

NICARAGUAN SANDINISMO, BACK FROM THE DEAD?

An anthropological study of popular participation within the Frente Sandinista de Liberación
Nacional

by Johannes Wilm

Submitted to be examined as part of a PhD degree for the Anthropology Department,

Nicaraguan Sandinismo, back from the Dead?

An anthropological study of popular participation within the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional

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Johannes Wilm

Johannes Wilm

Abstract

Thirty years after redefining the political landscape of Nicaragua, Sandinismo is both a unifying discourse and one driven by different interpretations by adherents.

This thesis examines the complex legacy of Sandinismo by focusing on the still widely acclaimed notion of Sandinismo as an idiom of popular participation. A central point is the current unity of the movement, as it is perceived by Sandinistas, depends on a limited number of common reference points over the last 100 years of Nicaraguan history, which are interpreted very differently Sandinistas and other groups, but which always emphasise the part Nicaraguans play in international relations and the overall importance of popular mass participation in Nicaraguan politics, rather than agreement on current, day-to-day politics.

Through my analysis, this thesis questions the view often expressed in anthropological studies and the mainstream press on the development of the Sandinista movement since the 1980s as being one of decay. Based on 18 months of fieldwork in Nicaragua in 2008/09 among mainly urban Sandinistas and some non-Sandinistas in the cities on the Pacific coast, involving formal and informal interviews, the thesis concludes that Sandinismo continues to involve grassroots elements of popular participation and that Nicaragua interpretations of history across ideological groups have in common that the actions of individual Nicaraguans are seen as shaping historical changes, which in turn validates and lends importance to such grassroots elements.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

This research investigates the project of the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (FSLN). This is to be understood on a level of theory of how the world fits together for Sandinistas and how they see development can be achieved, as well as on the level of concrete actions taken. I try to see this both on the level of people who hold government or central activist positions and on the level of general sympathisers of the party who call themselves Sandinistas. The current positions are viewed in an international and historical context.

Both Nicaraguan and the outside media have concentrated on certain aspects of the new FSLN government after 2006, and these portrayals all seem to focus on the divergences between the current government and the program of revolutionary transformation of the 1980s over single political issues such as therapeutic abortion. None of these looks at Sandinismo in its totality. In this thesis I show that anthropologists have incorrectly assumed the Sandinista movement would disintegrate completely into identity politics, a view popularly represented by Babb (2004).

The Sandinista movement includes people who believe in many ideologies (nationalism, social reformism, Marxism and anarchism, to name a few). Sandinismo did in the past include, and still includes, many of the individual aspects of identity politics in a way which may have led some anthropologists to believe it was the sole point of most Sandinistas' engagement with politics. Related to the internal ideological difference within the Sandinista movement is an informal structure of different groups of Sandinistas who engage in concrete actions to change society. Most times this works without provoking conflict between different

groups of Sandinistas, and is not immediately noticeable to the outside observer.

Historical background

The Central American Republic Nicaragua experienced a revolution in 1979 led by the guerrilla group who claimed to follow the ideology of Sandinismo and was organised as the FSLN. The revolutionaries were Marxists, and they worked together with Cuba and the Soviet Union. The United States funded a civil war against the government and maintained an economic boycott of the country, which crippled it severely. José Daniel Ortega Saavedra was a leading figure of the FSLN before 1979, a member of the cross-political junta directiva that ruled the country (1979–84), and elected president (1984–90). In 1990, the FSLN lost the government in national elections to a coalition of parties more in line politically with the government of the United States. This group was led by Violeta Barrios Torres de Chamorro. In 2006, Ortega Saavedra was elected president of the country once again. It gave the post back to the FSLN for the first time since 1990. Different from the 1980s, the FSLN did not obtain a majority in parliament in the 2006 elections, and has had to rely on temporary coalitions with different Liberal parties. This has, in the eye of many international observers and at home, tainted their image of being a socialist party. In addition, during the last days of the previous Sandinista government, some property changed hands and made several of the FSLN members rich, which distanced them from their own subjects.

The Sandinista movement has not always been explicitly socialist. Augusto Nicolás Calderón Sandino, the rebel leader (1927–33) the movement was named after, fought on the side of the Liberals, and it can only be confirmed that his views were nationalist and anti-imperialist, but not that he was a Marxist, or anarchist or any other type of political radical. This is in spite of his socialisation as a political activist in the communist and anarcho-syndicalist petroleum

labor unions in Mexico. “Sandinismo” seems to have been re-branded as a socialist/nationalist movement with the creation of the FSLN in 1961. Their taking power through a revolutionary uprising in 1979 seems to have been jointly accepted by Soviet Union and the United States during the administration of James Earl ‘Jimmy’ Carter. One could also argue the junta of five which led initially also included Barrios Torres de Chamorro, Ortega Saavedra’s future successor who followed US policy advice, and the attacks launched by the next president of the United States, Ronald Reagan, came after an internal change in Nicaraguan policies.

Simultaneously the Soviet Union was involved in Nicaraguan politics starting in 1979, with strategies of national liberation fronts, from the beginning of taking power of the FSLN. Different from many other Soviet-allied countries, the Nicaraguan political system was never changed to the one party structure classical to the Soviet system. When the FSLN lost power and was replaced by a neoliberal government philosophy as its main principle, it was through regular elections rather than through a violent counter-revolution, the FSLN continued to be a very popular force, especially among the poorest sectors of society. Many Sandinista non-governmental organisations (NGOs) sprang up, and labor unions continued to be dominated by Sandinistas and for a long time mass organisations the Sandinistas created in the 1980s continued to function.

The Sandinista movement of 2007–11 under Ortega Saavedra faced a completely different reality than that of the 1980s and its policies will of necessity be different just because of external differences. The Soviet Union ended, and the United States was not financing militarily insurrections, and did not put in place an economic embargo of Nicaragua. Germany gave more than 2.5 times the aid bilaterally that the United States offered (OECD 200X), and

the governments of Venezuela, Ecuador, Bolivia and Cuba incorporated Nicaragua in their alternative trade network, Alternativa Bolivariana para los pueblos de nuestra Américas (ALBA). In light of this, the government started an organisation with the stated goal of providing direct democracy through popular participation, the Consejos de Poder Ciudadano (CPCs).

The theme of the investigation

My interest concerned mostly the foundational changes in FSLN Sandinismo ideology. The following shows some of the main issues I researched during my fieldwork. It was important for me to understand what it means to be a Sandinista for the individual and how that differs from being a Liberal or Conservative. This question related to many aspects of people's personal identity and went well beyond who they voted for or of which party they were a member. It was not restricted to ideological differences, and the variety of opinions and ideologies within the Sandinista movement proved to be gigantic.

I tried to find how the Sandinista public or Sandinista-supporting public related to the FSLN, what they expected from an FSLN government and how much Dependency Theory, Marxism, and anti-imperialism ideology were part of the general Sandinista viewpoint in comparison to the amount of neoliberalism and modernisation theory. I also wanted to learn how popular

participation in decision making processes worked under the Ortega Saavedra government. In this connection my main concern was whether the role of the different types of organising in non governmental groups, labor unions and CPCs which all are somehow linked with Sandinismo, were to legitimise those decisions of the President for which he had no parliamentary approval. Were these part of a long-term strategy to link the FSLN to the state beyond the current elections, or were these to extend the influence of and improved the communication from the base of society? It was also important to understand how the contribution in participative political processes by non-FSLN members was viewed. Were they excluded systematically?

As the current government was portrayed as anything but revolutionary in the international media, I wondered whether there would be a push for radicalisation from some lower level within the Sandinista movement. I could imagine the FSLN leadership would find itself two steps behind a population expecting “patria, socialismo o muerte” (“nation, socialism or death”, Chavez at Ortega Saavedra’s inauguration ceremony Rodríguez 2007b) or that the FSLN leadership would turn out to represent a minority of educated radical scholars in an otherwise Liberal population.¹ If radicalisation would come from below, I wondered what parts of the program of the FSLN leadership it would go against and what channels would be used – CPCs, party apparati or government bureaucracy – and whether such attempts would be successful.²

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- 1 The discourse of Ortega Saavedra before the 2006 elections and immediately afterward was minimally radical. This changed before I returned to Nicaragua and so my initial ideas were somewhat outdated. I planned on including in my interviews some of the key terms from former times, such as ‘Sandinismo,’ and ‘imperialism,’ that were avoided by Ortega Saavedra around the elections. I wanted to ask respondents what they connected those terms to and how they felt about them, and then compare the responses of different informants. Because the words served as part of the official Sandinista government vocabulary at the time of my return, finding out how much people used such terminology worked more as a test of the degree to which they aligned with the government.
 - 2 Similar to the previous question, I wanted to note reactions to key terms such as ‘Contras’ and ‘neoliberalism,’ yet again the word ‘neoliberalism’ had been given a negative connotation in the wording used in official government statements. Interestingly, no Liberal would ever mention ‘neoliberalism’ in a favorable light either. I recorded the degree to which

Given Nicaragua's unique historical background of foreign interventions, I questioned how important international relations effected Nicaragua, and what importance generally is attributed to them. Given that the Sandinistas were back in power, it interested me in finding out how the international relations of the 1980s were seen today and what relevance was currently attributed to them.³

My ethnographic fieldwork

I focused on four main ethnographic projects which form part of my fieldwork (see table p. 28). In each chapter I indicate from which of these four projects I gathered the most information to form the basis of my understanding in that particular chapter. In addition I gathered much general information through my day-to-day fieldwork in León.

The first project looked for Nicaraguans who had studied at the Wilhelm-Pieck school of political leadership of the Freie Deutsche Jugend (FDJ, Free German Youth) in East Germany during the 1980s. The school was one of three schools in the Eastern Bloc that educated young people (ages 16–25) from around the world who were believed to be the next generation of political leaders in their respective countries. All students studied one year and then returned to their native countries to engage in the local struggle. Up to 10 Nicaraguans attended this school each year throughout the 1980s. In the early years they used false names due to security issues, and in the later years they promised not to exchange addresses. An East German who studied at the school asked me to try to find his classmates who attended from 1985–86. I put up posters throughout the town of León and went to

former contra supporters and people still organized in the Partido Resistencia Nicaragüense (PRN) now participated in and cooperated with the current government.

3 The last question came up both as part of the ongoing politics in which a more Central place was attributed to Russia during my time in Nicaragua and when the Ruben Dario medal was given to former East German minister of education Margot Honecker in July 2008. When looking for former students from the Wilhelm-Pieck school of political leadership, I wanted to assess the relevance of the international relations of the 1980s and its effect in ordinary conversations today.

Managua to be recorded on national television with my campaign to find all the Nicaraguans who studied there. I started the search in late July 2008, and received calls from former students for the next 10 months. Altogether I found 37 students, although some could not be verified. I usually travelled to whatever town or village they lived in with my video camera, and sometimes stayed over night or stayed in touch for a longer duration of time. My questions to them concerned what they had done before going to the Deutsche Demokratische Republik (DDR, German Democratic Republic); why they went; what they remembered of the trip; what they did after returning and what they did now; and what they thought of the current political situation in Nicaragua.

The second project was to collect the life stories of the founders of the organisation 'Amigos.' Bayardo José Fonseca Galo, the uncle of my main informant, Carolina Fonseca Icabalzeta, was very active in the student movement prior to and during the 1979 revolution. He does not currently hold any important political position. He wanted to start an organisation of people like him who were politically active previously, but who now did not belong to the inner circles of the FSLN. The stated purpose of the organisation was to spread knowledge about Sandinismo and engage in social projects for the betterment of society—thereby advancing the general cause of the party without directly getting involved in it. Fonseca maintained an extensive network of friends all over the country with whom he had close contact and who he wished to recruit to this new organisation. I accompanied him around Managua to interview some of those who had agreed to join, and was sent by Fonseca to El Rama and Chontales to meet up and interview others he was interested in recruiting. The primary questions I posed to Fonseca's contacts were: To what inner-party tendency did you belong before 1979; what was your role in the insurrection; what was your role during the 1980s; how did you survive

the 1990s; and what is your involvement or stance on the current situation?

The third project involved working with the employees of the Nicaraguan Ministerio Agropecuario y Forestal (MAGFOR) on creating a new national information system for all of their data. From January 2009 to September 2009 I worked on an information system for the MAGFOR. This project involved engaging with the free software movement situated in Managua. I also taught courses on the use of open source software at the Universidad de Managua's León campus (UdeM León). The free software movement provided the principal driving force behind the idea of the need for social/political change, but the project also involved engaging with the Sandinista bureaucrats who ran the ministry and the largely Sandinista agriculture professionals who formally organised the system through the NGO Servicio de Información Mesoamericano sobre Agricultura Sostenible (SIMAS). Through my interactions with this particular cross-section of Nicaraguan society, I gained a deeper understanding of middle-class professional Sandinistas' views of Sandinismo, and the policy plans of those formally involved in government. I found it interesting to note and highlight the relations between the open source movement and this more technocratic use of IT, as they would initially seem to represent two competing political visions within Sandinismo.

In addition to the three projects above, I tried to be present whenever a political event occurred, and tried to get in contact with the principal actors if they could be reached. In doing this, I soon developed a network of contacts in the Sandinista administration of León as well as León as a whole.

Chapter overview

Chapters 1-3: Introduction, Methodology and Literature Review

These chapters serve to introduce the theme of the thesis as well as the methodology and literature used.

Chapter 4: Development theories

This chapter introduces the theoretical background of the development theories that have been utilised both in Nicaragua and internationally since the 1950s.

Chapter 5: Recent political history of Nicaragua and the Sandinista movement

This chapter presents the political history of Nicaragua over the past 100 years with a particular emphasis put on those parts my Nicaraguan informants focused upon. This chapter is included as it contains needed background knowledge to understand the subsequent chapters. This chapter is not in itself part of my ethnographic research.

Chapter 6: Economic history of Nicaragua

This chapter presents a scientific account of the economic history of Nicaragua using the Dependency Theory-based model of Biderman (1983), but using a greater wealth of data sources bringing it up to current times. This chapter gives an overview of the actual economic situation of the country over the last century with a focus on the years since the earthquake that destroyed most of the capital, Managua, in 1972 and the governmental economic plans offered, regardless of whether these actually came to fruition.

Chapter 7: The politics of history

The histories of groups and single individuals form an important topic in everyday conversations in Nicaragua. As a foreigner I found knowing about Nicaraguan history to be

the most important factor in engaging people in conversation and in gaining a nuanced linguistic competence and a sensitivity to the importance of local notions of history. This also allowed me access as a serious researcher among Nicaraguan informants.

From the outside, the recent history of Nicaragua inextricably gets tied up with regional politics, and social theory focusing on dependency and intervention by the United States.

Within Nicaragua, discussions get conducted from an internal perspective. Several versions of history of Nicaragua exist for the last 100 years, each linked to an ideological group or subgroup. They all have in common the fact that foreign involvement gets played down, and all are emphatic that the main actors in each relevant historical period/event are Nicaraguans and not foreigners.

In this chapter I show how the suppression of foreign involvement is achieved in the course of everyday conversations. The difference among the various tellings of the country's history maps quite neatly onto differences in political views (the basic contrast is Sandinista vs. non-Sandinista). At the same time differences exist among Sandinistas in how much criticism of one's own movement/position one allows when talking about historical events. I found that this difference mainly turned on the criteria of age and class.

For this chapter I was helped by the general political journalism, which gave me an insight into how non-Sandinistas tend to explain reality, and the interviews of old revolutionary fighters who started the organisation 'Amigos.' These old revolutionaries tended to be most thorough in their explanations of historic realities of Nicaragua.

Chapter 8: Perceptions and expectations of economic development

This chapter presents how the economic plans and situations of the past are discussed today

by different types of informants. It shows an interesting connection: The changes to economic circumstances are connected to political shifts as described in the previous chapter, but those groups causing these changes are not all judged according to the same criteria.

While the Sandinistas in the 1980s were not successful with their economic policies, they are hardly ever judged by that. Instead, there is a focus on the success their policies could have led to, had they been continued uninterrupted without the Contra-war, financed by the United States. In contrast, the governments of the 1970s and 1990s are judged by the actual economic achievements of those periods.

In this chapter I used my experience amongst Sandinista professionals, ministry workers and the founders of the organisation 'Amigos,' especially those living in Chichigalpa. Both groups were happy to engage in discussions about economic policy in the past, and the professionals who still work were the most interested in relating it to the current government and what possibilities exist today. In both cases I gathered data in terms of the individual's ideological viewpoint at the level of the country's economy in general and at a more practical level as concerns their personal economy.

Chapter 9: The forming of the politics under the FSLN

Currently many groups try to influence aspects of Nicaraguan society according to their interpretation of Sandinismo. In each major political event focused on by the Ortega Saavedra administration during my fieldwork an emphasis was put on the importance of Nicaraguans and Nicaragua as an autonomous, self-contained system. Simultaneously an emphasis was placed how Nicaraguan society and in particular the Sandinista movement was seen as part of a global movement and things which happen in Nicaragua are directly related to events at a global level. Rather than Nicaragua being influenced by what important decision makers in

powerful countries are doing, the way it may be seen from abroad, Nicaraguans believe Nicaragua plays an active part in world current events.

For this chapter I used all four types of investigative projects. Being in attendance when political relevant events took place as a journalist gave me one version, and interviewing completely unrelated people about that same issue in the subsequent days and weeks completed the initial picture of the situation.

Chapter 10: Ways for Sandinistas to involve themselves in politics

The different types presented in the last chapter lead to different ways of trying to exert Sandinista power of different subgroups during the current Sandinista administration, without any clear hierarchy with respect to whose actions are more important. This is most likely quite different from the 1980s, when the state is said to have been very centralist and hierarchical. Both now and then the ways power gets exerted is a collective processes.

Looking at the Sandinista professionals and the founders of 'Amigos' showed me two very different groups engaged in this activity. A third group was the younger Sandinistas who worked with media activism and who had an entirely different approach.

Chapter 11: Historic relations to Eastern Europe

Although Sandinista activities, understood as concrete actions undertaken by individual Sandinistas or groups to further what they believe is the Sandinista cause, range widely and are seldom controlled by Sandinista and President Daniel Ortega Saavedra, it is noticeable that the oligarchy of the country continues to exist and capitalism has not been abolished. Although these were previously very central goals of the Sandinistas, and many Sandinistas still talk about these goals, they seem incapable or unwilling to do anything about them.

This failure can partially be explained by Dependency Theory and that in most cases individual third world countries get trapped by the relative economic position in which they find themselves. It however fails to explain the difference in local activity level (Nicaragua vs. other countries in a similar situation) and how a rather absurd unique understanding of world events can lead to different possibilities for the country. An example is when the Nicaraguan government supported Russia in the Georgia conflict, allegedly because they believed Russia to be a reincarnation of the Soviet Union. It led to renewed economic and military help from Russia.

I show the unique view of world events my Nicaraguan informants have, is the connection the country had to the Soviet Union in the 1980s. Although the economic relationship ceased to exist, I believe the results of these educational products still influence how many of my Nicaraguan informants see the world today. While my Nicaraguan informants often talked about the education programs in the Soviet Union in the 1980s, it was with little focus on whether this changed/influenced Sandinismo.

In this chapter I present many of the personal stories of those who went to the Deutsche Demokratische Republik (DDR, German Democratic Republic) that show how it had a lasting effect on their activities and how some are in positions of political power and are likely to shape the policies of the current government.

Conclusion

For my informants, Sandinismo today consists of accepting a certain version of the past, one of seeing Nicaraguans as the center-piece of a great phase of world history, and of not leaving decisions to the Sandinista government, but involving oneself directly without much concern for the party apparatus.

Internal differences are large. Differences in strategy and interest among Sandinistas are seldom handled internally. Instead these are played out on a national stage as part of the national political dialogue. All this seems, for many Sandinistas, to make out the centrepiece of Sandinista ideology today. For these informants there is also an ideological connection between the Sandinismo of the 1980s and the current Nicaraguan government.

Chapter 2

Methodology

As my main methodology I employed participant observation. This is a wide-spanning method and further qualities have to be specified. Different from other methodological approaches, the anthropological method of long-term participant-observation can determine changes and phenomena on a grassroots level, independently of whether manifested or represented in official party lines, statements and manifestos written by leading party figures, official written laws or newspaper articles written by opinion makers. Eckstein (1990) presents a good case for how studies with such an approach can extract further knowledge that would not be accessible to political scientists, economists, historians, or interview based historians. In her study of Mexican democratisation in the late 1970s and 1980s, Eckstein (1990, p. 214) employed three long-term periods of fieldwork in 1967–68, 1971–72 and 1987. This included around a 100 open-ended interviews and interviews with the same people over and over again. This allowed her to record how the formal democratisation in the official political sphere did not lead to a similar development on the grassroots level, where the state in fact extended its authoritarian rule. Similarly, in the case of Nicaragua, the anthropological approach I used gave me access to information about how Sandinistas structured relationships to one another and how the Sandinista project functions at a grassroots level in a way other social sciences could not have determined.

Participant observation

In my previous stay I made contact with older men at a León center for former FSLN revolutionaries, a pensioned lady who worked part-time showing Sandinista attractions of León to tourists, a student and a 27-year-old Spanish language teacher and her husband who

tried to teach himself Linux and who operated a few web sites. All of these people expressed a very positive view toward the Sandinista take-over the last time I spoke to them, and counted themselves as Sandinista without being actual members of the party.

I planned to start out in León and get in contact with the local CPC, as they supposedly represented citizen involvement in politics, and through that contact, hopefully could touch base with the FSLN either in the city or a barrio. As a backup plan I used my other contacts in the city to get to talk to someone. Initially I figured if I then moved on, western Nicaragua is not too large, so I could easily move back and forth between cities and continue to follow the development in other cities. From party politics in Europe I was accustomed to the idea that it is usually easier to make contact with the party apparatus in a smaller city; however, most of the power struggles can only to be observed in the capital. Depending on how things went, I planned on spending an extensive amount of time in Managua at a later stage. This ended up working largely as planned.

In the field I experienced the CPCs as representing only a certain subtype of participative politics. In most places only people in the 1980s involved in the Sandinista mass organisation Comités de Defensa Sandinista (CDSs) were active in them. Those involved were generally involved in many other forms of political organisation and only used the CPCs as one of several political fora. Simultaneously, my Nicaraguan informants found many other ways of involving themselves in participatory politics. In the case of Sandinista activists, this spelled out ways of shaping the policies of the government. It made no sense to view the CPCs as isolated or the sole space of political activity. Realising that, my focus changed towards participative politics among Sandinistas in general rather than specifically looking at the CPC. For this purpose I frequented most places of political activity, as well as the Sandinista party

headquarters of León and an Albergue in which Liberals and former Contrás often gathered.

Ethnographic basis of study

type of informants	number	age range	gender	methodology used	location
former students of the Wilhelm-Pieck school	37	ca. 40-50	male and female	mostly formal interviews	Managua, León, Estelí, Matagalpa and some outside of cities
people around the organisation 'Los Amigos'	ca. 30	ca. 50-80	male and female, majority males	formal and informal interviews	Managua, León, Juigalpa, El Rama
free software movement/SIMAS/MAGFOR	ca. 70	most under 30	mostly male	informal conversations	Managua
journalism on politics	ca. 100	any	male and female	formal and informal interviews	mostly Managua, León, some in other places such as Moyogalpa, Ciudad Sandino, Laguna Perla

Formal interviews

Part of my research aimed at interviewing people who formerly or currently held posts in the FSLN system. In León, I did this because I knew they would expect it of me and it built trust, and also because it was a good way of getting to know people. I was unsure who I would interview at the start, other than party officials. Once in the country, it became easy enough to find good interview partners. I had a video camera, so it was very clear when the interview was officially on and when it was not. As so often is the case, most interesting and valuable remarks were made while the camera was turned off, yet the camera served well to communicate my intentions of being interested in explanations of what took place around me.

The interviews of the members of the groups I focused upon were in many cases the main interaction I had with these informants apart from the few comments they made when the camera was turned off.

Archival research

Those involved in the Sandinista movement spend much time telling and discussing history among themselves. The recurring themes of history tellings involved the time of Calderón Sandino and of the Sandinista rule during the 1980s. This is something that Sandinistas engage in within all periods of Sandinismo, and it is very noticeable in the current period. I believed it to be necessary to investigate whatever I could find out about these periods in written form. Part of this was simply looking at back issues of the main newspapers, which are available on the Internet, and part of this pertained to looking at the books on Calderón Sandino and the purpose of the FSLN.

It is important to note that the newspapers of Nicaragua, La Prensa and El Nuevo Diario, cannot be counted as impartial and the information given is oftentimes contradicted by other articles in the same newspaper of another date. Both newspapers are strongly opposed to president Ortega Saavedra. Nevertheless, oftentimes the newspapers are the only source of information on important issues. The more academic journal Envío has oftentimes published more reliable information from both foreign and Nicaraguan scholars. Generally the line of the journal was critical but generally with a positive undertone towards the Sandinista movement. Most recently the line has changed somewhat and the editorial line is now strongly opposed to the current FSLN government. Other media have also provided written material through their websites. Some of these are clearly FSLN-dominated. This is true in the case of the website EIPuebloPresidente.com or the radio station La Primerísima. While I did make use of

the information found in these sources due to lack of any viable non-partidarian source of information – a practice I observed was also practiced by other social scientists writing about Nicaragua – I tried to make sure not to claim that contested articles were necessarily factual.

Ethical concerns

As a main guide for ethical questions while conducting my fieldwork I used *Samfunn og vitenskap* by Engelstad (1998). Engelstad focuses on research ethics mostly concerning situations where the search for truth conducted by investigators comes into conflict with other values. The actions a researcher performs often do have consequences beyond what was initially expected, so the researcher has to reflect on how his impacts on the lives of informants. While this is something that can be expected by all responsible members of society, the responsibility of the professional researcher extends beyond this.

Science has a privileged role in society and because social interaction is the material that social scientists study, such researchers need to be especially careful about the way they influence their environment. The result is the investigator has the responsibility in concerns of research ethics and is obliged to know the appropriate laws and familiarise himself with the appropriate norms (Engelstad 1998, pp. 429–430).

One of the most common issues among social scientists is not to ‘report the truth’ (Engelstad 1998, p. 431). The most obvious way of not telling the truth is by reporting completely false data, but what is much more common is to change data just a little or to leave certain surveys out in order to get it to fit one’s theoretical models. In anthropological research this could be a possible issue as the anthropological method does not clearly state what part of the

anthropologist's everyday life is part of his research and what is not. This means the anthropologist essentially has to decide what he finds to be relevant and what not. It is, therefore, in his hands to actively try to find examples which do not fit into his theories in everyday life. The adherence to this principle is, however, a question of degree. In the case of this particular research, this could especially have relevancy in that I was involved in politics and oftentimes had concepts of my own. The danger was that I would try to make these fit simply by recording data just in those moments that covered situations seeming to fit my own agenda. My experience from previous fieldwork provided the best way of avoiding this is by simply being aware of just what concepts I have and devoting extra space and time to those informants who have ideas significantly different from my own preconceptions. I tried to apply this insight by not only mingling with people I politically agreed with, and giving those I do not agree with enough space to respond for themselves. Different from my fieldwork for my MPhil degree in Douglas, Arizona, my own opinion on different subjects shifted somewhat more in the case of Nicaragua over time and I would agree with different people on different issues. It made it somewhat easier to not gain a completely partial view. In the descriptions of my interactions in this thesis I try to give the reader enough detailed explanation about the surroundings to let them make up their own mind about the conclusions I reach.

Another common issue is not recognising that even though an informant agrees to participate in the researcher's study, the informant still has certain rights (Engelstad 1998, pp. 432–433). For one, the researcher should avoid putting the subject through unnecessary pain. This would include social conflict or the feeling of having been tricked by the researcher. Another point is respecting people's autonomy and giving them the right of privacy. Also, any

participant had the right to be anonymity in any released paper. The right to have a private life is especially tricky in anthropological research, as one usually tries to go beyond the facade informants present to a regular sociological interviewer. A lot of the pain caused by this can be avoided by giving anonymity to informants to the degree where people they have social interaction within one domain (family, work, friends) do not obtain information about the informants' behavior in any other domain.

Additionally, the AAA (1998) requires of anthropologists to obtain 'informed consent' from anyone studied. This means the subjects need to know how what their statements will say, how they will be used, and have the option to deny the researcher from using material about them. I believed before going to Nicaragua, the difference in wealth between the researcher and informants might make this especially difficult as informants may put themselves in situations which cause them problems later on in order to earn the favor of the researcher. My experiences with Nicaraguan informants did not raise this issue. If they reported on their own poverty, they generally did this knowing this would be published. Most of the time I walked around with a professional looking camera with a gigantic microphone, thus communicating clearly that what people said to me would be used for something more than just a western tourist's vacation photos. This very often generated questions as who I was and what was the final object of my study. When I worked in Managua, I made it very clear to my coworkers that if they wanted me to not mention them then they just needed to tell me. None of them chose to do so. When I mentioned I could use false names, they objected. Carlos Alberto Rocha Castro, one of the programmers, commented: "All I'm saying and thinking is GPL⁴." The only person who seemed surprised I used material about her was Carolina Fonseca Icabalzeta,

4 GPL refers to the GNU Public License (GPL) which is a software license that allows anyone to use the source code of a program however he pleases, as long as he attributes it to the original author and makes any changes done to it publicly available.

who knew exactly what I studied, but did not think of herself as a possible study object even though I, formally interviewed her. I offered to retract her statements, but she did not make use of this right. She wanted to add that saying she lives in a dangerous neighborhood (something which had been said by her uncle Bayardo José Fonseca Galo and her neighbor William Leiva Cardoza) was an exaggeration, and that saying her friend Ninfa Ramos did not tell her everything about her political activities would make the FSLN look bad in a way she had not intended. She did assure me that none of this would create problems for her.

In Nicaragua the possibility exists that the research findings might be of interest to a future dictatorial regime or a foreign power, who would like to map the power relations within Nicaragua at present. It was, therefore, of great importance for me the field notes were stored in a way which neither of them could get hold of these. None of my informants asked to for anonymity and I did not deem it necessary to do so as almost nothing they told me was not known to people around them already or would be before the publication date.

Another common issue is with treating “deep questions within society”(Engelstad 1998, p. 446). As a research goal this generally refers to the notion a researcher should concentrate on problems having a practical use for society at large. It becomes relevant as a question of ethics when dealing with problems having a great importance connected to them within the society of study, in order not to offend the informants. The nature of the Sandinista movement and the FSLN is obviously of great importance for just about all of my Nicaraguan informants. Wording any criticism needed to be thought through very carefully. In general, I believe I have avoided most problems by making extensive use of quotes by informants to make sure they feel their viewpoint has been acknowledged. At this time I am not certain whether it will be read extensively by Nicaraguans or whether a Spanish language version will be made

although several informants requested that. I thought it a good principle for my own writing practice to make sure that if it were read, it could not be easily disputed as being my own opinion by Nicaraguans from either ideological camp.

Other typical conflicts mentioned by AAA (1998); Engelstad (1998), such as not disclosing funding sources (I received no funding from anybody to perform this study) or having problems of staying objective when analysing one's ethnographic material due to intimate sexual relationships with informants (I did not have any such relationship with any Nicaraguan at any point in time) I did not expect this to become a problem beforehand and the study showed it did not. My not having any sexual relationship with anyone in Nicaragua may at times have influenced my research. The phenomenon of foreigners in Nicaragua betraying a partner at home with either another foreigner or a Nicaragua was so common my non-participation in this was seen as most unusual among some, specifically in León. At one point I discovered some activists of the MRS referred to me as El Sacerdote (Eng: the priest) and they wondered what was wrong with my sex drive. I believe as a spin-off I heard several other rumors about myself which made me look somewhat strange during the rest of my time in León. According to one, I would oftentimes speak to myself while walking in the streets at a rapid pace, only to suddenly turn around and head in the opposite direction at an equally rapid pace. The effect of this was limited, as just about all my younger informants lived in Managua and not León. In Managua I seldom experienced pressures to engage in sexual activity with Nicaraguans.

Where I stayed

I arrived in Nicaragua on 6 April 2008. For the first month I stayed in the neighborhood of Bello Horizonte in Managua, where I rented the garage of a friend of a friend of a friend of

mine. The family consisted of the mother, a teacher not particularly fond of any political ideology, and her son, a disc jockey who was not involved politically, but who felt closest to the MRS. During my stay there, he began dating a Palestinian who had very strong Sandinista views. After my first month with them I moved to León, the second largest city in Nicaragua, where I stayed downtown in a house owned by Rigo Sampson Davila, a member of the FSLN. His father formerly was the mayor of León and currently worked as director of the local university. I stayed at Sampson Davila's house until late August 2008. From September 2008 until February 2009 I stayed across the road from Rigo Sampson Davila at the house of María Mercedes, a former activist in the struggle against the Sandinistas in the 1980s who lost two brothers in the fight to protect Nicaragua from the Sandinistas. One brother had served as a member of the Guardia Nacional, the other one as a member of the Contras. From February 2009 until June 2009 I rented a house with an Austrian civil worker in a poorer area, San Felipe. The area did not have the same party politics as the center of town, but political questions came up nevertheless. During this phase I spent less time in León than I had previously. From July until September 2009 I stayed at a hostel in Managua and did most of my research there, working with young Sandinistas, and involved myself during this time in the production of an information system for the ministry of agriculture.

My background and points of influence on my fieldwork

In order to understand how I could conduct this study, I believe it is necessary to understand who I am. Many of the interviews I made were possible only because I could point to my own background, and the way I later analysed the information I would strongly depend on my own background.

I grew up just south of the German-Danish border in the West-German village called Schuby

(Danish: Skovby), as a member of the Danish minority in Germany. After a high school exchange year in South Carolina, I moved out from my parents home at the age of 18 to live closer to the only Danish high school south of the border, in the city of Flensburg. This was in the fall of 1998, when the Social Democrats were elected to power in the Germany national elections for the first time since 1982. I voted for the minor coalition partner, the Green party, but after the elections I became involved in a campaign of the socialist party that grew out of the ruling party of East Germany. The issue I became involved in concerned a campaign for the right of dual-citizenship for Turkish-Germans. It was fairly coincidental that it was the socialist party I contacted after I had heard about their campaign on TV, but once I was at the local party office to ask the local chapter to participate in the campaign, the party started at a national level, I noticed the members, most of whom were as old of my parents, had only two students among them, and would listen to my proposals as if I were equal to them. I quickly became a member and rose in the ranks. Within half a year I took over the post as head of office of the local party headquarters, I became president of the newly founded party youth at a national level for a short first term though, and within a little more than a year I became the youngest candidate at state elections of Schleswig-Holstein in February 2000.

During this time my life quickly changed. During weekends I mostly went to visit some party or party youth chapter somewhere in East Germany, while during the week I spent most of my time outside of school on campaigns in Flensburg. Not having been part of the mainstream German society in Western German, my experiences in Eastern Germany were – not much more than a decade after the fall of the Berlin Wall – politically and culturally of utmost interest. The positions I would have obtained in our west German local chapter were in the Eastern local chapters reserved for party militants of many years' participation. I learned

about the many differences in understanding of party democracy, and what it meant for people to be connected to the party. Whereas in Western Germany we were nothing but a marginal group of radicals, in the East the party represented a fairly large part of the population, and a member of the party was not something one needed to hide. I also started to learn the skill of analysing power structures within the party, and trying to find hidden networks within the party. Even in West Germany, where we had almost no elected representation and party-related jobs an extreme amount of time was spent in building secret alliances within the party to try to take over certain party-internal posts that were seen as important.

When I graduated high school in the summer of 2000, I felt I already had quite a party-political career behind me. I moved to Oslo, Norway, where I became employed as a national responsible for IT of the Red Electoral Alliance (RV) in early 2001 in preparation for the 2001 national elections. Within the generally left-socialist party, the Maoist Workers' Communist Party (AKP) – had a well-built network of positions of power within the party. Although the party only had representation at regional levels in city councils, the struggle for power within the power structure was strong, especially in the Oslo chapter.

As my German political experience taught me to always be suspicious of nationalist movements, I was quite shocked to notice the amount of openly celebrated nationalism and flag-waving that happened within the RV. I therefore soon joined the more internationalist, "The International Association," another political group within RV connected to the Ernest Mandelist Fourth International with headquarters in Amsterdam. Since then I have been the national treasurer of that organisation.

While the internal party struggles in Germany were time-consuming, in Norway they would for

periods consume all my free time. The amounts of party-internal power-struggles seemed to have no limits in any respect. In 2003 I discovered another Maoist group, 'Serve the People' (TF), had made a list of people they would have to kill in case of a revolution in order to make sure the revolution would not derail. Questioning them in public on who would be on the list, it became apparent I was a likely candidate to be on the list.

As there were not many electoral positions to be filled, most RV activists looked for alternative fields in which to be active. Over the next few years I led a peace alliance at the university, became active in the teachers union and student politics and joined numerous other organisations such as ATTAC. Everywhere I found the same faces. Everyone knew everyone. In total I would estimate that possibly 100 revolutionary activists were controlling most Norwegian organisations, most of which were directly connected to RV, the Trozkyite International Socialist Organisation (ISO) or the Socialist Left Party's Youth (SU). While an organisation struggling for some social good or other would appear as independent to the outsider – including social scientists, who studied the organisations due to their fascination with why we would invest so much time fighting for such things – all these organisations were more or less directly coordinated by those 100 revolutionaries. They were not controlled by a central leadership which gave out orders, but rather by the same people who worked together numerous other occasions, read many of the same books, knew about one-another's opinions and preferences and built up an informal, but complex system of cooperation through compromises. A new person, entering an organisation would not know about this, and would generally not have a chance with any proposal if it went contrary to an already agreed-upon compromise.

During my fieldwork in Douglas, AZ in 2004 I became familiar with Latin American politics. I

stayed at the encampment of Andrés Manuel López Obrador the fall of 2006 in Mexico City and also in Oaxaca during the teacher-led uprising of the same period. I then travelled to Nicaragua where I arrived shortly after the FSLN Sandinista victory of that same year.

In London I met with some anarchists I had met in Oaxaca and I lived with an anarchist girl in Hackney during my fieldwork preparation. Different from both Germany and Norway, there was not a central party that all the radicals flocked around, and the activity of preparing the occupation of houses to live in as well as various camps based on social issues seemed very different from what I knew before.

How did my experiences influence my experience of Nicaragua? For one thing, I was extremely aware of the possibility that things were said, not because they were true, but due to tactical considerations. In Norway, I saw what we said to the press were just ways to express a tactical nature., I had an understanding of the possibility of party-internal power struggles. I knew the practice of creating fronts for some social cause or other that were formally not connected to the party, but were quite directly controlled by the same few radical activists who controlled just about everything.

All this also existed in Nicaragua, although in somewhat different ways. The FSLN had actual positions of state power lacking in Europe and it had united most things under it. The MRS was working quite independently from it during the time of my fieldwork. This was different from Norway, where many of the front organisations would have activists from different parties/organisations.

I realised many times when discussing my findings with other social scientists in Nicaragua that their understanding of the situation was very different from mine, as they would generally see any dealings that were not completely out in the open as undemocratic, and in general

they would be shocked when I explained how some circumstance or other was not quite as simple as their interview partner had tried to make them believe.

Had I not had the background, I may also have seen the practice of tricking Europeans or outsiders as a Nicaraguan cultural pattern rather than a general feature of organisation, the way some Nicaraguan informants did it themselves, by pointing to the tale of the Güegüense (see also: Field 1999) as describing a part of Nicaraguan cultural.

My background additionally meant I would have a different focus of my studies in terms of who I would look at. While some working more journalistically, might have tried to set up interviews with a few top FSLN leaders, and anthropologists without my background have talked to ordinary people who simply saw themselves as Sandinistas, my focus was on party activists. This was out of the experience that party activists were those who actually moved the politics of the party, while party leaders generally just tried to forge compromises between different internal party factions. I also spoke to people on the ground, far away from any decision making processes, and made sure to keep up relations to neighbors and ordinary people and to hear their views on day-to-day politics, but it was not the main arena of investigation. When speaking of MRS Sandinistas, FSLN Sandinistas or Liberals, these are in their majority political activities and activists (of which there seem to be extraordinarily many in Nicaragua).

My background likely consequences on the way I conducted my fieldwork. Many times informants asked about my own background, likely in order to be able to better categorise me and at times it was not enough to say that I was an anthropologist from Europe as the

informants wanted to know my personal interest in the subject matter. In these situations I talked some of my own history as an activist. For informants who had a history of being activists this seemed to work better than for those informants without such a background. Consequently, it was much easier for me to obtain information from activists. My selection of good informants was also limited in part due to this fact.

Due to changes in my practice during my time in Nicaragua, the way I perceived different groups may also have been somewhat skewed. At the time when I investigated the MRS, I had only recently arrived in the country. It took some time until I noticed they had told me lies (which they considered as such) on just about every subject. I therefore recorded very many lies on their part. The fact they told me so many false things may also directly relate to them perceiving me as a new arrival from Europe with relatively little knowledge of the country.

When later I talked mostly to FSLN Sandinistas, I had a much better feel for when certain typical tourist lies were about to be presented and with a few words on my part that showed I had been in the country for a considerable period already, I managed to avert many false statements. Oftentimes the person start over, and tell me a version of events which fit better with my level of knowledge. Altogether, FSLN Sandinistas came across as more truthful.

Is my perspective therefore Euro-centric? Clearly my background influenced what I would record. Had I been a female journalist from Japan, I would likely have found other points of investigation than what I did. Had I been Nicaraguan, I would also have seen many things differently. I would likely have understood some things more intuitively, but I would also not have had certain freedoms – such as asking people to tell me things from the ground up. I

would possibly also have been restrained in what I could say be pressures from my family, future work opportunities, etc..

My initial blunders

Just as anyone who enters the field for the first time, I did not do everything right from the start, and I made some assumptions based on my earlier research that turned out not to make sense under the given conditions. One of the main things I did understand was how the political discourse and the relationship between news media and political groups in Nicaragua worked. I did not understand that at times things were said as part of a tactical game. I investigated the MRS party for several months in the beginning before I understood very few Sandinistas felt represented by them. I did not include most of that material in this thesis when I decided to put the research focus on the FSLN.

With time it became easier for me to distinguish when statements were made out of tactical concerns and when they represented the speaker's real opinion. When an informant told me one of the tactically planted stories, I immediately interrupted and quickly explained how the point he was currently making did not correspond to other facts I had already discovered and even greater distortion on his part would have made it impossible for him to admit his error without losing face. With this I demonstrated, I was not just a tourist with little to no knowledge about Nicaraguan reality. Some would then react by telling me another tactically planted story, but at least as soon as I had interrupted the informant a second time and pointed to the disconnect from reality,⁵ the conversation would start over with a more realistic approach.

Arguably I could not have avoided going through a phase of learning about the nature of

⁵ I do here not mean to judge the opinions or intelligence of my informants. In these cases both the informant and me would generally agree that his or her initial description constituted a lie or simplification that were told assuming that I was an unknowing outsider at a later stage. That the informant would be well aware of the falseness of it, would generally be something readily admitted by everybody around.

tactically planted stories, and they do say a great deal about the nature of the contact between Nicaraguans and many foreigners, which generally is of a temporary nature. In many occasions none of this had to do with me – the same stories were told internationally at conferences, and just about anywhere in Europe or the United States when talking to people with some knowledge about Nicaragua, it were these same stories that were told over and over. Those of my informants who were FSLN activists generally claimed it was part of a Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) tactic to destabilise the country by spreading stories against the government. That may be true in some cases, but does not explain why members of all political groups were engaged in this activity.

Representativeness of groups

It has been questioned whether my choice of groups and individuals to interview was justifiable when looking at their size. This is often-times a difficulty for anthropologists, given the focus on qualitative rather than quantitative aspects. When I talk about FSLN Sandinistas, then I am not principally not concerned with the roughly 40% of Nicaraguans who voted for the FSLN in the elections since 1990, but rather the activists who run this party. Without doubt their numbers are smaller, but especially in the case of León, political participation in one way or other seems to be important for wide parts of the population. Those I spoke to had mostly long-term organisational experience at least at a regional level. This often indicated higher education than the Nicaraguan average and often experiences with international exchanges. Both the groups Los Amigos and those who had studied in East Germany belong to the FSLN activist base at this level.

The number of MRS activists in León was much smaller during my time there. Maybe three to five people sat in their office on a daily basis and at maximum 15 people ever congregated at

the same time, while probably at least 100 times as many FSLN Sandinistas had organisational posts somewhere in town. The FSLN was in power and it was somewhat more prestigious to work with them than the MRS. Also, I discovered the MRS had certain internal disagreements which meant that a large part of their followers would not come to the office. Nevertheless in this light, staying with the MRS 4 of 18 months – equivalent to 22% of my time in Nicaragua – it could look as if I put too much focus on them. If one looks at their 6.29% presidential election results from 2006 – equivalent to 14.21% of the total Sandinista vote – this would seem to justify the amount of time spent with them.

The project of SIMAS/free software movement/MAGFOR has to be seen as a particular case of professionals, many of which had strong Sandinista leanings. Obviously, going into any particular office or area – say I had instead gone into the administration of the social security administration or the mayorship of any particular town – could always be portrayed as very particular and not representative of anything beyond themselves. This is of course true and I tried to avoid this by not focusing on anything particular to these groups. It must also be highlighted that the amount of professionals working at this level is very limited in Nicaragua. I have not encountered concrete numbers, but my own estimate would be that it is under 5% of the population, a number still much higher than the total number of MRS activists in the country. And given the capacity they have, I do believe their decision making power is not insignificant during the current phase of Sandinismo and they are an important group to look at when trying to decipher the Sandinismo of today.

With the focus of the thesis on the FSLN, I did not use most of the material I collected about either MRS or professionals.

Chapter 3

Literature Review

Quite a lot has been written on Nicaragua and the Sandinista movement since the triumph of the revolution in 1979. After I returned from Nicaragua the first time, I researched everything I could find in Europe. Other works I did not find before returning to Nicaragua. The literature of Nicaragua in the 1980s and in the post-Sandinista years has served as a background in getting an idea of what significance Sandinismo was like in those periods and what issues were important for Nicaragua. I cannot argue much with them as they describe historical periods quite different from the current one. Literature that describes the Sandinista II Nicaragua is somewhat more limited, yet I have tried to the extent it was possible to engage with it.

Historical studies on Nicaraguan politics and ideologies

David E. Whisnant (1995), who holds a PhD in American Literature, wrote a long history of Nicaragua from the time of the European conquest to the 1990s, focusing mainly on the role of culture during the different times – a theme which, it must be noted, was left out of this thesis even though I do not try to hide the cultural realm which seems to be of particular importance to many Nicaraguans. In the view of Whisnant, the cultural sphere was neglected during the time of Somoza, when US American influence through print media and TV had almost free rein in Nicaragua. This domination in the cultural domain was of particular importance to some Nicaraguans who later on, in the FSLN administration of the 1980s tried to make up for it by putting extra emphasis on this aspect. However, due to the war efforts organised by the United States which took on an aspect of public relation management against any political effort made by the Nicaraguan government and which made the access

to funding extremely difficult, as well as problems with cultural differences between Nicaraguan East and West coasts, as well as ingrained gender role models and arrogance on the part of Sandinista leaders towards other ethnic groups, in the 1980s Nicaragua experienced neglect and discontent in the cultural arena. Nevertheless, the elections of 1990 meant a clear step backward for Whisnant, who believes the arts and women suffered during the times of cutbacks in the late 1980s and even more with the loss of government power in 1990.

The philosopher Hodges (1986) seeks to investigate the true origins of Sandinismo in the writings of Sandino. The material he has to work with is rather small and in the end he seems to have to resort to assumptions – some of which are the same ones used by some of my Nicaraguan informants today, if they wish to argue for a Sandino heavily influenced by Marxism and anarchism through his experiences in Mexico. According to Hodges, Sandino was ideologically influenced by both these groups, yet disagreed with them on much strategy and tried to use both patriots and “extremists” to achieve his short- and longterm goals (Hodges 1986, pp. 88-99). In the second part of his book, Hodges presents the Sandinismo after Sandino and how they incorporated the ideas of Sandino. Hodges (1986, pp. 161-173) explains how this task was not uncontroversial, and that the taking of Sandino's name was not given from the beginning. While giving a detailed overview of Sandinista history up to his time, Hodges explains how the Sandinistas in reality were not only influenced by Sandino, but also by international groups from Maoists to Cuban revolutionaries and Leninists and how they sought to fuse the ideas of all of these back into the original Sandino. Hodges sees Sandinismo as split into two versions at his time: a popular Sandinismo built upon Sandino (which is compatible with certain types of Christianity), and an FSLN-lead Sandinismo that builds upon internationalism and which is not supported by many groups who claim which

claim they have betrayed Sandino (Hodges 1986: 293-298).

The political scientist Cruz (2005) compares Nicaraguan and Costa Rican political systems and political cultures over the centuries. The central claim of the book is that political culture in the two countries “Crucially affected democracy’s chances and the way that democracy actually works” Cruz (2005, p. 20). In the case of Nicaragua, she notes several important political phenomenon have historically occurred and still do so to this day. One of the more important factors that seems to be of importance currently is the role of the press/media, which she notes already in the 19th century during certain periods to have been very partisan in the internal conflicts of the country and not restraining itself from criticizing those in power while at other times those involved in critical media have suffered severe persecution. This seems similar to the relationship between the newspaper La Prensa and the Somoza regime in the 1960s and 1970s, when the paper was very critical to the sitting regime until the editor Pedro Joaquín Chamorro Cardenal was killed in 1978 under mysterious circumstances. Also during the current regime, the two printed newspapers are extremely critical of president Ortega Saavedra.

Another important factor that can explain some of the current understanding is the role “pacts” between the leaders of powerful groups have in Nicaraguan history. While Cruz portrays Nicaraguan history as for more than a century including groups that for a long time had seemingly irreconcilable positions. These were oftentimes resolved through political negotiations by the leaders of these groups. As Cruz explains, the popular idea of such pacts has been that these had negative effects for the general population. Cruz believes the historical Nicaraguan understanding of terms such as “negotiations” and “pacts” were what led Contra leaders in the late 1980s/1990 to avoid the word “negotiations” to describe the

peace talks which evolved. It also explains why the MRS insists on naming the cooperation on certain issues between Ortega Saavedra and former president José Arnaldo Alemán Lacayo a “pact”.

Dore (2006) focuses on the development of capitalism and land distribution in the village Diriomo near the city of Granada in the early 20th century. According to her, the patterns of ownership of landed property and labor exploitation prohibited the development of capitalism rather than furthering it. She believes that the consequences were far-reaching, and among other things it led to the Sandinistas under-estimating the importance of handing out land during the 1980s and that they were caught up in trying to improve labor rights for agricultural workers. The Sandinistas simply misunderstood the extent of capitalist development which took place, in her view, and did not sufficiently recognise the feudalistic aspects present in the agricultural sector. Dore also looks upon several other areas that were not directly class related, such as the early disappearance of indigenous structures in western Granada, in comparison with other parts of Latin America, and the importance that the patriarchic ownership models had in forming Diriomo society.

Studies of Nicaraguan democracy

L. E. Anderson (2006) looks at the power relation between Nicaraguan the legislature and the presidency during the past few decades. He claims the Nicaraguan executive has world-wide power. He favors more legislative power and uses this as a measurement of how good the democracy in the country works. His main findings can be summed up as follows: Under Somoza, the presidency was extremely strong. Under the Sandinistas of the 1980s, the presidency was very strong, but Ortega Saavedra governed in part through strong revolutionary popular support. Although the Sandinistas benefited from the strong executive,

they gave more power to the legislative through the Constitution of 1987. Torres de Chamorro announced that she would give more power to the Legislative, but when she came to power, she had many other things to take care of initially (and lacked the support in parliament). Later she was not interested in change as she made good use of her powers. The Constitutional reform of 1995, agreed upon by two thirds of parliament but not signed by Chamorro, gave more power to parliament and limited the possibilities for those representing the executive to run in consecutive elections. Alemán Lacayo then changed the Constitution to give himself further powers, but had to buy this support by compromising with the FSLN. This meant he had to give up on some of his neoliberal reforms as well as his plan of stopping the 2000 municipal elections. Bolaños Geyer did not try to extend his powers, and formed a pact with the Sandinistas in organising a march to parliament to get it to remove the immunity Alemán Lacayo enjoyed so that he could be tried. Anderson sees Bolaños Geyer and Torres de Chamorro as the two presidents least interested in expanding their own power – possibly due to their background from Nicaraguan Conservatism – while he sees Ortega Saavedra and Alemán Lacayo as most interested in expanding their powers. Anderson concludes that Nicaraguan democracy has been improving in recent years and he also sees as a positive trait that Nicaragua regularly sees strikes and has laws that favor strikers in comparison to other Latin American countries.

Anderson wrote before the return of Ortega Saavedra to power, and given his views of what constitutes better democracy, he may see developments in recent years as rather negative. In the period 2007–11, Ortega Saavedra largely governed around the national assembly, and prior to 2011, Ortega Saavedra changed the Constitution through reinterpretation to give him the right to run in the 2011 elections.

Revolution studies

After the FSLN won the revolution in 1979, Nicaragua was the site of many anthropologists investigating a concrete revolution throughout the 1980s. A number of anthropological studies were conducted on the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (FSLN) and the Sandinista movement. Three documentary films show the early years of the revolution and the experiences of individual members of society: one on the experience of the revolution, one on the literacy campaign, and one on the FSLN and the Contras (Schultz 1980; Tercer Cine 1981a; Tercer Cine 1981b). Enriquez (1997) explored how certain collectivisation programs worked better than other agrarian programs under FSLN rule to make the farmers identify with the FSLN and its project for transition.

The anthropologist Ekern (1987) experienced the 1984 election campaign in León and observed how the Leonese inhabitants related to the ongoing revolution. He put much emphasis on studying the organising efforts around the CDSes and the strong role women had in these. He seems to have a rather critical view of the power relations between revolutionary leaders and general populace. Most jobs are only short-term jobs and Ekern believes this means that state employees feel obligated to support the FSLN leaders in power. He portrays a revolutionary Nicaragua in which women are the stable and stick to one place and men who move on from house to house and city to city while staying with different women at different times. Political mobilisation on the streets takes a central stage in directing politics. Both of these circumstances still seems to be of relevance during the current Sandinista administration, and from the reports of the period in-between, this also seems the case.

The anthropologist Lancaster (1988) looked at the relationship between class consciousness

and religion in the revolutionary period. He noticed a distinction between the wealthy, who followed the conservatives leaders on higher levels within the Catholic church who advocated non-intervention in political affairs, and the revolutionary poor who followed an idea of liberation theology, according to which faith in Christ required social-justice activism. These findings Lancaster (1988, p. 28) believed to already be well documented in other Latin-American literature, and while he basically agreed with them, he felt they did not quite explain the complexity of religious divisions sufficiently. Through an anthropological study of several Managua neighborhoods, he asserted that the historically new revolutionary class consciousness, and with it the legitimacy of Sandinismo, was based not primarily a direct import in the form of Marxism or liberation theology from other countries nor something entirely new. He found that it was much in line with Catholicism as it was practiced in Nicaragua before the advent of liberation theology, as Nicaraguan saints represented a tradition of helping the oppressed – though with more of a focus on peasants and workers rather than indigenous groups as is the in many other Latin American countries (Lancaster 1988, pp. 37–38).

The anthropologists Bourgois (1986) and Hale (1987) displayed how the Miskito minority and the black population were heavily recruited by the CIA for an insurgency against the Sandinistas. These groups live mainly on the Nicaraguan east coast in the two semi-independent regiones autónomas and its members are generally subject to even higher levels of material deprivation than the general population. The study of these areas is quite apart from the study of the central and Spanish speaking part of Nicaraguan, and focused on the bilingual language situation and patterns of their internal organisation.

Another subject of a lot of attention in literature on the Sandinista revolution was the reform of

the health care system as part of the revolutionary process (Donahue 1989; Ripp 1984; Garfield 1984; Bossert 1984; Williams 1984). This subject also now receives attention. Ripp (1984) suggested that from a Marxist viewpoint, the study of the health care systems can serve as a replacement for participant observation among just a handful of informants, as the analysis of the class antagonisms within the health care system will automatically say something about class relations in society. These lines of thought may be what made it popular to study individual aspects of Sandinismo rather than the phenomenon as a whole. Furthermore some research in related studies were produced using anthropological methods. Hoyt (1997) had observed Nicaragua starting in the 1960s and 1970s. She wrote on the changes in the Sandinista view of democracy. Before the insurrection, they saw elections for parliament as not needed, then in the early 1980s as needed for tactical reasons and finally some years later as a necessary part of a truly democratic society. She also saw a change in the role institutions of participative democracy had in the Sandinista view: While they initially saw them as a way to spread the politics of the Sandinista leadership, by the late 1980s they realised that they needed to be controlled by the local citizens who they were supposed to represent.

A work I discovered much too late, which would have been very useful in preparing me for Nicaragua is the book *Nicaragua* by Walker and Wade (2011). Walker published previous versions under the same title and other books on Nicaragua since the early 1980s. Their study was conducted within the Latin America sciences and is written in an extremely readable journalistic style. The perspective of Dependency of Nicaragua to the United States this study presents is very much the same way I see the relationship. For obvious reasons, the authors have a much closer personal relation to the Nicaragua of the 1980s than me. For

me, the 1980s is a backdrop to the current events, whereas for them the focus lies in this period, although they accurately describe the history since then.

Post-Sandinista studies

In the following years, a number of works on Nicaraguan politics were published. Most of this concerns the period of time between the Sandinista governments. The period was labelled 'Post-Sandinista' when it was not known that the Sandinistas would return to power. A lot of this has to do with new types of social movements and the sense of destructiveness of this period.

The first of this type is the anthropologist Field (1999) who wrote on the changing meaning of the popular play *El Güegüense*. The play originated in colonial times and was about travelling Nicaraguan merchants who convince a Spanish official they were rich and how they arrange a marriage with his daughter. During the 1980s Sandinismo, the play was reinterpreted as being about anti-imperialism and after 1990 it was again reinterpreted, this time as being about the central part that false play had in Nicaraguan politics.

Prevost and Vanden (1997) give through a series of essays an update to the international audience of what has happened in Nicaragua after 1990, when the amount of literature written in the social sciences on Nicaragua declined rapidly. Their view, like most others, is that Nicaraguans lived under rapidly deteriorating conditions and with a revolutionary past faded into the background. The authors believe the 1990 elections were a significant step back from empowering Nicaraguans and building up of democracy. Three additional articles by Richard Stahler-Sholk, Cynthia Chavez Matoyer and Pierre M. La Ramée/Erica G. Polakoff describe how the struggles to keep the post-Sandinista government from putting through their harshest plans of structural adjustment at least in part succeeded: the status women achieved

during the 1980s and their decline after the 1990s elections and the decline of popular organisations (although these have not been done away with completely).

Another often-read anthropologist of this type is Babb, who wrote about the situation of Nicaraguan women and the imagery of revolution in the post-revolutionary period (Babb 2001; Babb 2004). In “Recycled Sandalistas” she focused on poor households in Managua in the 1990s, when government programs to help these were rolled back. Babb concluded that the consequences were very different for men and women. Women were forced back to the household, to take care of children and family and were actively discouraged from participating in the wage labor workforce. She showed how some women are able to fight back. She compared the situation with that of other post-revolutionary regimes. Generally, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) instituted the same program as imposed on many other Latin American countries, but with harsher consequences for the general population (Babb 2004, pp. 35–36). Many of those who worked in the public sector saw themselves forced to work in the informal economy. That oftentimes meant setting up a store in their home, especially for women who stayed at home to watch the children (Babb 2004, p. 36). Simultaneously, what Babb (2004, p. 36) called ‘still mobilised mass-organisations,’ groups she obviously believed would fade away with time, managed to win concessions in negotiations with the Liberal governments. In this connection Babb (2004, p. 37) focused on how the Sandinista women’s organisation Asociación de Mujeres Nicaragüenes Luisa Amanda Espinoza (AMNLAE) lost support from some sectors, and how a new penal code in 1992 obliged women who were pregnant due to rape, to give birth to the child, and outlawed homosexuality. Babb described a dysfunctional society and combined it with discourses on development and how the fundamental premise under the Nicaraguan discourse at the time

was that the country was in pain. Those from poor households related this much more to their own lives than an abstract entity (Babb 2004, pp. 175–202). As she saw it, non-partidarian movements were about to start growing out of the rubble of neoliberalism, including, peace, environmental and indigenous organisations in what she saw as an “altered national context [that] supported more pluralist approaches” (Babb 2004, pp. 203–239).

Much in line with the same line of thinking, but decidedly more politically, the anthropologist Rodgers (2008, p. 79) declares that “there can be little doubt that Sandinismo as a political ideology is quite unequivocally ‘dead’.” As evidence for this conclusion, he lists that “the upper echelons of the [FSLN] ... have venally integrated themselves into the elite that has ruled Nicaragua since 1990.” Rodgers explains that the Sandinista leaders have integrated fully into the general Nicaraguan political and economical elite and that seems to make the Sandinista political ideology meaningless, or ‘dead.’ Nevertheless, as we know the FSLN continues to obtain election results at the level of or better than in 1990, and the marches organised by FSLN activists continue to have support from a sizable part of the population, so it appears that not every Nicaraguan shares Rodger’s view on this. Rodgers (2008, pp. 77–78) explains at length that he was personally frustrated when he came to Nicaragua as a young leftist in 1996, given the lack of revolutionary spirit in Nicaragua at the time. Rodgers is now strongly opposed to president Ortega Saavedra, whom he accuses of owning a hotel chain and possible other big businesses (Arsenault 2011).

The destructive perspective seems similar to what many political commentators, including Amin (1990) thought at the time, when he argued that the goal of national independence as a common theme which could be used to gain political support throughout the third world were exhausted by 1990. He also believed a lot of the subsequent movements would treat single

issues, again much in line with Babb (2004). According to Amin (1990) this was not so much an expression of the end of more fundamental criticisms of the system, but it meant that national liberation in itself was not a goal that would reach far enough for the masses. It would still be capitalism and the notion of exploitation these new movements tried to confront, even though they only did so in isolated cases. Given this perspective, the time of party politics did not come completely to an end, but had to be readjusted to the new subjectively experienced necessities of the peoples of the South.

The political scientist Selbin (1993) gives a somewhat more positive picture in his comparison of the Nicaraguan revolution with other Latin American revolutions. Writing in 1993, it seemed for him that the Nicaraguan revolution had made some fundamental changes to the Nicaraguan state and society that could not be changed back to the way they were before the revolution, and these changes were being defended against the onslaught of right-wing governments. It must be noted that he wrote earlier than many of those who showed more pessimistic perspectives.

The political scientist Wright (1995) does not have as negative a view of the future of Sandinismo. He wrote a detailed political history of Nicaragua since the time of earthquake of Managua in 1972 and until the 1990s and the split between MRS and FSLN. In his view, one of the main problems of the Sandinistas during the 1980s was that it tried to make the peasants adhere to what Sandinista leaders saw as what their demands should be, according to radical theory, instead of trying to adjust their own program to the political demands of the peasants. The Sandinista interpretation of Marxist theory was such that it differed from more orthodox approaches in several ways. According to Wright, it was the interpretation Carlos Fonseca Amador delivered that allowed for a mixed economy, open elections (with the

participation of bourgeoisie elements) and that these could be combined with participative democracy. This was, at least in part, because according to Wright, Fonseca Amador thought the national bourgeoisie had outplayed its political role already, that a phase of national bourgeoisie hegemony was not needed, and that Somoza was not more than the representation of international capital (Wright 1995, pp. 211-212). Wright saw that after the elections of 1990s the future was at least possibly positive – the errors made by the FSLN could be revised and he thought it possible that at a future time, the FSLN could again take up the work of a revolutionary force which spoke for the interests of peasants and proletariat (Wright 1995, pp. 243-244). At times Wright seems to write more like he is on a political mission of reforming the FSLN rather than viewing them as a social scientist, therefore, at times it is difficult to differentiate between the two parts in his writings. In his conclusion he seems to speak more out of political interest rather than as the result of a scientific study of Nicaraguan politics. Nevertheless, he was one of the few who predicted a return of Sandinismo to a position of state power.

The view of failed agricultural policy is shared by anthropologist and historian Montoya (2007), who looked at the ideological construction of an agricultural cooperative in a perspective of socialist state formation in the 1980s, collecting stories from peasants in a village that had been celebrated as exemplary during that period. Different from Wright, she sees this from the peasant perspective according to how it was conceptualised as when compared to the ideals of Sandinismo. She also explains how they felt the peasants were being harmed by the Sandinista government through their policies that were not always in their interest. Montoya (2003) also looks at how gender role persisted in the 1980s, and how the gender equality that was spoken about so much, in reality suffered because the

Sandinista project was executed in a way favoring men, and at many times it was left open for men to interpret how revolutionary policies were to be carried out in practice.

The study of health care continued from the Sandinista period, though rather than looking at the build-up of the health care system, the focus was on its break-down, looking at such things as the abolition of 'therapeutic abortion' mentioned above and the preparations to remove it (McNaughton, Blandon, and Altamirano 2002; McNaughton, Mitchell, and Blandon 2004). Another focus of study was land rights following the revolution (Abu-Lughod 2000; Everingham 2001). Everingham (2001) wrote on changing property rights in Nicaragua after the electoral defeat in 1990. In his perspective, the privatisation of lands after 1990 were done in a way that favored certain influential groups. Further, this made land disputes in the following years inevitable, and made the poor even poorer. It also prevented the full establishment of democracy (Everingham 2001, p. 34). He looked at the specifics of Nicaraguan law and the history of the various decrees that ordered the expropriation of land in the 1980s (Everingham 2001, pp. 63–65). His conclusion, possibly inspired by a politically Liberal viewpoint, was that the head of states and international political experts were right in arguing that the level of uncertainty of property held, was the most important factor in determining the overall level of poverty of peasants within a society and which made Nicaragua stand out particularly badly (Everingham 2001, pp. 83–84).

Similar studies about various aspects of the perceived breakdown of society were written by Rodgers (2008) about the horrific lives of the members of street gangs in Managua. Metoyer (2000) focused on women's organisations, and Quesada (1998) focused on embodiments. Field (1998) focused on the rebirth of indigenous identities in western Nicaragua. Tatar (2005) claims to show that the FSLN never really represented the insurrectionist movement of

1978/79. Lundgren (2000) looked at those who received professional education during the Sandinista regime and how they negotiate their previous alignment with the FSLN in times of neoliberalism when these were frowned upon and Lancaster (1992) wrote on the continuing existence of gender stereotypes and class relations in the late 1980s/early 1990s which he portrayed as a nightmarish time of violence both in the inner-personal relations and at a systemic level.

When Lancaster (1991) wrote about Nicaraguan perceptions of skin colors, he traced the origins of the existing categories (and the difference that exists vis-a-vis popular perceptions in the United States) back to colonialism rather than to Sandinismo. The anthropological study of the Miskito could be conducted somewhat apart from this national context, possibly due to the physical distance from Managua, language differences and that Sandinismo not being popular in the 1980s among the Miskitos. Jamieson (2002) wrote about the importance of ownership of the equipment to catch sea bob in a little village in the Laguna Perla in the early 1990s in determining differences in wealth, without mentioning whether and how the change of government in 1990 or the existence of the Sandinista movement had for such class relations. Studies in related subjects did include the national reality and Sandinismo, though somewhat more distantly than any of the studies on the mestizo parts of Nicaragua. Hooker (2005), who has a PhD in government studies, mentioned Sandinismo as one of three mestizo-nationalist (anti-Miskito) ideologies. According to her, the first such ideology had been 'vanguardism' of the 1930s, which celebrated Spanish ancestry. She placed Sandinismo in the 1960, as an ideology that celebrated Amer-Indian origins. As current ideology of the 1990s, she saw 'mestizo multiculturalism' – an ideology that emphasised multiculturalism, but also the hierarchical nature of ethnic relations, with ethnic mestizos as the most important

group. Freeland (2003), a Linguist who wrote on bilingual education among Miskitos, briefly mentioned Sandinismo, but only as a backdrop to the history of the institution of current education laws. In all cases, it would have been unthinkable had these studies been conducted on the Nicaraguan west coast, to not include the change of power in 1990 in their explanations.

Relevance of studies done in the time of previous governments under current circumstances

Studies such as the above formed the preparation of my fieldwork. It was clear I would not find the country in process of neoliberal self-destruction, yet given that most of these studies were conducted only a few years in the past, I expected them to still be more or less relevant.

I quickly noticed that gigantic changes had taken place. There was not the plethora of different independent social movements which Amin (1990); Babb (2004) had predicted.

Although a rather large number of formally independent theme based organisations existed, I quickly understood they were always related to party politics. The connections were not always immediately obvious, and many times the 'political line' was to deny any party connection. Other times the connection was concealed from some of the participants at a lower level. Yet, it could always be found if one was insistent. Most organisations that declared themselves independent, were linked to the FSLN. I also discovered such groups connected to the Partido de Resistencia Nicaragüense (PRN, the party of the former Contras) and the MRS.

The idea that times had changed is not uncontroversial. Many social scientists side quite explicitly with the MRS in their views of current Nicaraguan politics. Rodgers (2008) published his article describing a breakdown of society with fast shifting priorities, based on fieldworks in

1996/97 and 2002/03, and in 2008 when Ortega Saavedra was in power again. Nevertheless, Rodgers was certain no greater change had taken place or would take place. Rodgers (2008, p. 96) finished his article with a look back at the 1980s, seeing good and bad, using a quote of Sergio Ramírez, presenting Ramírez as a “noted Nicaraguan author and Vice-president of Nicaragua between 1984 and 1990”. Additionally, Ramírez was one of the founders of the MRS in 1994 and its presidential candidate in 1996 and he continues to be at odds with the Ortega Saavedra government. It just so happens, that the MRS represents a view that the current FSLN government has not made any advances.

On the July 6–12 2009 the Institute for Latin American Studies of the Free University of Berlin held a conference entitled “30 years Sandinista Revolution: Retrospective and present of a transnational movement” sponsored by the Fritz-Thyssen foundation (connected to the German company ThyssenKrupp). The MRS was directly represented through Participants Hugo Torres and Hector Mairena, while no-one from the FSLN was present. The remaining speakers, German and foreign, all represented more or less directly the views of the MRS. When asked why no-one from the FSLN or at least representing one of the many views present inside the FSLN was present, I was told that it was simply impossible to find such a person.

Relations between Miskitos and Sandinistas changed markedly from the 1980s, with Sandinistas gaining much more support on the east coast than previously. I went to the east coast only once, a trip during which I was able to interview representatives of the FSLN in Laguna Perla and Bluefields who were in power. The trip gave me more insight into the current state of relations as it helped my formation of a general analysis of the current Sandinista scheme. Among other things, the FSLN representatives in Laguna Perla now

believe their main problem of gaining local support is with mestizos as the party has gotten the image of being the party of indigenous and Miskito in this area.

The situation in land rights was quite different from what researchers encountered just a few years earlier in that some land was again given out, although not on the same scale as in the 1980s. Many unresolved issues exist from those years, including much confusion about who is actually the owner of any property due to changing property rights and interpretations of laws by the various governments. Political deals made around the handing over of power by the Sandinistas to Barrios Torres de Chamorro were still used to explain the repartition of land by the government. Studies on land rights are highly informative and relevant in understanding today's situation. The confusion I witnessed, tended to favor the poor rather than the rich land owner during the second Sandinista period.

Nevertheless, my findings in the area of economics is that real-life changes that have taken place since the FSLN came to power are much smaller than what either Liberals or Sandinistas try to make of it. In some aspects the frustration with the FSLN and the world as a whole, has even grown since 2006 among those of my informants who believed in immediate changes. Studying certain parts of society, many of the observations made by previous anthropologists will likely still apply.

Sandinista II studies

The second period of Sandinismo starting in 2006 has received less study than the previous period. The studies I found are those of European Master Degree candidates. I did not encounter any anthropologists with a doctorate nor US American higher degree students conducting studies of Sandinismo in Nicaragua after 2007. The study that came closest is that of Gooren (2010), who was in Nicaragua in 2005–06 and who focused on Ortega Saavedra's

election campaign of 2006 and looks specifically at the religious aspects of it. This is a field of which I have much less knowledge. The part of his study that focused on more general aspects of the election are the same ones mentioned by the international media and which in Nicaraguan politics form the propaganda of the MRS: Explaining that there is an alliance between Partido Liberal Constitucionalista (PLC) and FSLN known as 'el pacto' to split all positions of power between them since 1998. This leaves out the fact there have been many other alliances in Nicaraguan politics since then, and many which run counter to this particular alliance. This gives a skewed view on the issue of therapeutic abortion.

Of the current studies mentioned, the focus is on health care in general (Bartoszko 2009). A difference from studies of the 1980s, which generally had a positive and participative undertone, is noticeable. The Bartoszko study has a generally critically undertone in her presentation of the subject. The fieldwork is situated in the very early part of the second Sandinista government in 2007, and Bartoszko finds a discrepancy between the nationalist Sandinista discourse which promotes the idea of an inclusive society and a health system which in reality works with principles that exclude and are based on principles of privileges for certain groups. The other study mentioned above, focuses on the more specific issues concerning the changes in the legal framework of therapeutic abortions in 2006 and especially the Sandinista involvement both in the negotiations forbidding it and later in undermining the prohibition of it (Helgheim 2009).

Another study looks at adult education and the renewed literacy programs that was very important to the Sandinista administration 2007–09 (Pytko 2008; Bartoszko 2010). Pytko argues that while literacy programs are offered by the new Sandinista administration just as they were in the 1980s, they are not seen as being of any concrete value to those who they

are offered. Programs of filling much more immediate needs such as employment and food are seen not as being complementary to the literacy campaign, but rather as opposites. The point of learning how to read and write is lost for many of those who cannot capitalise on this knowledge in the form of an actual job.

The tradition of studies of politics continues in the form of studies of the CPCs (Bochove 2008; Pallmeyer 2009). Bochove (2008) was present at several meetings of the CPCs of León and compares it with other instruments of direct democracy created in the years preceding the Sandinista takeover and similar institutions in Bolivia. His objective is to see whether they do in fact bring more direct democracy to the local and municipal levels of Nicaraguan government. He concludes they do in fact change one aspect by excluding foreign organisations from participating in the structures the way previous organisations allowed. At the same time, they are more directly connected to only one party (the FSLN), and the fact at *departamento* level they are organised by FSLN personnel which makes them less democratic to Bochove (2008, pp. 47–48). Anderson and Dodd (2009) have a somewhat different perspective in that they believe the CPCs execute orders coming from Ortega Saavedra, thereby undermining the power of locally elected FSLN mayors. It is true several conflicts between CPCs and elected mayors exist, but my data does not suggest that either CPC or FSLN-mayors are directly controlled by Ortega Saavedra.

I met Bochove at a CPC conference in León in spring 2008 and although I have been present at a number of different CPC meetings, I had not compared them to other similar institutions. I lived with Helgheim during her stay in León. It was through conversations with Helgheim I first understood how exactly the Sandinistas undermined the anti-abortion law they passed.

Each of these studies has just looked at one individual program of the new Sandinista

government, and not always over a very long period. It is only when taken in its entirety that certain aspects of incoherence and general patterns of decision structures first show. While Pytko (2008) makes references to an overall Sandinista discourse, it is taken for granted and its interaction as regards particular aspects are not further analysed. The historic period and economic positions of Nicaragua are not focused upon. It is as if Nicaragua and the FSLN are free to do whatever they want, disregarding any power structure that goes beyond the nation state. The formal and informal negotiations with the world beyond the Nicaraguan state are not focused upon.

It is in this area I choose to locate this study – viewing the Sandinista project or projects, including all its programs, as one general program for social change. The comparison I seek to make with the Sandinista project of the 1980s is less concerned with individual details, such as whether certain government programs have changed names or have slightly different parameters, as much as how the overall logic according to which they are employed, structured and executed has changed. Parts of the Sandinista project go beyond pure parliamentary decisions and presidential decrees, which are largely ignored by the existing literature. In an overall analysis, this part has to be considered.

Studies of similar phenomenon in other parts of Latin America

The phenomenon of political parties or more specifically political mass parties targeting the poor, the workers or peasants is obviously not exclusive to Nicaragua. Many studies have been done of other countries in Latin America.

Adler Lomnitz and Melnick (2000) wrote about relations of people who are not politically active but who identify with a party. The identity aspect of belonging to one of the groups is similar to what Adler Lomnitz and Melnick (2000, pp. 82–82) describe as ‘party subcultures’ in

Chile, in that their origins lie in party politics, but they are somewhat freed from the day to day politics and are more about personal identity and a feeling of belonging. The groups in Chile are mostly defined through descriptions of their consumption patterns, dress and speech. One can easily identify similar subcultures in much of Europe, and to a somewhat more limited degree also in the United States of America. In the case of most of my informants much of this is less relevant, as their involvement with politics includes a major component of being involved with current politics.

A phenomenon of mass organisation around a party in Latin America that has been studied a great deal is of Peronismo in Argentina (Auyero 2001; Levitsky 2001). The comparative political scientist Levitsky (2001) looks at the development of leftist parties around the world and how they evolved during the period of what he calls “neoliberalism.” He seems to use roughly equivalent to the FSLN labelling of the period between 1990 and 2006, with the exception that it starts earlier in many parts of the world. Levitsky takes it as given that parties with previously socialist/leftist outlooks had to act “adaptively” which seems to translate to giving up their socialist viewpoints and replace them with neoliberal views. The reason for this is Levitsky believes only parties appealing to middle class groups and independents not connected to the traditional workers' organisations would stand a chance of surviving politically in elections. Levitsky identifies several factors he sees as important in determining whether a party will be able to make such a switch. According to this model, in the first world, a party is hindered in changing its viewpoints radically if it is connected to masses – in the form of labor unions or mass member basis. However, Levitsky claims that in some third world countries, such as Argentina, mass parties have a rather small leadership that is not very formally constituted and which is therefore relatively free in changing the party line. The

difference to the first world according to Levitsky is that in the first world mass parties are generally directly linked with a big bureaucratic structure of the party which doesn't permit large change- easily. Another important factor he sees is the level of routinization within the party. If a party works according to routines, internalised and accepted by all those involved, leaders tend to stay longer and consequently the ideological position of the party does not switch as quickly. At the same time party leaders are constrained in their ability to change party lines because they have to adhere to the routines.

Many aspects of Levitsky's observations can be found in the case of the FSLN – the party leadership is not chosen through a bureaucratic process within the party, but are rather chosen out of tradition. As we will see in the chapter on history and economic history, the party has been very flexible in its policies in many areas.

In certain areas the analysis does not fit. Levitsky claims the populist parties in Latin America were created from above, whereas the European communist and socialdemocratic counterparts were founded through disciplined organisers, Latin American populist parties were created “from above.” He does not define what he means with “from above,” but if it is to out a position of state power, then this clearly does not apply to the FSLN. If it is meant “through students who made out a privileged layer of society,” then it comes closer to the truth in the case of the FSLN. As we will see throughout this thesis, many other group besides the current leaders of the FSLN claim ownership to the party, and who have been with it from before its days of state power and who attempt (and at times successfully) influencing the party line. Also, very different from the Peronismo described by Levitsky, the FSLN continues to be inseparable from organised labor in Nicaragua.

Levitsky also mentions three other parties which he ranks according their success in adopting

neoliberal policies – in Mexico, Venezuela, Argentina, Chile and Peru. In the case of a Chilean communist party, Peru and Venezuela, the parties were not able to adapt quickly enough and consequently lost at elections in the 1990s, whereas in the case of Mexico the party partially adapted and consequently only lost moderately and the case of Argentina and a socialist party in Chile which managed to fully adapt to neoliberalism and consequently did not lose. The examples given are not anything like the FSLN. Although the FSLN, in the view of some, adopted many neoliberal policies in practice for certain periods of time. The election results between 1990 and 2006 remained roughly the same.

Memory in anthropological discourse

In the field of anthropology an ongoing debate takes place on the importance of the representation of the past in the present and how the past is used by social actors in the present. The anthropological debate on memory culture closely relates to an earlier debate on how the measurement of time and standards for what counts as valid retelling of history depend on cultural context. (Durkheim 1964; Evans-Pritchard 1940; Geertz 1973; Bloch 1977; Malinowski 1945; Leach 1954; Appadurai 1981). The idea of a myth based understanding of time as historically changing, is employed in the study of Amer-Indian tribes (see for example Ramos 1988; Hill 1988; Gow 2001; Fausto and Heckenberger 2007; High 2009; Hugh-Jones 1988). Appadurai (1981) creates a framework for the standards to which a particular story from the past must conform within a given society, for it to be generally accepted as truthful. It shows that these standards differ between cultures.

Several recent anthropological approaches to memory focus on the social purpose of remembering the past, and they see the purpose as being an argument for something one wishes to take place in the present rather than something that happened in the past. This

follows an anthropological tradition of contested history tellings (Leach 1954) and a sociological tradition of Maurice Halbwachs (White 2006). Maurice Halbwachs claims that any kind of recollection of the past is a genuine social process that happens between people rather than in the individual human mind and the past really comes into existence only when people relate their own actions to historic processes in their everyday life (Maurice Halbwachs in Assmann 2000, pp. 31–35). He does not mean to say no past existed before someone made it up, but the points of the past seen as important and the emphasis put on various aspects of it, develop through this process of relating to the past in the present. This framework has been appropriated by anthropologists in looking at how political differences between groups in the present oftentimes manifest themselves in different versions of history. These versions do not necessarily contradict one-another, as they present the past in different ways by selecting certain events and leaving out others (White 2006).

Some of the more recent anthropological approaches in this field also focus on the particular historical past of any particular group. Many of these studies presuppose a dominant national or colonial myth which contradicts that of individual informants (Connerton 1989; Cole 2001; A. L. Smith 2004) and that non-dominant groups represent other versions of the past (Kenny 1999; Rappaport 1990).

What makes sense for Nicaragua?

While Nicaragua certainly has a colonial past, it is the much more recent past that seems most important to my Nicaraguan informants. The discourse relating to current economic centers, specifically the United States, takes on a life of its own which—no matter what group one chooses to follow—is completely different from any version of the past that may have been imported from the United States. No one group dominates all aspects of social life.

Several groups exist, each of which dominates in at least one sphere, with each representing a different account of the past.

Besides Nicaragua, Mexico and Cuba have a history of successful revolutions to which the states and their populations continue to focus, while other countries in Northern Latin America do not (Wilm 2009). It has led to some similarities in the understandings of the importance of history. The revolution itself appears most important in determining the Nicaraguan situation. The Nicaraguan revolution is the youngest and consequently more people from the insurrectionist period still live, and Nicaragua experienced more abrupt political changes since the revolutionary beginning than Mexico or Cuba. This seems to be a factor for the continuing extensive discussion of history in Nicaragua (Wilm 2010). Also before Sandinismo and the Sandinista revolution, Nicaragua had a long history of having several in-conciliatory groups with radically different political goals fight for power. This may constitute an additional factor as to why political-historical discourse is so prevalent.

What makes a lot sense in the case of Nicaragua is to look at how history is employed to differentiate and legitimise different groups. While my Nicaraguan informants are extremely informed about Nicaragua's particular history, the meaning of different events within Nicaraguan history are highly contested, and my Nicaraguan informants were generally very familiar with them and discussed and argued the points. The anthropologist Tully (1997, p. 302) also noticed this of Nicaragua in the mid-1990s. She saw the diverse practices of discussing history as a central part of Nicaraguan popular culture.

It is important to note that this history telling, which largely happens orally, is not about telling myths. Although an apparent 'rebirth' of indigenous identities among the majority of Spanish-speaking Nicaraguans flowered during the 1990s (Field 1998; Tatar 2005), it has not

altered the overall standards of what is accepted as valid history among my Nicaraguan informants. Instead of myths of ancient times, the telling of the past in today's Nicaragua generally lives up to the same standards of quality as the western academic discipline of history. My contacts were generally willing to use academic standards for falsification and validation of stories of the past, once they accepted me as a person generally knowledgeable in the area. What is accepted as a believable history seems to be similar or the same as in other parts of the western world, so creating abstract models of what constitutes credible tellings of the past within Nicaraguan society seems to make limited sense.

Dependency Theory in the literature on Nicaragua

The main framework employed in this thesis is that of Dependency Theory. The thesis is not primarily concerned with proving the relevance of Dependency Theory, but takes its fundamental premise – highlighted in the next chapter – as background for the analysis. Several reasons exist for the choosing of this framework. As we will see, some type of Dependency Theory has in many ways been the fundamental base for the analysis the Sandinistas made when drafting their political program in the 1960s and 1970s. This meant that much of the terminology and general line of thought was familiar to my informants and it was not too difficult to discuss some of the issues relating to it with them. This however is not to say I adopted the Sandinista version of Dependency Theory. On the contrary, as my field material shows, my informants seem to have build a unique version of Nicaraguan history which does not automatically follow from Dependency Theory Framework.

Dependency Theory has been invoked by several social scientists when discussing the case of Nicaragua. Walker and Wade (2011) start their work by presenting the relationship between core and peripheral countries and the stream of wealth between them as a given fact, as a

backdrop that Nicaraguan history has to be understood against. In their description of recent years they do not seem to resort to such a theory and focus on the power-sharing agreement between Ortega Saavedra and the PLC. The economist Biderman (1983) presents a thorough Nicaraguan history up to his day in which he takes the dependency relationship as a given, but then goes a step further and analyses the responses by Nicaraguan actors to the fact that Nicaragua is a peripheral country. It is this perspective I build upon. While Biderman looks at the matter purely from the perspective of an economist and at Nicaraguan governments as the principal actors, I transfer this to an anthropological view in which it is activists and individual Nicaraguans that are focused upon.

This does carry with it a problem of the connection of macro and micro – it is not possible to proof whether actions at a national level are affected by what I observed at the ground level among my informants, as will be the case in most anthropological studies. I therefore make it clear that I am not trying to say anything with certainty that goes beyond my informants.

Theories/frameworks that were not used in this thesis

Much theory has been written in the social sciences about just about any aspect of human existence at an ever greater speed over the past centuries. After having presented my material to various anthropologists, I have come to understand there are many views of what would constitute a natural theoretical framework and what would need to be included in terms of literature. Had I included all the available literature, the entire thesis would be with nothing more than a long literature review and would still not be able to include all available material. I therefore early on saw the need to limit myself in how much written theoretical works I would permit to enter the thesis and what type and amount of ethnographic descriptions I would include. I will here mention some of the limits I put in place and speak about some of the

theoretical works that have come up time and again which I did not choose to include.

I limit this thesis to the study of understanding economics, understanding history and structures of power, and leave out general culture and religious aspects. Many things can be said about these areas as well – such as a marked change in churchgoing and membership since 1990, and changes in cultural activities with the introduction of Halloween and other newly invented or imported celebrations. I recognise the importance of these in the everyday life of Nicaraguans. Yet, they lie outside the scope of this thesis. I have placed the discussion of the individual pieces of theoretical literature within the chapters they relate to. In the following, I only present the type of approaches of which I choose not to make use, while recognising their centrality in current social sciences and acknowledging the fact it would have been possible to write a thesis using much of the same ethnographic material as I did with any one of these approaches.

Looking at people living in a country with some type of power structure today becomes the business of every social science study produced. One has to limit oneself in concerns of what background literature one chooses to include. I choose to go for the school of anti-imperialism which developed into Dependency Theory and later on into World Systems Theory (WST) and onto postmodern versions represented by writers such as Hardt and Negri (2001), but leave out most of the later theories beyond Dependency Theory. Dependency Theory has been in use both in academia and in political practice and is able to span the two fields, WST has almost exclusively been a framework of academic debate and has never been part of a political discourse nor is it clear whether it allows for social change through directed human political activity. Also, as pointed out by Amin (2004, p. 24), the very generalised idea of an Empire without any clear center to it as it newer theorists oftentimes seem to claim, fails to

acknowledge the existence of a hegemonic center in the current world system, represented by the United States, with Europe and Japan being part of a triad-type center of surplus production. This approach seemed initially most helpful to me, because it simultaneously represents a theoretical framework in academia for which this thesis is produced and the same concepts get mirrored in the language employed by the FSLN. If I were to disagree with my informants on any concrete point, I assumed that likely my informants would still understand my analysis and I would be able to comment on it. This assumption turned out to be correct.

A related perspective that comes out of the world of anthropology is what is presented in *Europe and the People without History* by anthropologist Wolf (1982). He looks at history as an anthropologist and explains that “most of the societies that anthropologists study are an outgrowth of the expansion of Europe and not the pristine precipitates of past evolutionary stages” Wolf (1982, p. 76). The people of the colonial possessions of European powers are seen as having participated in the forming of history, and that they are not just affected by the doings of Europeans. This seems at first to be much in line with Dependency Theory and could be a natural departure point for an anthropological study. The perspective employed is however still quite a lot wider than what seemed fruitful in the case of history as it is discussed in Nicaragua. The parts of Nicaraguan history mainly discussed all lie within the past century, where Wolf goes 600 years back in time, to the time of European colonisation of the Americas. He dedicates a lot of space to a discussion of different modes of production, with capitalism being the latest stage. Although there were some experiments with regulating the ownership of the means of production in Nicaragua during the 1980s, this had little to do with the historical development of distinct modes of production over centuries, but instead

comparatively short-term shifts in global political alliances. I believe it would be rather misleading to mix the two perspectives (that of 600 years and that of 30 years) together as although they may have some nominal points in common, they really treat two completely different issues.

Another way of going about this research would be to de-construct the categories 'Liberals' and 'Sandinistas' in some post-modern sense. For early draft versions of this thesis I received comments such as "How do you know that person is a Liberal?" I do not try to pass any judgment on whether someone actually belongs to the category as it has been used in European discourse over the centuries. Obviously a great deal could be said about how hard it would be to define any features that distinguish Sandinistas from Liberals. The meaning of 'liberal' could easily be shown as being used rather specifically in a Nicaraguan context and as varying greatly from the term as it is used in other parts of the world. While interesting in many ways, such investigations are not part of the research here. As a starting point, I accept the existence of these groups and accept those who claim to be part of a particular group and who are generally seen by other Nicaraguans as belonging to that group. So when I describe someone as 'Liberal' it is because he is a member of a Liberal party or has described himself as 'Liberal.' After having accepted the existence of the groups, I then show the views of history as they have been presented to me by members of either group. Members of the three groups also have a lot in common as they all are Nicaraguans. As such, their presentations of history also have many points in common.

Another approach I could have taken was to focus on the history of the people versus the history of individual leaders. This approach, 'History from Below' has been practiced by Marxists and their theme has often been people in the third world. In its latest incarnations it

has been promoted mainly in Britain and then adapted by the French Annales school in history (Bhattacharya 1983, pp. 4–5) and later popularised by various authors of ‘The People’s History of [insert country name here]’ books. This approach to history openly invites the use of anthropological data as part of one’s case. The reading of various ‘People’s histories’ certainly has informed my approach to collecting data. The history I researched mainly serves as a background to better understand the current situation and the interpretations today. That is the focus of this study. This Nicaraguan history is, as it is presented here, comes both in the form of a relatively inter-subjectively line of important events seen as such across groups, and as a more specific presentation of distinctions between historical understandings not shared across all of Nicaraguan society. A lot of this history is connected directly to the FSLN, yet I seek to understand today’s views rather than understand how events in the past were perceived by suppressed groups at that time.

One could also go further into the anthropological study of nationalism, and the FSLN project could be interpreted as mainly having a nation building purpose. While the state had an important role during the Somoza years and a lot more decision making power concentrated in its institutions, there was not the sense of universal citizenship (or at least semi-universal if one forgets certain issues with indigenous people on the East Coast) the FSLN built up with the literacy campaign, which targeted large disenfranchised rural and urban groups. The redirection of industrial output from luxury goods for the elite to mass products for the public, and the employment of generally based political organisations is important. All the standard literature on nationalism could then be applied.

The two writers traditionally connected with the beginnings of nationalist ideologies agreed on the idea of nationalism, but it was not clear to them what constituted a nation. The two

proponents for the two main lines of nationalism were Ernest Renan and Johann Gottlieb Fichte. Renan (1939) saw nations as voluntary contracts among its members and as a rather recent phenomenon. Fichte (1978, p. 187) saw nations as given entities that had common traits, and most of all a common language. Comaroff (1996, p. 164) labels these perspectives on cultural identities as constructivist and primordialist.

The two lines of thought have continued up to today, although both have changed considerably. Among the primordialists, one can note at least two separate tendencies. Some, as Fichte, see nations as having commonalities through nothing more than cultural traits built upon over many generations. The other tendency combines the idea of objectively existing nations with Darwinism. Nations, therefore, have a commonality of genes and must be seen as the equivalents of races or maybe rather sub-races which are more important than the race held in common with the other sub-races within the same race. The constructivist line has changed considerably since Renan. Those seeing nations as constructed no longer necessarily see them as an inherently positive concept. The anthropologist Gellner and the historian Hobsbawm agree on looking at nationalism as a modern phenomenon that has come into being within the course of the buildup of industrialism and capitalism. They see nationalism as being a project of the new elites that came into being with industrialism/capitalism. They both believe nationalism only spreads downwards to other layers of society later on, after it had been established among these elites (Gellner 1983; Hobsbawm 1990).

B. Anderson (1994, p. 90) sees nationalism arising out of the invention of the printing press and a capitalist system, as the printing press made it possible to produce the same text for a largely coherent readership in a limited number of close-to-vernacular languages which

standardised the spoken languages while capitalism in its constant search for unsaturated markets made the print industry turn from Latin to these languages. Although Anderson allows for single actors to have an influence in the nation building process, such as Luther with his use of German in the writing of his theses, it is only as a result of transformations in the means of production of printed material and the satisfaction of the market of Latin readership, that he was able to succeed. Previous movements in the same direction were halted by the more effective lines of communication the Catholic church had in the pre-print age (B. Anderson 1994, p. 91).

Although applying the European models to Latin America and other third world countries is often done by the inhabitants of those countries, a literature exists which argues the Latin American experience concerning state-building and nationalism is distinct due to the few inter-Latin American wars and the high level of violence internally in Latin American states. This has the implication several places that differences between countries are seen as much less important than class differences inside each country has made the force of nationalism in many places less substantial than in much of Europe (Thies 2005). Also Anderson recognises that the newer nationalisms of the Americas are merely recreations of the original versions as they came into being in Europe (B. Anderson 1994).

As mentioned, although these theories on nationalism were mainly created for a European phenomenon, many aspects can be applied to the Nicaraguan case. Nicaragua has a colonial past and the creation of a European style country complete with a capital and a state administration in the territory it occupies today, can hardly be said to have been the working of internal processes. Nevertheless, it was often argued by my Nicaraguan informants as if it were this way. Speaking to both Sandinistas and Nicaraguans in general, the fact there has

been immigration from Europe, Africa and Asia received very little attention among those I spoke to. That current borders do not represent a genetic boundary and were not taken into consideration. It seemed to be general practice for them to speak about the Nicaraguan people as one steady entity which has existed for a long time, without specifying its exact coming into being. In this sense, the folk tale of a primordialist concept of Nicaraguans was very popular among them, and for some of them it seemed to be a definition of a Darwinist kind with a belief that Nicaraguans share biological genes other people do not possess.

An anthropological inquiry could be launched to try to relate this to the constructivist aspects of Nicaraguan national identity including understandings of cultural aspects which have been created over many generations of common history. If one were to do it with a focus on Sandinismo, one could focus on the development of a common and distinctive Nicaraguan history with systematic and country wide introduction of education practices and equalisation of incomes in the 1980s and how it laid the groundwork for certain aspects of Nicaraguan nationalism, or historically study the increasing rate of urbanisation and industrialisation under both Somoza and FSLN and relate it to the development of a national Nicaraguan identity. Such studies could be done in a comparative perspective. The general Latin American perspective on nationalism of being grounded in few inner-Latin American wars does apply to a much lesser extent in Nicaragua than in many other Latin American countries. The attacks on Nicaragua in the 1980s that came from Honduran and Costa Rican soil have not been forgotten by many, and while a pan-Central American nationalism exists in both Honduras and Costa Rica—according to which there is little to no difference between the people of the various Central American countries—I have not found the same to be true in the case of Nicaragua.

One thing that seems to have astonished many European anthropologists has been the emphasis on structure and generalisations. Obviously, these can not be complete. Whenever I state that most Nicaraguans say one thing or another, it is hereby meant most Nicaraguans I have met. There are clear limitations to the Nicaraguans I met. Although there seems to be an emphasis within the social sciences to try to not ever generalise and to point out that really all individuals are independent actors in all sorts of forms, I nevertheless have found it very important in understanding Nicaragua, to understand what things could fruitfully be generalised by patterns of conduct to which I could relate and respond. Possibly—although that shall not be the theme of this thesis—is the Nicaraguan nation with its inherent structural make-up less questioned by many Nicaraguans than that of many European nations at this particular point in history. At least I have found it to be much more common to discuss a common view of how the Nicaraguan nation is made up, which sub-fractions it contains, and what history it has, than is the case in any other place I have known about. It has been suggested this could be used to expand upon ‘structuration theory’, which basically holds that agents are influenced by the structure they operate within and that they in turn influence the surrounding structure (Giddens 1986). Part of my argument seems to be going in the same direction in that I believe the room for actions of Nicaraguans are highly influenced by the past actions of Nicaraguans which led to a wider repertoire of possible actions, even though economic outer circumstances have not improved. Nevertheless, Giddens’ perspective seems to put too little emphasis on the outer restrictions that govern possible actions. The repertoire of possible actions available to Nicaraguans today are still, I argue, governed by the outer restrictions of Nicaragua’s position in international trade relations, geographic position, etc..

The anthropologist Kertzner (1988) writes on the ritualistic aspects of politics. He uses

examples of far past and close to the present and seems to try to show that rituals are an essential part of doing politics at all times, that the manipulation of symbols is an inherent part in this and that the result is identification with the larger unit within which this takes place. A great deal could be said about this in the case of Nicaragua – the frequent invocation of parts of Nicaraguan history by Nicaraguan leaders could very well be analysed using this perspective. The same is true for the participation of Ortega Saavedra in marches and other things that represent Nicaraguan history in one way or the other. Kertzer tries to show that the net of symbols and rituals people within one society/group adhere to is not just part of a one-way communication from leaders to subjects, but also leaders are caught up in the same system and have to adhere to it. Given the large amount of historic events celebrated in Nicaragua of the recent past in which current political leaders actively participated, it would be interesting to analyse to what degree Nicaraguan leaders have been able to influence the creation of political rituals in a Nicaraguan context.

However fruitful studies based upon any of the above models may be, I have chosen not to elaborate this any further in this thesis due to various restraints. Even though I ultimately did not choose to go further into expanding the study into any of the directions outlined above, I did have them at the back of my head when I set out on my fieldwork in Nicaragua and so they may have colored my initial understanding of Nicaraguan reality.

Chapter 4

Development theories

Since WWII, a few theories on how development can be achieved by third world countries have been central. These influenced the debate on the strategies for achieving development and have been used in most third world countries, including Nicaragua. Before we look at the concrete policies different governments implemented as part of their development program, we look at general theories of development which formed the basis for these policy decisions. We need to understand the development of development theories in order to understand the economic plans of the different Nicaraguan regimes. Furthermore, we need an etic account of the economic history in order to make sense of the emic accounts of the different times my informants have come up with.

Mainstream modernisation development theories

The international trend in the two decades immediately after WWII, was to apply policies in third world countries which copied the historical models set by western countries. The United Nations and others tried to employ this theory in their development programs around the world. This theory is known as “modernisation theory.” The countries of the third world were simply “behind” and had to play catchup to reach the same level of modernity the first world enjoyed. Strategies built upon this theory emphasised investments in state and private sectors coupled with transfer of technology from the first world (Wallerstein 1999; Smukkestad 1998).

For the countries allied with the United States, models such as the phase model of US American economist and political theorist Walt Whitman Rostow (Rostow 1956; Rostow 1960, see table p. 85) were developed and employed. These models operated with the idea that a

particular 'impulse' of some kind needs to start a phase of development which will modernise a country. According to these models, if the impulse to start development originates from outside the country—true in all cases of modernisation initiated through the United States—the modernisation phase needs to be oriented towards creating export goods to sell on a world market.

Export oriented strategies for development mainly build on the model of the British political economist David Ricardo (1772–1823). Ricardo's model proclaims that even if a country is less productive in all sectors, it will still gain from entering a free trade agreement with more developed countries. The important part is the given country should stop producing a range of goods and instead focus only on one food or product which it is relatively better at producing and then focus on exporting it. This is termed a certain country's 'comparative advantage' of producing within a certain field. According to Ricardo, the country should then import all goods in which it does not have a comparative advantage (Ricardo 1821; Smukkestad 1998).

Rostow's phase model

- | | |
|-------------------------------|--|
| 1. Traditional society | At this stage industry hasn't made its entrance yet, and almost all production is conducted in the traditional way. That does not mean that society is static. Changes can happen, but none of these will fundamentally modernise the country or increase living standards substantially. |
| 2. Preconditions for take off | At this stage, mechanisms of mass production are introduced. The point of all efforts of development policies must be to reach this stage. |
| 3. Take off | This is the tipping point, when one really can say the new production mode take over. This happens due to an impulse. The impulse can be internal, as the 1848 revolution in Germany, or it can be external, such as the high demand for Swedish products throughout the 19th century on the international market. |
| 4. Drive to maturity | Now the system matures and work methods get standardised and the cooperation of the various economic actors formalised. At this stage foreign trade really starts to become important. |
| 5. Age of mass consumption | Now domestic demand reaches a level where it makes economic sense to produce for it. All the basic needs of the population are being covered. |
-

Rostow's phase model: After the Second World War (WWII), the US economist Walt Whitman Rostow created an overview of several phases of economic development which he believed a country needed to move through in order to reach the status of a fully developed country (Rostow 1956; Rostow 1960). Rostow's model is merely one of several similar phase models that were created between 1945 and 1968, which were seen as explaining development in the view of the United States and its allies (Wallerstein 1999, p. 193).

Neoliberalism

A current version of modernisation theory is neoliberalism, the theory behind the policies universally employed by capitalist states since the time of Ronald Reagan, President of the United States between 1981–89, and Baroness Margaret Hilda Thatcher, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom from 1979–90. This current version continues along the lines of modernisation theory, but puts a lot of emphasis on the exchange model of Ricardo (1821) and general classical economic theory (Sandbrook 1995, p. 278). They believe trade is good for all involved parties at all times, also those who overall are less efficient in production, measured in required labor time per produced unit (Ricardo 1821, chapter 7).

Differing from early modernisation theory, those arguing the case for neoliberalism hold that too much state intervention in the economy is an evil. For the economy to turn ‘healthy,’ government should not have ‘too much’ of an engagement in development and economics of its respective subjects, and government oversight needs to be rolled back. Neoliberalism is strongly in favor of selling public property as a way to cancel national debt. Much of this theory is seen by neoliberals as being of universal principles and as one that should be used by governments independently of time and space and not beholdng to specific peripheral or semi-peripheral countries. Associated with the neoliberal approach are the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Throughout the 1980s it set forth a number of Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs), supposedly to accommodate both development and get rid of the debt these countries had run up (for Nicaraguan case, see illustrations p. 144 and p. 145).

Opponents hold that the proponents of neoliberalism in reality have a goal of extending exploitation of the third world—which was necessary after the economic problems in the

1970s resulting from the oil crisis—and very often the neoliberals are directed not by rational social development arguments but their own economic interests.

Counter-hegemonic development theories

For socialist revolutionaries, development generally is seen as equivalent to the introduction of socialism. The classic model according to which Marxists handled revolutions in the 20th century in peripheral countries was to follow Russian revolutionary Vladimir Ilyich Lenin (1870–1924) in asserting that the conditions for completely socialised means of production—that which is commonly termed ‘communism’—would first have to be built up. In this period, which Lenin calls ‘monopoly state-capitalism,’ the state would take control of and rationalise production in order to prepare the country economically and culturally for socialism. This could in some cases also happen as part of an unforeseen consequence of general capitalist development, such as in the case of Germany, where state-control was largely introduced by the rulers during the First World War. Lenin believed this opened the possibility for socialism as a next step and argued Soviet Russia should copy it (Lenin 1917a; Lenin 1917b; Lenin 1921) as a first step towards socialism.

When Lenin formulated the model, other socialists such as Polish-German revolutionary Rosa Luxemburg (1871–1919) challenged him on the way this transition period was to be organised. Lenin (1921) believes one should use all dictatorial means necessary to ‘hasten’ development along, while Luxemburg (1922) holds that parliamentary democracy and freedom to organise—also for the opposition—have to be in place if the revolution is to represent freedom in any meaningful way. Many Marxists have since come to the conclusion that no generalised model of a transition period toward socialism can be made (Harris 1988, p. 13). In the cases where socialists have organised such a transition period, they varied

heavily in political content and in the length of time they lasted. Yet some form of monopoly state-capitalist transition periods were organised in most countries which underwent socialist experiments in the following decades. In Cuba the period officially lasted 4 years during which private property was nationalised (Harris 1988, p. 9) while in Nicaragua during the 1980s it never came to that.

Socialist versions of modernisation theory

In the first few years after the Second World War, Soviet-allied countries followed a similar modernisation model as that which the west employed, with the Soviet Union as the leading country rather than the United States or Western Europe (Wallerstein 1999, p. 194). Instead of directly switching to socialism, many Soviet-allied Marxists believed third world countries which had not developed an internal capitalist system would have to do so first. Karl Heinrich Marx himself stated at one time that “[t]he country that is more developed industrially only shows, to the less developed, the image of its own future” (Marx 1867, Preface). In line with this reasoning, these Marxists argued that the overthrow of the system by a socialist revolution is not a possibility until one has a large proletarian movement. Until then, radicals will just have to participate in regular elections (Palmer 1988, p. 96). Even participation in labor unions will not help any, as the members of these are mainly artisans, pre-capitalist workers who one never should hope to work for a socialist revolution (Gould 1987, p. 354). Marx qualified his statement as only applying to western Europe and he said other parts of the world would not necessarily have to go through such a phase of capitalism (Marx 1881). This was apparently not acknowledged by Soviet-allied countries immediately following the Second World War when they set up their plans for where they thought revolutions would make sense or were possible.

Some Marxists in other parts of the world went even further along these lines. The British communist Bill Warren (1980), who operated within the Marxist paradigm, declared that capitalist development is contradictory and he concluded that in the third world, there was still what he called “the continuing transformative potential” of capitalism and imperialism. To support his claim, he pointed to the growth in manufacturing output in third world countries in absolute numbers (Warren 1980, p. 241) and also to the growth of manufacturing as a percentage of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in several third world countries between 1950 and 1973. Similarly, in today’s China, the Communist Party of China also makes use of the Marxist framework, despite all changes the nature of the regime has undergone in recent years, and argues the party’s responsibility lies in following ‘the three representations’: “representing the demands for the development of advanced social productive forces, the direction of advanced culture, and the fundamental interests of the greatest majority of the people” (Holbig 2006, p. 18) This means Radicals should support the demands of engineers and capitalists for further capitalist development rather than follow peasants and workers and other groups with which Leftists traditionally have been connected.

The Soviet Union never went quite as far in dismissing socialist ideals for the sake of development as these two examples show, and there was one difference to be noted in how the Soviet Union related to the countries in which it directed development in comparison with how the United States and western European powers did : The Soviet Union did not have current or former colonies and those third world countries who they were allied with in practice, were generally encouraged to seek a status as nonaligned countries rather than formally allying with the Soviet Union (Wallerstein 1999, p. 194). That may be why the idea

that the Soviet Union would support a country with a capitalist structure is seldom mentioned.

Dependency Theory

With the gradual realisation that modernisation theory did not bring the welfare to the masses the way promised or at least expected in much of the third world, criticism of mainstream theories of development started to appear in the 1950s. One of the more prominent group of critics was known as Dependency Theorists. Their main target for criticism is the underlying premise in mainstream development theories that the development in one country works independently of external influences from other countries (Wallerstein 1999, p. 194).

Under the heading Dependency Theory various approaches emphasise a constant stream of wealth transferred from the developing third world countries (periphery) to the developed first world countries (core). Some theorists hypothesise operating with a middle layer of semi-periphery, acting as a buffer zone between core and periphery societies (Wallerstein 1974, pp. 229–233). The fundamental difference between first world and third world, they see, is what is produced. Third world countries generally sell raw material and produce agricultural goods, whereas first world countries produce industrial goods. The two then trade one-another's products with each other. Over time, they note, the price of raw material and agricultural products goes down in comparison to the price of manufactured goods. This means the third world can afford less and less of the industrial goods they import from the first world, and this leads to obvious economic problems for the third world (Prebisch 1950; Singer 1950). They also argue that much of the high standard of living of the masses of the first world is a product of this transfer of wealth, and the various types of powers the countries of the first world have (media, military, political, etc.) are actively employed to keep this state of

affairs in place.

One of the most well-known group of non-radical followers of Dependency Theory are called Structuralist Dependency Theorists and they were linked to the United Nation's Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe (CEPAL) during the later Cold War years. They supported programs of import-substitution⁶ in order to build up a home industry in the various third world countries. They hoped by producing some of their own machinery, these countries would be able to diversify their production and over time be able to do away with the exploitative links to more central first world countries that existed through the import of first world machinery.

Radical Dependency Theory

Political radicals appropriated Dependency Theory a few years later. Their geographic background was quite diverse as were their audiences. In western countries, The Political Economy of Growth by Baran (1957) was one of the most popular early texts written in this category. This inspired several of the later writers. Followers of what with time became known as Radical Dependency Theory extended the idea of exploitation through terms of trade within a country. They hold that inside third world countries the local elites, situated in urban centers, exploit people further away from those centers, and they often have closer personal ties to and share interest with the interests of the western elites, compared with the rural and poorer population of their own country (Johnson 1981; Gunder Frank 1969).

Although the idea of extraction of surplus from the third world is essentially the same as it is for other Dependency Theorists, it is expressed in Marxist terminology and analysed

⁶ Import-substitution schemes denote government policies which put heavy taxes on the import of certain key industrial products in order to provide for the establishment of such an industry at home.

accordingly. Baran (1957, chapter 5) argues that the only reason Japan is not as underdeveloped as the other countries of Asia is that the country was never subjugated by the west and turned into a colony, the way just about all other countries of the third world had been at some stage. The attention to the importance of third world exploitation originates, for these radicals, from Marx's discussion of what the process of 'primitive accumulation' of capital represented that made it possible for some Europeans to already have built up capital at the time when industrial capitalism was just starting. Marx (1867, chapter 26) argues a great part of that came from the forceful exploitation of the third world – through wars, slavery, forceful land grabbing, etc., all actions that today's capitalist would see as highly illegal and unethical, at least in the first world. Luxemburg (1913) argues this exploitation by force of the third world still continues to provide an influx of money to western capitalist countries even now and that capitalism started and capitalism is dependent on this. More recent Radical Dependency Theorists add to this, that when one produces either for a mass market in a foreign country in export enclaves or luxury products through import-substitution for the ultra rich in one's own country, the size of the available market is disconnected from wage levels, and so great profits can be made by lowering wages (Biderman 1983, pp. 7–8).

Among several other reasons, that is why many Radical Dependency Theorists do not believe in import-substitution and according to Kay (1989, pp. 126–127) take the fact that Latin America generally becomes more dependent and has national elites that react with acts of repression on popular movements as indicators that the national capitalist classes do not play any progressive role. According to this logic, a national capitalism that brings the same benefit

to the population as has been the case in the first world is not possible, and the remaining options are either a fascism based dictatorial system or some type of socialism. Some Radical Dependency Theorists from Latin America, like Theotonio Dos Santos and Vania Bambirra, explored the idea of an independent capitalist development in dependent countries. If only one builds up machinery and heavy industry by nationally owned capital, they stated, accumulation processes could work without exploitation from other countries (Dos Santos (1978) and Vania Bambirra (1973), cited in Kay 1989, pp. 151–152). Five years later, Bambirra (1978, p. 19) seemed to differ with her earlier statement as she declared that the Cuban revolution had shown socialism was the only way forward for Latin America because the national bourgeoisie no longer saw any perspective in nationalist-capitalist autonomous development.

The criticism of mainstream development theories continued to develop among Radical Dependency Theorists and more recent works seem to give less specific advice to third world countries. Amin (1980) attacked modernisation theorists mainly on the basis of their belief that current developments in the third world mirror those of the center regions some decades or centuries earlier. At this time, he claimed developments in the third world are fundamentally different in that when development occurs in the third world it is capitalist, and mostly aids the international capital based in the countries central to capitalism. This more general view does not give a clear answer as what actions people in a third world country can take to evade dependency. This change was probably caused by the failure of the Soviet Union and failed attempts at revolutions by third world countries in the second half of the 20th century.

Chapter 5

Recent political history of Nicaragua and the Sandinista movement

In order to understand anything about the Sandinista movement, one has to know something about Nicaraguan history over the past 100 years. This is when the political groups which exist today formed. During my time in Nicaragua, it was frequently pointed out to me that without knowing this history, I could forget about understanding anything about what goes on today. Such a history can of course be presented in many ways. The focus I place on it here is the one emphasised by most of my informants – all of which were Spanish-speaking Nicaraguans – and it is presented in a way I believe to be uncontroversial among any of those I spoke to in Nicaragua (see tables p. 95 and p. 96). Additionally, I have added some points about general political developments on a global scale that may aid in understanding the specifics in Nicaragua.

Timeline of Nicaraguan leaders

- 1893–1909 Liberal President José Santos Zelaya López
- 1909–26 A series of Conservative and Liberal presidents seldom referred to, in combination with constant interventions by the United States
- 1926–29 Conservative President Adolfo Díaz⁷ / US Marines
- 1929–33 Liberal President José María Moncada Tapia / US Marines
- 1933–36 Liberal President Juan Bautista Sacasa / Director of the Guardia Nacional, Anastasio Somoza García
- 1936–56 Dictator Anastasio Somoza García⁸
- 1956–63 Dictator Luis Anastasio Somoza Debayle
- 1963–79 Dictator Anastasio Somoza Debayle
- 1979–80 Five-person Junta of National Reconstruction: José Daniel Ortega Saavedra (FSLN), Sergio Ramírez Mercado (FSLN), Moisés Hassan Morales (FSLN), Violeta Barrios Torres de Chamorro, Alfonso Robelo
- 1980–81 Five-person Junta of National Reconstruction: Ortega Saavedra (FSLN), Ramírez Mercado (FSLN), Hassan Morales (FSLN), Arturo Cruz (Conservative), Rafael Córdova Rivas (Conservative)
- 1981–85 Three-person Junta of National Reconstruction: Ortega Saavedra, coordinator (FSLN), Ramírez (FSLN), Rivas (Conservative)
- 1985–90 FSLN President Ortega Saavedra
- 1990–97 UNO President Barrios Torres de Chamorro⁹
- 1997–2002 Liberal President José Arnoldo Alemán Lacayo

7 Although Díaz called himself president, the legitimacy of his presidency is disputed.

8 The official positions of the Somozas vary, as they sometimes controlled the country as presidents and at other times as leaders of the Guardia Nacional.

9 Unidad Nicaragüense Opositora (UNO)

2002–07 Liberal President Enrique José Bolaños Geyer

2007– FSLN President Ortega Saavedra

Sources: Ministerio de Educación (2011); Pozas (1988, p. 58)

Events and figures often referred to in Nicaraguan history

1856 Andrés Castro Estrada threw stones at invaders from the United States

1912 General Benjamín Francisco Zeledón Rodríguez fought US troops occupying Nicaraguan territory

1923–25 Augusto Nicolás Calderón Sandino worked in oil sector of Mexico

1926–27 Calderón Sandino and his rebel army teamed with Liberals to fight Conservative and US forces

1927–34 Calderón Sandino and his rebel army fought US forces by themselves

1934 Calderón Sandino was killed during peace talks with the Director of the Guardia Nacional Anastasio Somoza García

1956 Liberal Rigoberto López Pérez killed by Dictator Anastasio Somoza García

1959 León students massacred during rally

1961 Leftist FSLN founded under the name Frente de Liberación Nacional (FLN)

1963 FLN name changed to FSLN

1975 FSLN split into three ideological factions

1976 FSLN founder Carlos Fonseca Amador killed

1979 FSLN reunited and triumph of Revolutionary Insurrection

1979–90 FSLN control of Nicaraguan state and society

1990–200 Known as ‘the 16 years of neoliberalism’

2000 FSLN regained position of mayor of Managua

2007– FSLN reelected to state power

Sources: Ejército de Nicaragua (2009); Cuenca (1992); Evans (2007); Bahen and Hernández (2007); Barbosa (2005); Valenta (1985); Equipo Correo (2010); Palmer (1988); Ministerio de Educación (2011); Equipo Envío (1990); Equipo Envío Nitlápán (2006a); Equipo Envío Nitlápán (2006b)

Before 1920

From the middle of the 19th century up until at least the 1920s, the two main political groups in Nicaragua were Liberals and Conservatives. Most historic characters can be classified as belonging to one of the two groups. Although the terms ‘Conservatives’ and ‘Liberals’ originated in European political discourse, one should not mistake them as necessarily meaning the same as what is common in Europe. Until the 1930s, the United States usually favored Conservative leadership in Nicaragua, and intervened militarily several times on the Conservatives’ behalf. Liberals and Conservatives were and are political identities that are not always directly linked to social class. Until 1979, the presidency went back and forth between these two groups. Liberals and Conservatives still exist in Nicaragua, although the group of Liberals has fractured into several parties in recent years, all of which claim general adherence to the traditions of the historical Liberal movement.

The first notable person commemorated today for being historically significant is Nicaraguan soldier Andrés Castro Estrada, who fought invaders from the United States in 1856 by throwing stones at them. He is seldom described as connected with one of the political groups, although he most likely Conservative. The action he is remembered for is throwing a stone at one of the US Americans during a battle. The second person remembered today is Liberal President José Santos Zelaya López who governed Nicaragua between 1893 and 1909 (16 years) and was responsible for the construction of a railway and for drafting a constitution that gave women the right to abortion in the case of a pregnant woman's life being in danger. Generally, he promoted a program of modernising Nicaraguan production. The third person remembered today is the renegade general and Liberal politician Benjamín Francisco Zeledón Rodríguez, who fought against the US troops occupying Nicaragua in 1912 (Ejército de Nicaragua 2009).

Augusto Nicolás Calderón Sandino

Augusto Nicolás Calderón Sandino¹⁰, the Nicaraguan who the Sandinista movement was later named after, worked in the Mexican oil sector in the state of Veracruz for 3 years. In 1927 he returned to Nicaragua. Nicaragua was invaded several times by US Marines after the end of the Zelaya López presidency, and in 1927 the country was again occupied by the United States, which intervened in an electoral issue between Liberals and Conservatives, favoring the Conservatives (Jansen 2004).

Calderón Sandino founded a small army, which joined the Liberals in a struggle against

¹⁰ Calderón Sandino was born 'Augusto Nicolás Calderón' because his father did not recognize him as his son until adolescence. When his father did recognize him (socially speaking), he started signing his name as 'Augusto C. Sandino,' although, in legal terms, his status in relation to his father had not changed. He has later been referred to as 'Augusto César Sandino,' whereby it is unclear whether he himself started using that name around 1927, or whether it was just assumed that the initial 'C' stood for César, given the historical precedent of 'Augusto César' in the Roman empire (Sánchez 2007).

Conservative forces and US Marines (Ejército de Nicaragua 2009, p. 36). In 1928 the Liberals decided to sign a peace treaty with US forces and Conservatives, which let the Conservatives keep the presidency and forced both sides to disarm. Calderón Sandino refused to abide by the treaty. He and his army continued fighting against the Conservative regime and the US American presence in Nicaragua. Their stated goal was to make every US soldier leave the country (Jansen 2004). Calderón Sandino and his men claimed their struggle was 'anti-imperialist' and they fought for 'nations' right of self-determination.' The group consisted largely of peasants, and some of its leaders were illiterate, which led to many difficulties in debates on theoretical issues (Fonseca Amador 1969, p. 30). It is not easy to determine whether Calderón Sandino and his group shared an overall ideology (Jansen 2004; Fonseca Amador 1969).

Somoza

The United States left Nicaragua in 1933, after training an army of Nicaraguans called the Guardia Nacional during its last year of occupation. At its head the United States put the Nicaraguan General Anastasio 'Tacho' Somoza García. The stated plan of the United States was for the Guardia Nacional to control uprisings against the constitutional order (Ejército de Nicaragua 2009, p. 35). Calderón Sandino was assassinated by Somoza García's men during peace talks between the Guardia Nacional and Calderón Sandino in 1934, while the terms for the decommissioning of Calderón Sandino's group were being discussed. Calderón Sandino's associates were then strongly suppressed. The revolutionary movement died down for several years, and 40 years of dictatorship commenced (Palmer 1988, pp. 92–94).

Somoza García utilised the Guardia Nacional to establish himself as dictator, and he formally took over the presidency for the first time in 1936. He and his two sons ruled Nicaragua until

1979, although formal sham elections were held throughout the period of the dictatorship. Most of the time a Somoza was officially president, with a few minor interruptions. Throughout this period, one of the Somozas controlled the armed forces. This era is now referred to as the period of 'Somocismo.' Somoza García acted as dictator of Nicaragua until 1956, when he was assassinated. His first son, Luis Anastasio Somoza Debayle, was in charge until 1967. His second son, Anastasio 'Tachito' Somoza Debayle, ruled Nicaragua until 1979 (Ministerio de Educación 2011).

The Somoza dictatorship was brutal. It included torture and execution by firing squad of political opposition groups. It was also riddled with contradictions, as the Somoza government regularly broke the laws it created whenever it seemed the convenient way to secure dominance (Borge Martínez 1980). Some controversy exists today as to whether it was really the wish of the United States to establish a dictatorship during the early Somoza years. The opposing argument is that the majority of US policies toward Nicaragua pointed to reestablishing democracy until 1948. Washington even cut off diplomatic relations with Nicaragua for an entire year: from 1933 to 1944 US-embassy personnel were told not to influence Nicaraguan politics. From 1948 on, the United States did not complain about Somoza, and shifted its policy to supporting him openly (Clark 1992).

The organisation of resistance against Somoza

Towards the end of the period of Somoza García, the struggle against the dictatorship commenced. Somoza García was shot and killed by the Nicaraguan poet Rigoberto López Pérez of the dissident Liberal party, Partido Liberal Independiente (PLI), in 1956 in an attempt to end the dictatorship (Evans 2007). Another often-mentioned part of the resistance against Somoza in the early years was a student protest march in León on 23 July 1959. The

students were protesting a 'massacre' of another protest organised by Conservative students which happened just prior to that. The León protest march was attacked by the Guardia Nacional, leading to four deaths among the students (Manzanares Calero 2002; Barbosa 2005).

The Soviet Union initially opposed revolutionary attempts in nonindustrial societies. Its line during the Second World War was not to attack Latin American governments which cooperated with the United States and the struggle against Nazi Germany. This profoundly influenced the principles of the Partido Socialista Nicaragüense (PSN) founded in 1944 (Fonseca Amador 1969, p. 31). The most famous Somoza-era revolutionary, Carlos Fonseca Amador, was originally a member of the PSN. After a visit to Cuba from 1955 to 1956, where he allegedly learned about guerrilla tactics and studied anti-imperialism and Calderón Sandino, he and his contemporary revolutionaries decided to break with the doctrine of nonaggression, and an organised struggle against Somoza formed (Palmer 1988, pp. 94–95).

In 1961 Fonseca Amador and other students founded the party which later became the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (FSLN). Their stated goal was the overthrow of the Somoza dictatorship. During the first two years of its existence, the party was known as the Frente de Liberación Nacional (FLN) (Valenta 1985, p. 165). The idea to include the name of Calderón Sandino in the name of the FSLN in 1963 allegedly came from Fonseca Amador (Alegría and Flakoll 2004, p. 146). Tomás Borge Martínez, Interior Minister during the 1980s and one of the founding members of the FSLN, claims the image of Calderón Sandino was a natural historic reference point for any revolutionary group (Tomás Borge Martínez, cited in Alegría and Flakoll 2004, p. 148) with a strategy like that of the FSLN.

The FSLN divided into three tendencies

The FSLN fought an 18-year continued struggle, largely underground, until it took over state power in 1979. Fonseca Amador functioned as the chief ideologue of the party for most of that time, with an ideology of combining peasants' and workers' struggles. Fonseca Amador advocated the unity of opposition to Somoza among radicals and Liberals. In some texts Fonseca Amador (1969) refers to himself as a Marxist and claims the FSLN represented a Marxist line without the Marxist-Leninist baggage associated with the PSN.

The FSLN at first tried to organise using Ernesto 'Che' Guevara's so-called foco-strategy. Instead of starting by organising large amounts of people among the urban proletariat, the discontented and alienated peasant farmers made for an easy breeding ground of ideologically-clear revolutionaries, and once having grown in the countryside to a level where small and mobile insurrectionist cells could attack the Guardia Nacional in several strategically important points, organising an urban insurrection would be easy (Childs 1995, p. 597). In the following years 1963–67, the strategy did not work very well and many Sandinistas were killed. In most countries in Latin America, similar movements were wiped out by military forces supported by the United States, but the FSLN managed to survive (Palmer 1988, p. 97).

In the last years before the 1979 insurrection, the strategies and ideologies within the FSLN diversified as more people joined (Miranda, D. Ortega, and Gorman 1979; Perez 1992). Between October 1975 and March 1979, the party consisted of three ideological tendencies or wings, each of which had slightly different ideas about what revolutionaries should do under the given circumstances (Equipo Correo 2010, p. 13):

- The Guerra Popular Prolongada (GPP) tendency, to which Fonseca Amador belonged,

believed a prolonged struggle in the mountains in combination with labor struggle in the cities would be the only way to succeed, and that peasants formed an essential part of any revolutionary movement. It represented the views most closely resembling the initial ideology of the party.

- The Marxist-orthodox Tendencia Proletaria (TP) argued that, in the decades after the Second World War, Nicaragua had developed capitalism and with it an urban proletariat had grown. They believed it was the time to focus on the classic Marxist strategy of organising the urban proletariat, and they aimed their organising at this sector of society.
- The third tendency, the Tendencia Tercerista (TT) to which current President José Daniel Ortega Saavedra belonged, focused on the need for immediate action. It defended the practice of insurrection in the countryside and the city simultaneously – as already established. It did so without combining it with most of the ideological considerations the other two tendencies entertained (Miranda, D. Ortega Saavedra, and Gorman 1979; Perez 1992, pp. 115–116).

In an interview with Ortega Saavedra, half a year before the takeover of power in early 1979, reveals how fragile the coalition within the FSLN was at the time. Ortega Saavedra argued in the interview that the TP was just a small group of academics, quite distant from the initial ideas of the FSLN, and although they were close to the centers of production, they spent most of their time propagandising and not organising. About the GPP, Ortega Saavedra said, they were isolated in the mountains, and they did not have real influence either. According to Ortega Saavedra, the unity of the FSLN at the time derived from common actions rather than commonality in ideology. Simultaneously he explained that the TP was complaining about

insurrectionist actions organised by the TT, but he believed they would accept them bit by bit. During the entire period of their existence, 1974/75–79, members of all three tendencies tried to come up with a unifying strategy (Miranda, D. Ortega Saavedra, and Gorman 1979, p. 115).

In the 1986 published version of *Carlos, el Amanecer ya no es una Tentación / Carlos*, now the Dawn's no fond Illusion, which Borge Martínez originally wrote while incarcerated in 1976, the author showed differences in strategic outlook made up the disagreement between the TP and the GPP. Disagreements also existed between the leading figures of the GPP. Fonseca Amador stated during internal meetings that the industrial working class would be destined to lead a revolution if it was to be victorious, but that the peasant class should not be discounted due to their prevalence in countries such as Nicaragua (Fonseca Amador, cited in Borge Martínez 1976, pp. 39–41). Fonseca Amador's statement could just as well have been made by a member of the TP and was controversial. This gives some idea about the broadness of the scope of the tendencies of the revolutionary Sandinistas and their beliefs.

In the later years of the Somoza regime, opposition to Somoza also grew among some bourgeois sectors of society. Pedro Joaquín Chamorro, editor of the newspaper *La Prensa*, was arrested together with 27 other civil leaders for conspiring against the Somoza government after calling the 1974 elections fraudulent (Tijerino 2008, p. 296). On the 15 December 1974, Chamorro started organising a group opposing Somoza. The group involved Socialists, Liberals and Conservatives. They agreed on their opposition to Somoza, but not all of them were prepared for insurrection from the bourgeois part of society. Chamorro was killed by Somoza's forces in 1978 (Tijerino 2008, pp. 296–299). The alliance with oppositional parts of the bourgeoisie was also part of Ortega Saavedra's program. Different from some of

the pro-capitalist modernisation Marxists, this alliance was to be ‘tactical and temporary.’ Ortega Saavedra was asked in an interview how one could avoid the United States supporting one’s capitalist alliance partner, who with their help could take control entirely over the process. Ortega Saavedra answered, that the choice was to ally oneself with capitalists, but not with the traditional capitalist parties. Henry Ruiz, speaking for the GPP agreed, but believed a prolonged struggle would make it in the interest of the bourgeoisie to do away with “Somoza ..., a bastion of imperialism”—and set the interests of the national bourgeoisie against those of imperialism (Miranda, D. Ortega Saavedra, and Gorman 1979, pp. 117–118).

In March 1979, a conference was held in Havana, Cuba, in which the three tendencies reunited (Equipo Correo 2010). At this time the FSLN was given a structure of nine comandantes, who formed a national directory in which each of the tendencies was represented with three people. With that step taken, the tendencies officially ceased to exist. The composition of the national directory remained the same until the 1990s (Perez 1992, p. 117).

The Sandinista years 1979–90

In July 1979, after an 18 month insurrection against the dictatorship of Somoza Debayle (Leogrande 1996, p. 329), Somoza Debayle fled and the Sandinistas took charge. The 1980s were, before the taking of power by the Ortega Saavedra government in 2006, the only time in the Sandinista movement’s history in which it held power at a national level and its ideology converted into the ideology promoted by the state. The country was led by a junta rather than a democratic-representative government during the first five years. This junta was made up of three FSLN representatives and initially two bourgeois anti-Somocistas. It established a (politically) left-leaning, but not fundamentalist, power base (Pozas 1988, p. 58).

Foreign Involvement

Initially, Sandinista leaders tried to forge ties to the US administration in order to gain access to funding. The United States under the rule of President James Earl Carter initially cooperated to a very limited extent, while pressuring its Western European allies to not cooperate with or support the Nicaraguan government. US legislators compared the Sandinistas in Nicaragua to the Communist Party in Cuba to explain why they could not support Nicaragua under a Sandinista-led government (Berrios 1985, p. 112). From a US American perspective, the two cases were somewhat similar: Just as in Cuba, the revolutionaries initially were not against the United States or opposed to capitalism, but non-acceptance and lack of assistance from the United States led to their radicalisation. Carter's limited initial support may be seen as a way of trying to avoid a Cuban-type situation (Leogrande 1996, p. 330).

Under President Ronald Reagan, the United States' position towards Nicaragua became increasingly negative. From 1981 to 1990, the United States more or less openly tried to overthrow the Sandinista regime. The United States funded the so-called 'Contras' who maintained a civil war against the Sandinistas during much of the 1980s. Those involved with the Contras often claim the FSLN established a dictatorship in 1979 (Hüeck 2006, p. 9). Reagan's support for the Contras ultimately culminated in the Iran-Contra affair, in which the President circumvented legislation designed to hinder him from financing the Contras. This prohibition was put into place by the US House of Representatives (USHR) in 1984 (Leogrande 1996, pp. 329–338).

Starting in the late 1960s, the Soviet Union invited Latin America to cooperate with the

Council of Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA), the economic network binding Soviet-allied countries together. This allowed for countries receiving aid through CMEA to gain greater economic independence from the United States (Berrios 1985, p. 111). The Soviet Union was not officially involved in the Nicaraguan revolution, and only established official contact with the FSLN shortly after the triumph of the revolution.

During the Somoza dictatorship until July 1979, Nicaragua and the Soviet Union did not entertain political or economic relations. Diplomatic ties were established on 18 October 1979. Soviet embassy personnel did not arrive before January 1980. In March 1980, the Sandinista leaders went to Moscow for the first time and signed cultural, technical and economic agreements with the Soviet Union, followed by similar agreements with Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, and the Deutsche Demokratische Republik (DDR, German Democratic Republic) (Berrios 1985, p. 112). The agreements were in trade and interpersonal exchange, which gave university scholarships to Nicaraguans to study abroad and allowed for professional experts to be sent to Nicaragua from Eastern Europe. This relationship lasted until the electoral defeat of the FSLN in 1990.

The FSLN structure

From working as a rather small organisation in the mid 1970s, the FSLN quickly changed its operational model into that of a larger political party with significant political power.

The modern concept of political parties first came into being in the 1800s. Among socialist and social democratic parties, two basic concepts evolved: Mass parties, which try to grow membership as much as possible, and small Leninist Vanguard models. Largely, mass parties

resemble trade unions in their membership and are made up of broad parts of the working population. These parties mostly accept quite different views among their members even on their core issues. The life of the majority of the members of these parties is not exclusively centered around party membership. Parties following the Leninist vanguard party model try to only gather the ideologically most schooled and trained persons within the party. Other supporters are not permitted full membership status. The process for joining a party operating according to the Leninist model is complicated, and may involve several months or even years of probation, before membership status is obtained (Lenin 1902, chapter 4).

The ruling parties in the Soviet allied countries and small communist parties in countries that were allies of the United States up until the dissolution of the Soviet Union, all tried to follow the vanguard party in theory, while Social democratic parties in the west during this period followed the mass party model. Some East European ruling parties ended up having a membership in the millions and were therefore mass parties and vanguard parties simultaneously.

The FSLN structured itself using elements of both models, similar to how revolutionaries in El Salvador organised at the time (Harris 1988, p. 24), and similar to the revolutionary parties in Cuba and Grenada during the insurrection period of the revolution. The FSLN operated according to a relatively open membership model before taking state power (Harris 1988, p. 24). After the insurrection, the FSLN turned to a vanguard party model with very limited possibilities of joining the party. The party consisted of a self-selected and disciplined elite of

revolutionary cadres/members. Many key positions in the state were controlled by members of the party. This vanguard party was augmented by a network of mass organisations linked to the revolution. The Unión Nacional de Agricultores y Ganaderos (UNAG) and the Asociación de Trabajadores del Campo (ATC) organised larger groups of the population, and were two of the main organisations which fulfilled this role (Harris 1988, p. 24).

The need to include democratic rights in socialist, anti-imperialist struggles received a lot of attention across Latin America in the 1970s and 1980s (Santos 1977, p. 188) after being absent for many decades (Harris 1988, pp. 18–19). Discussion focused on how to set up a political party focused on keeping internal political structures democratic (Lowy, Michael and Denner, Arthur 1987, pp. 460–462). An essential part in what set Nicaragua apart from other Soviet-allied countries¹¹ was the government's position on the issue of democracy (Hoyt 1997, p. 3). The Sandinistas did not forbid opposition parties, and free elections were held in 1984 and 1990. The FSLN had a goal of always permitting oppositional parties, while expecting these to eventually whither away, as they believed they would no longer fulfil a social purpose (Borge Martínez 1980, pp. 96–97; Ramírez 1984, pp. 338–339).

Popular participation and direct democracy

After taking power, besides focusing on politics of social justice, Sandinistas looked towards politics of popular participation, which they thought essential in the creation of a new type of society (D. Ortega Saavedra 1979). Besides the Sandinista mass organisations, there were the Comités de Defensa Sandinista (CDSs). These institutions of popular participation had been created before the Sandinista revolution and with the revolutionary triumph it was

11 Nicaragua officially formed part of the nonaligned bloc of countries, and D. Ortega (1979, p. 44) described it as a misunderstanding that the country would form part of the Soviet bloc. Nevertheless, connections with the Soviet Union were close enough for outside observers to describe the country as Soviet-allied.

organised into groups representing blocks and neighborhoods in the entire country (Hoyt 1997, p. 57). The CDSs totalled around 500,000 people. It mirrored a similar Cuban institution employed since the 1970s with the stated goal of preventing bureaucratisation of the state (Harris 1988, p. 22). The CDSs were organised as an institution of direct democracy, with the members at the base not representing anyone other than themselves. Everybody was allowed to participate voluntarily. The CDSs were represented in the Consejo de Estado and integrated into the dealings of the government at ministerial level through 'coordinating committees' (Irvin 1982, p. 41).

The FSLN electoral defeat in 1990

In 1990, national elections were held and the FSLN was voted out of power. The elections were part of a peace agreement with some of the groups of Nicaraguans who fought against the Sandinistas during the 1980s. Violeta Barrios Torres de Chamorro, won the presidency as a leader of a coalition called the Unidad Nicaragüense Opositora (UNO) which included 2 left-wing groups, and 12 right-wing parties from Conservative and Liberal origins, several of which at some level had cooperated since the mid-1980s, but at all times fought between themselves. The campaign of Barrios Torres de Chamorro was strongly supported by the United States and surprisingly won with 55% compared to Ortega Saavedra's 41%. Most Sandinistas seemed to think electoral defeat was impossible at that stage. With the election of Barrios Torres de Chamorro, the end of the war was a certainty and on 26 June 1990 the Contras officially ended their demobilisation (FRD 1993).

The government change in Nicaragua in 1990 was one of several cases in which the United

States successfully overthrew a socialist government. Access to agricultural production and direct foreign investments under the Sandinistas may have constituted reasons for intervention in the thinking of the US. The Nicaraguan market for products from the United States was fairly limited due to the overall level of poverty. An additional reason for intervention may have been the fear of a Sandinista-like ideology spreading to neighboring Central American republics, in which revolutionary movements formed simultaneously with the founding of the FSLN in Nicaragua. This could have an effect on Mexican politics, and with time, the Soviet Union could possibly have been able to build an alternative to the Panama Canal through Nicaraguan territory. This will always remain mere speculation, as long as files on the analysis by the United States of the Sandinistas are inaccessible.

In the early 1990s socialist regimes in Eastern Europe were not replaced by US allied puppet dictatorships with orders originating directly in Washington, the way United States historically had done. The countries were turned into allies by integrating the country's leaders with the internationalised global elite. Elitist and liberal, but democratic regimes were put in place and formal democratic state apparatuses established. Extensive ideological rhetoric was employed on the popular classes to change their aspirations and dreams to be in line with that of western countries. In the western hemisphere the same strategy was used on both Nicaragua and Haiti. The United States seems to have sought to control these countries through obtaining hegemony in civil society (Robinson 1996, pp. 642–643).

The Sandinistas negotiated a treaty with President Barrios Torres de Chamorro to keep the leader of the army, Humberto Ortega¹², for half her governing period, until 1993. Barrios

12 Humberto Ortega Saavedra has the same two last names as his brother José Daniel Ortega Saavedra. In order to minimize confusion between the two, only Humberto Ortega Saavedra's first last name will be used in the remaining parts of this thesis.

Torres de Chamorro was only able to govern because she made deals with the Sandinistas. She started to privatise many services and abolished the Nicaraguan railway system. The next president, José Arnoldo Alemán Lacayo (1997–2002), was very anti-Sandinista. It is said he required public employees to enroll in his Partido Liberal Constitucionalista (PLC). The President of the United States, Bill Clinton, suspended aid to Nicaragua after a hurricane during the Alemán Lacayo years, when it was discovered the aid never reached its final destination. President Enrique José Bolaños Geyer (2002–07) was vice-president under Alemán Lacayo, but once he took over as president, Bolaños Geyer charged Alemán Lacayo with fraud. The FSLN at first helped Bolaños Geyer remove Alemán Lacayo's immunity, but then once the PLC split over the issue and when Alemán Lacayo was in prison, switched back and forth between Alemán Lacayo and Bolaños Geyer, voting with the party of either one, depending on the issue (Ministerio de Educación 2011).

At some point in the 1990s, as a product of the Sandinistas trying different strategies to continue to exert power, it seems the Sandinista movement grew into a more diversified group with several individuals and subgroups each coordinating their own projects independently of the FSLN leadership. In a 1999 interview, Ortega Saavedra described the party as looking like an 'anarchist party' – apparently meaning that it was full of highly studied but not always agreeing activists who now ran their various projects relatively independently. He admitted the 'marked contradictions' of class in society reflected in the FSLN – some of the FSLN members were now to be counted as part of the ultra rich (Gaynor 1999). I understood what Ortega Saavedra meant after visiting several projects—of land grabbers or groups organising children's activities—organised by Sandinistas and in the name of Sandinismo, but without the party formally being aware of their existence.

The FSLN as an opposition force

In the years after the FSLN lost power, the concept of the vanguard party was questioned. In 1994, a power struggle between an orthodox pro-vanguard faction around Ortega Saavedra won against a faction which claimed they wanted to change the party so it would be a more open, and an electorally oriented party. After Ortega Saavedra won, the opposing faction lost top posts it held in the party newspaper Barricada. Since 1990 the paper operated rather independently of the party (Jones 2002).

The losing faction started a new political party—the Movimiento Renovador Sandinista (MRS)—which in theory was to be more open to alliances with other political groups, devoid of vanguard concepts (S. K. Smith 1997, p. 106) and more of a party of the social democratic kind. Most of the FSLN members of the national assembly left the FSLN and joined the MRS. In the next elections in 1996, the FSLN won many more members of the national assembly than the MRS. Other than these few years, the FSLN always held a substantial number of members of the national assembly. These members of the national assembly were essential for finding majorities for each of the three Liberal presidents. Additionally the FSLN continued to hold substantial power in labor unions, and until 1998 in other mass organisations. During this period, the FSLN could theoretically stop orders made by any one of the Liberal presidents. Each one of the Liberal presidents committed to signing a number of political contracts with the FSLN over the years, in order to avoid such interferences (S. K. Smith 1997).

In 1998 the FSLN newspaper Barricada closed down, because the government decided not to fund advertisement in it any longer. Government advertisement accounts for 70% of all advertisement in Nicaragua. The state acting as a major advertiser is very common in Central

America. All newspapers have experienced a sharp decline since 1990. Between 1994 and 1997, the number of newspapers sold fell from 68 per 1000 inhabitants to 30 per 1000 inhabitants. Much of this was due to overall economic problems. The literacy rate fell from 88% in the 1980s to 66% in 1995. Local companies were drained of capital and could not invest. The few people still reading the advertisements were too poor to buy most products (Kodrich 2008, pp. 63–71).

It is widely reported after losing the elections of 1990, Ortega Saavedra met with all the solidarity groups and told them to continue to help, but to stop sending the help to the government and send it to a net of Sandinista-dominated NGOs, created for that purpose, and to send it to the already existing 'mass organisations.' The NGOs consist mostly of professionals and very seldom do they publicly portray their NGO as being part of the Sandinista movement. The internal communication network between FSLN, Sandinista mass organisations and Sandinista NGOs was frequently mobilised in order to stop the Liberal governments from acting contrary to Sandinista ideology. This approach, famously called 'governing from below,' is what the Sandinistas claim to have done during the 16 years of neoliberalism. The ties between FSLN and mass organisations were officially given up in 1998 (Font 2009, p. 279).

The FSLN electoral victory 2006

In the fall of 2006, the FSLN won the presidential elections for the first time since 1990, and Ortega Saavedra was inaugurated as president on 6 January 2007. He did not win a majority of votes to become president. Only 38.07% voted for Ortega Saavedra according to the official count. That is less than he received in previous elections. In 2001, 42% voted for Ortega Saavedra (2001). The figure for 1996 is 37.75%, and for 1990 40.8%. Each of the

national elections of Nicaragua in those elections was won by a Liberal candidate (Equipo Envío 1990; Equipo Envío Nítlápan 1996; Equipo Envío Nítlápan 2006a).

Part of the explanation for the electoral victory in 2006 was a combination of a split vote among Liberal voters between the candidates of the Alianza Liberal Nicaragüense (ALN, 29%) and the PLC (26.51%) (Consejo Supremo Electoral 2006). The other part was the electoral reform in the 2000. The reform added a special provision that specified in the case of one candidate gaining at least 5% more than the second best scoring candidate, only 35% of the total vote are needed in order to be able to declare victory. Previously, 45% of the total vote were needed to gain the presidency without a second round. The reform was pushed through by a permanent alliance of PLC and FSLN as part of an agreement to split all major posts in the country between them. This political maneuver is known as 'el pacto' (La Prensa 2005; Equipo Envío Nítlápan 2006a). Taken together and if the election results of 2006 were not manipulated, the FSLN electoral victory of 2006 was only due to a lack of unity among Liberals and advanced political negotiating on the part of the FSLN and not due to increased popular support of Ortega Saavedra and the FSLN.

Subjective aspects of the history as it is presented

The political history of Nicaragua as presented above is and cannot be complete, as no history can ever be complete. I mention the events I believe most important to the Nicaraguans with whom I spoke. It is a simplified version, in that most of my informants were able to list a much longer list of historical events that are important to them. Some of the commemoration celebrations are only held locally in certain villages or cities. These are mostly left out, partially due to lack of awareness of all and for reasons of space. History does figure prominently in many aspects of Nicaraguan social life and in all the following chapters

we will look at this phenomenon more closely.

Chapter 6

Nicaraguan economic history

Here we look at the economic history of Nicaragua and the underlying development theories that seem to have formed the economic policies of the different Nicaraguan governments using a perspective of dependency theory as an analytical tool. Notice that we here use it as an analytical tool, quite independent from any possible Nicaraguan appropriation of that theory.

The Somozas from the 1950s until 1979, the Sandinistas until 1990, and the Liberal governments up until 2007 represented very different approaches to achieving economic development. Each one of these was connected to one of the theories of how development could be achieved for third world countries, that was popular at the time at an international level.

We need to understand the economic development of Nicaragua and the different development theories that were used in order to make sense of the views on the economic aspects of these times expressed by my Nicaraguan informants today.

I here use the framework of Biderman (1983), who divides Nicaraguan history into these different phases, based on the relation of Nicaragua to the world market. I expand this model up to present times. According to him, there are three development models that represent three basic setups of the economy: The Somoza period in which a national bourgeoisie is built up, the country develops economically but income gaps are high, The Liberal period in which foreign capital is given access and controls most of the economy, and the Sandinista period in which it is a stated goal by the state to diminish income gaps while increasing overall production levels.

After colonisation

Once settled after the Spanish conquest, the Nicaraguan economy was for a long time based around an agricultural sector dominated by a few large latifundio properties of over 500 hectares, which produced for export, and many small minifundio properties of under 5 hectares, which provided for subsistence farming. This structure existed in much of Latin America since the time of the Spanish conquest and continues in many places. During this phase, Nicaragua provided ample opportunities for the investment of international capital in the latifundios. Most indigenous people were killed or sold into slavery. It meant there was an almost constant lack of laborers for the latifundios. This problem was solved by preventing agricultural laborers from leaving the property they worked on as much as possible, and by raising cattle rather than growing crops. Raising cattle required little human intervention in comparison with growing most crops. In the 17th century, cattle represented the main basis of the Nicaraguan economy. In addition to cattle, two cash crops were grown: cacao was produced for the Mexican market, and indigo exported to Europe. The combination of the three products worked well together for a while. With time competition from other countries grew, the labor shortage extended and British pirates made transport increasingly unsafe. Thus the production of both cacao and indigo eventually lost profitability (Biderman 1983, pp. 9–10; Tijerino 2008, pp. 93–97; Román 1975, pp. 13–103). This period lasted until the second half of the 19th century.

Obviously, the amount of choice that lay in following this model of development for the Nicaraguan state must have been very limited; even if they had wanted to follow a different development model, it is questionable whether they would have been able to control Nicaraguan farmers and prevented foreign intervention to protect foreign capital. It may be

wrong to say Nicaragua followed any particular development theory in this period. If one were to specify a theory, it would be that of classical liberals such as Ricardo (1821), seeing a value first and foremost in international trade and the specialisation on only one or a few products, and following a doctrine of little or no state intervention, as neoliberals preached much later.

The following period, the last third of the 19th century, was a short-lived phase of nationalist-bourgeoisie development (Román 1975, pp. 106–107). Coffee-production was introduced and production techniques modernised rapidly due to favorable policies towards increasing national production levels under 30 years of Conservative government. Even more such policies were instituted under the following, nationalist government of Liberal President/dictator José Santos Zelaya López (1893–1910). Zelaya López came to power by way of a military coup, yet the policies before and after the coup seem to have gone somewhat in the same direction. Coffee production doubled in the first few years after 1899 (Biderman 1983, pp. 10–12; Tijerino 2008, pp. 166–176). The changes that this phase brought consisted of, among other aspects, the forced breaking up of indigenous, communally owned land and replacing it with private individual land ownership in the form of large plantations. Laws were passed to require all indebted persons to either find work or go to jail (Mahoney 2001, p. 250; Biderman 1983, p. 11). The first professional Nicaraguan army, which Zelaya López put into place, was used to hunt fugitive workers and send them back to the estates where they had worked (Mahoney 2001, p. 249). Another measure under Zelaya López was the incorporation of the Atlantic coast into the state of Nicaragua with help from the United States, providing unfavorable economic terms to this area, which housed the center of US trade (Powell 1928, pp. 45–46). The new government's policies effectively

started the first developments toward a capitalist production model where both land and labor became commodities, and the first private bank was established. These were limited in scope, and wealth was largely built using massive exploitation of the workforce and lands as had been done previously (Biderman 1983, pp. 10–12; Tijerino 2008, pp. 166–176; Román 1975, pp. 104–106). Zelaya López also tried to diversify trade patterns by establishing trade connections to European markets (D. Ortega Saavedra 1979, p. 46). Today, Zelaya López's uprising in 1893 and the writing of a new constitution 1894 are officially celebrated by the Liberals on July 11th, but as mentioned, I have only heard Sandinistas speak positively about him. They recognise he was a Liberal, but understand the economic policies of that time period are more in line with the current Sandinista policies than the policies of the Liberals before 2007, in that they favored national over foreign capital.

Although Zelaya López would not have known it, his policies were somewhat in line with the development models that came up after the Second World War. Part of his policies can be seen as being in line with modernisation theory in that much of the population was forced into capitalist production, and other parts could have been the program of Structuralist Dependency Theorists in that he built up institutions necessary for industrial growth at home, such as a national bank. It is interesting to note that although Sandinistas identify with Zelaya López today, he did not put much emphasis on eliminating social differences within Nicaragua. He was definitely not a follower of Radical Dependency Theory.

Economic policies between Zelaya López and the Somozas

The end of Zelaya López's government was the end to the phase of nationalist-bourgeoisie development, which gave way to a yet another phase of development led by international capital. Many of my Nicaraguan informants believed what halted the overall development of

Nicaraguan production, was that Zelaya Lopez's nationalist policies did not continue after he was removed from power (Biderman 1983, p. 12). The United States overthrew the Zelaya López regime in 1909/10 through a coup and gave control over agriculture back to a landed coffee oligarchy. This oligarchy had no interests in modernising the industry they controlled, as they made good profits without needing to reinvest much. According to Sandinista historian Román (1975, p. 106), it was mostly the fear that Zelaya López could cooperate with non-US companies in trade and possibly in the building of another canal to compete with the one the United States was building in Panama, which led the US administration to this step.

For the next three decades, private bankers from the United States took control over just about the entire Nicaraguan economy. Combined with ever recurring US military interventions to hinder popular struggles, this meant economic development was not feasible (Biderman 1983, p. 12). The production practices, such as the planting of low-yielding types of coffee and very limited use of pruning and pest control, were not renewed between 1900–50, and with a lack of focus on soil preservation, these factors led to a decline in total yields of 4% per year between 1925–49. As late as 1957–58, the yield per tree or yield per hectare was half that of Costa Rica and El Salvador (Biderman 1983, pp. 10–12). In 1951–52, mechanised farming was almost nonexistent, and when it was employed it was without much access to spare parts or expertise on how the machinery was to be used (Winters 1964, p. 502; Román 1975). Furthermore, the cattle industry did not modernise in those years and a dairy industry did not come into existence before 1943 and 1953 with the installation of the first and second pasteurising plants and subsequent modernisation of them (Patten 1971).

It is not difficult to see that during this period it was once again classical liberal theory which

governed Nicaraguan economic policy. Different from the previous phase, at this stage it had been proven that the institution of a different type of development policy would be possible in Nicaragua – given the absence of intervention by the United States.

Economic policies under the Somozas

The Somoza period is generally treated as one single period of government during which a combination of the Somozas and the interests of the United States governed Nicaragua. In reality it included periods with different economic policies. At times the Somozas followed ideas of non-interventionists government in much the same way it later was incorporated into neoliberal theory. At other times, the government's policies leaned more towards ideas about modernisation theory, with some state intervention to modernise agriculture, and Structuralist Dependency Theory with import-substitution schemes.

The Somoza regimes took the first steps to move back to a phase of nationalist-bourgeoisie development with control of international capital in the late 1930s and early 1940s. Although very limited and without any great consequence to the overall demographics at first, it used the power of the state to encourage the development of new crops (cotton and sesame) and started the import of tractors. The Second World War allowed for the development of some limited mining, lumbering and rubber cultivation operated by foreign companies on the Atlantic coast (Biderman 1983, p. 13). The main economic policies of the Somoza regime remained the same until the 1950s, permitting more or less free access to foreign capital and doing nothing to close the income gap between rich and poor. In the later 1950s, the policies of modernising agriculture dominated to a degree where they could be successful in modernising production and elevating the GDP, which grew significantly throughout the 1950s

and 1960s, with cyclical downturns in 1958–59 and 1968 (Heston, Summers, and Aten 2011, see also illustration p. 208). Between 1950 and 1955, the total number of tractors used in Nicaragua grew from 500 to 2500 (Biderman 1983, pp. 13–16). At the same time the country became increasingly dependent on foreign companies like many Latin American countries (Muro Rodríguez et al. 1984, p. 70). To counter this trend, import-substitution schemes for the manufacture of chemical sprays for agriculture, the production of foot wear and textiles, and food processing were successfully set up in the early 1960s (Irvin 1982, p. 36).

The gross value of manufactured exports increased from \$4.1 USD million (\$27.1 USD05 million¹³) in 1960 to \$143.1 USD million (\$491.2 USD05 million) in 1976 (WB LA and Carib. Office 1978, p. 9, see also illustration p. 156). Exports and imports grew rapidly at a similar pace during the 1960s and 1970s (Banco Central de Nicaragua 2010a, for imports see also illustration p. 155). At the end of the 1970s, industrial production stood for 28% of GDP, slightly more than agriculture (Pres. of IDA 1980, p. 1). However, a large part of the value of the main industrial export, chemical products, went to pay for those of its ingredients which had to be imported (WB LA and Carib. Office 1978, p. 27). Food production remained, therefore, the most important source of export earnings.

By the time of the overthrow of the Somoza dictatorship in 1979, the country had—helped by an advantageous position in the regional market Mercado Común Centroamericano (MCCA, created in 1961) for its agricultural and industrial products—less foreign ownership in the agricultural sector than in any of the other Central American countries (Irvin 1982, p. 36).

Throughout Latin America, the development of import-substitution schemes and with it the

13 USD05 are USD adjusted for inflation to 2005 levels, using the US Urban Consumer Price Index (USCPI-U).

buildup of stronger national bourgeois interests spread (Pollin and Cockburn 1991, p. 28).

Radical criticism of Somoza's economic policies

In the first few years following the Second World War, the Soviet-allied Partido Socialista Nicaragüense (PSN) stated that pre-capitalist countries such as Nicaragua should first develop industrial capitalism, before a struggle for socialism could begin. For Carlos Fonseca Amador and other radical students who initially associated with the PSN, the economic advances under the Somoza regime in the 1960s and 1970s were not enough, and they strongly disagreed with the unequal distribution to which these advances in development would lead. Fonseca Amador (1969, pp. 24–25) saw the politics of Central American integration, during the time of the MCCA, as a project for US American companies to better drain the area of its riches and not as a help in terms of enhancing national economic development, much in line with how Dependency Theorist Baran (1957, pp. 190–194) sees the setup of some infrastructure projects in the third world. Big companies were given rights to mine and cut lumber for very low fees (Fonseca Amador 1969, pp. 23–25).

Although GDP grew, development remained fundamentally unequal. In 1951–52, 42% of all agricultural land was in the hands of only 1.6% of the population (Winters 1964, p. 501) and 55% of the total area of privately owned farms in 1952 were held by very few private proprietors (Fonseca Amador 1969, p. 24). The modernisation in production that the state promoted starting in the late 1950s, meant that big producers—those producing for export—received preferential treatment over those producing for local consumption (Biderman 1983, pp. 16–22; Wall 1993; Dijkstra 1999, p. 212). The focus on export crops led to food being grown in the worst possible areas, and in order to feed the population additional imports of food had to be made (Fonseca Amador 1969, p. 24). By 1969, cotton production took up 75%

of all cultivated land (Muro Rodríguez et al. 1984, p. 71). The number of students exiting school prematurely and the number of deaths and severely injured due to production related incidents reached record levels, even in a Central American comparison (Fonseca Amador 1969, p. 25). One of the consequences of the state's policies was more rapid migration to the population centers, most of all to Managua. In Managua, various capitalists with close connections to the Somocista regime built factories to take advantage of laborers flooding in (Wall 1993, p. 2).

Fonseca Amador and other leading Sandinistas proposed to equalise the development of the country, with a focus on equalising economic development in the city of Managua with the rest of the country (Wall 1993, p. 1). While modernisation led to the creation and strengthening of the bourgeoisie and a professional middle class in the cities, especially on the Pacific coast, it also meant peasants were transformed into urban wage laborers – often unemployed and destitute city dwellers (Irvin 1982, p. 37).

Conflict of interest between bourgeoisie Nicaraguans and Somoza

The Somoza dictatorship managed to keep up high overall growth rates throughout the 1960s, but the saturation of the Central American market for Nicaraguan products, the Managua earthquake (1972), the world oil crisis (1974), combined with cyclical economic downturns, led to a downturn at the beginning to middle of the 1970s. This downturn proved to be a huge obstacle for the Somoza regime. New investments were increasingly made by government borrowing, first through development assistance, then by borrowing in the commercial market. By the mid-1970s, debt payments made up one third of all export earnings, and the government accounted for 40% of all investments. The ratio of taxes to GDP fell in the years following the earthquake from 10.8% in 1973–74 to 10.5% in 1975–77,

despite increased income and sales taxes (WB LA and Carib. Office 1978, p. ii) and although Nicaragua had the second lowest taxes to GDP ratio in Central America after Guatemala (WB LA and Carib. Office 1978, p. 23). In 1978, the WB proposed to stabilise the economy by decreasing planned public investments 35–40%, only carrying through projects with a high socio-economic priority as well as other austerity measures, increasing taxes, and augmenting exports to pay down external debts (WB LA and Carib. Office 1978).

Control of the economy also shifted markedly during the last years of the Somoza regime. At the beginning of the 1970s, the Pellas family from Granada and the Montealegres from León together were responsible for 20% of GDP (Dijkstra 1999, p. 296). As late as 1975, the Somozas were still only the third richest family (Brown 1994, p. 212). Through ownership of various enterprises and their rule of the country, the Somozas tried to appropriate an increasing part of the total national income. By the end of the 1970s, the Somozas were the richest family, and they were responsible for 25% of GDP (Dijkstra 1999, p. 296).

The policies that aimed to enrich the Somozas in relation to other Nicaraguan capital owners led to an increase in dissatisfaction with the regime among the bourgeoisie (Irvin 1982, pp. 36–37; Brown 1994, p. 212), and much attention at the time focused on the part of the business community that disagreed with Somoza and the part they played in the organising efforts against the Somoza regime. Relatively little attention is given to that now, either by Liberals or Sandinistas. The Somozas were generally described as having been in control of just about everything and they are seen as the richest family of that time. A reason for this may be that the other two families have survived and the Montealegres finance a great part of the Liberal opposition.

Economic realities and policies under the Sandinistas of the 1980s

The insurrectionist war left the country indebted by \$1.5 USD billion (\$4.0 USD05 billion), most of which Somoza had spent on arms purchased from the United States during the 18 month insurrection. In order to be eligible for any foreign loans, the governing post-insurrection junta accepted the debt of the Somoza regime, although only \$3.5 USD million (\$9.4 USD05 million) was left in Nicaragua's reserves (Berrios 1985, p. 125). It is estimated that 40,000 Nicaraguans were dead and 100,000 wounded (Irvin 1982, p. 37). The damage to building structures was valued at around \$250 USD million (\$672.5 USD05 million). Capital flight during and directly after the insurrection totalled around \$500 USD million (\$1.3 USD05 billion) (Pres. of IDA 1980, p. 2). In addition to the economic difficulties the country inherited from the last Somoza years, these war-related issues had an enormous impact on the Sandinistas' achievable short term production levels and the type of trade the country could realistically set up.

Ideological influences on economic policies

After the successful Sandinista insurrection of 1979, the influence of Dependency Theory on the way the Sandinistas tried to set up the country's economy was strong (Velasco 2002, p. 42). Jaime Wheelock Román is known for his work *Imperialismo y Dictadura: crisis de una formación social*, which analyses Nicaraguan history in a Marxist Dependency Theory perspective, and for being among the nine members of the national directory of the FSLN representing the Tendencia Proletaria (TP) during the 1980s. He also became the Minister for Agriculture and Agrarian Reform after the insurrection. His book achieved cult status among most Sandinistas, especially those not having a background from the Tendencia Tercerista (TT), and several reedited editions of *Imperialismo y Dictadura: crisis de una formación*

social, and several other books representing much the same economic thinking, were published during his time in government.¹⁴

14 The description of the early years of the FSLN in the 1960s and 1970s by Borge Martínez (1990) suggests the theoretical studies of most central Sandinistas had not gone beyond Marx, his friend and co-writer Friedrich Engels, Lenin, and Augusto Nicolás Calderón Sandino. It seemingly did not include much from the writers of Dependency Theory, even though their ideas were associated with Sandinismo. The knowledge horizon must have varied quite a bit among leading Sandinistas. With his central position in the government, Román did make central economic policy decisions and economic theory. In that sense, the Sandinista period represented a period of development with the stated goals of achieving more national independence and achieving more equality.

Government Consumption Share of GDP Per Capita (PPP)

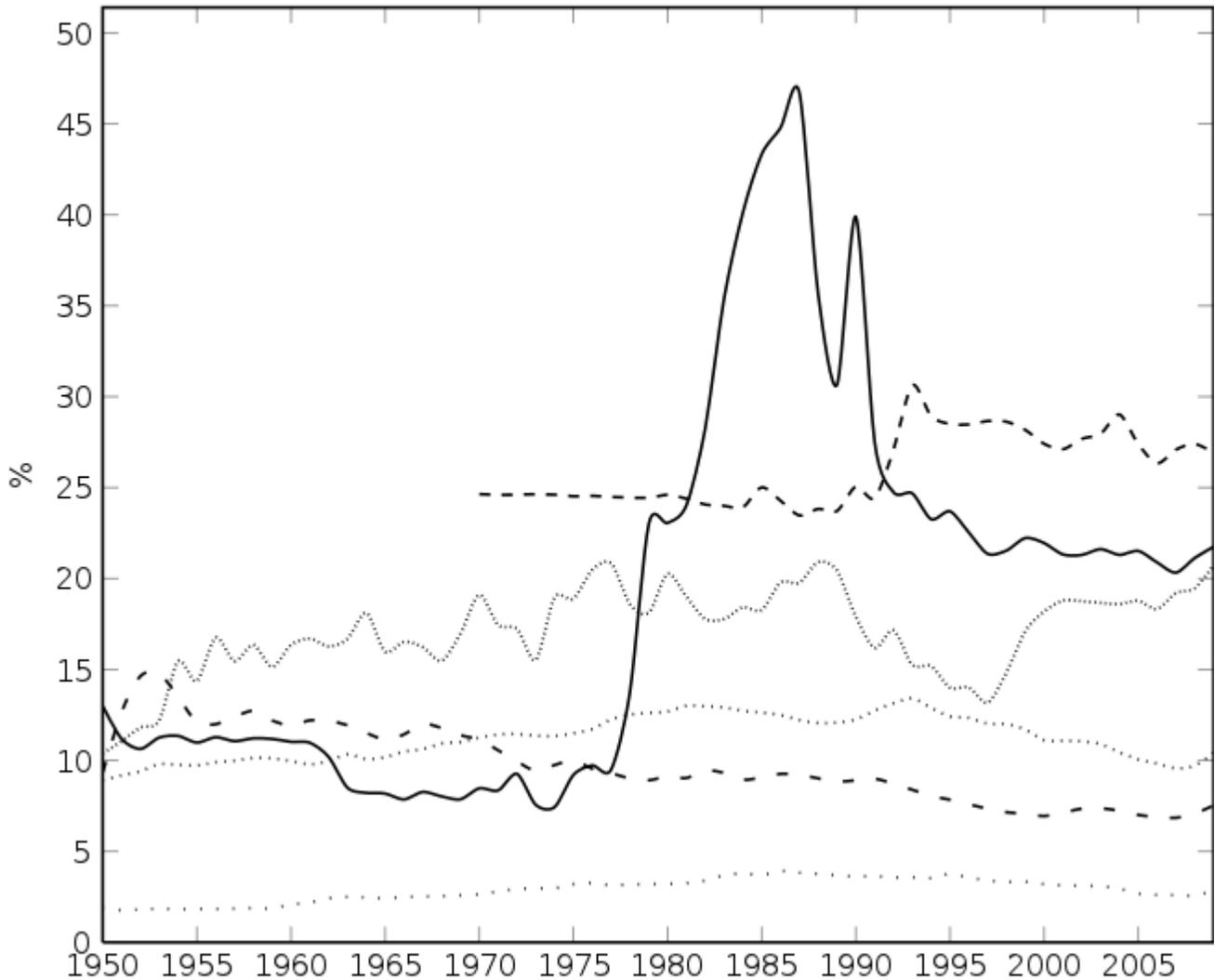


Illustration 1: Government spending has long been a higher percentile of GDP in Nicaragua and Honduras than in the United States and Mexico and at times even Sweden. The 1980s brought the government portion of GDP up to more than 40% – almost twice that of Cuba. In the subsequent years of Liberal governments it declined to around 20% – still more than twice what it had been in the 1970s. In the period 2006–09, it increased insignificantly by 1.4% per year. The figures are somewhat skewed. Until 1979, the businesses of the Somoza family were part of the private sector, even though the Somozas and the Nicaraguan state worked much like a single unit, and since 2007 the activity of the Sandinista owned company ALBA de Nicaragua, S.A. (Albanisa) has been counted as part of the private sector, even though it operates like an extension of the state. Recent figures for Honduras look



The governing junta nationalised the banking sector, the Somoza property and put foreign trade under national control. This put 20% of industry, 25% of agricultural production and more than 50% of the service sector under national control. This made up an important part of national production. In the early 1980s, agriculture represented around 25% of GDP, employed 50% of the labor force and generated 70% of export earnings (Pres. of IDA 1980, pp. 1–2). In the first year after the insurrection, the public sector share of GDP rose from 15% to 40% (Pres. of IDA 1980, p. 2, see also figure, p. 129). Each year in the period 1984–87, this figure was higher than 40% (Heston, Summers, and Aten 2011), while a much smaller part of the total productive sector was in public hands. This made state planning difficult. The export oriented industry which still operated was entirely in private hands (Irvin 1982, p. 38). In the 1980 and 1981 economic plans, the prioritization made the shift in economic policy from the Somoza years obvious. The plans tried to restore the same levels of growth and capital accumulation existing in the Somoza years, but with consumption geared toward the poor rather than the luxury sector. The idea was that while in the short term, Nicaragua would be almost entirely dependent on foreign aid, in the long-term it would be able to lower dependency on aid while diversifying its sources rather than relying on aid only from the United States (Irvin 1982, pp. 38–39).¹⁵

Land reform, trade and oligarchs

The main Sandinista reform in the 1980s within the sector of production was in the area of land redistribution. The lands of the Somozas were nationalised and divided out through

¹⁵ With the Sandinistas in power, social scientists of all types flocked to Nicaragua, and the economy was analyzed much more than before. Berrios (1985); Irvin (1982); Cuenca (1992) studied the economic reality Nicaragua faced during the first few years of the Sandinista rule with no support from the United States, limited support from Western Europe and somewhat more support from Soviet allied countries. Many figures that demonstrate economic development are only available for the years after 1979 due to this increased interest. It also means that it is not possible to compare all aspects of the Nicaraguan economy in the 1980s with the years before the revolution due to lack of data.

agrarian reforms. The titles were not always written out on paper, and oftentimes were just informally known by Sandinista authorities at the time. It was believed the first land disbursements would be followed by further steps of land reform which would include measures to further the collective usage of lands. Land reform on a large scale did not start before 1984 (Fonseca Terán 2008d). Altogether around 60,000 families received redistributed lands, either collectively or as individuals (Tijerino 2008, pp. 313–314). The land titles given out generally had provisions in them, such as, land given to cooperatives could not be sold. The idea behind this setup was it forbid any future renewed accumulation of lands by the few. State run businesses were also part of the Sandinista economic plan, especially in the early 1980s. Yet quite differently from other socialist experiments, the stated goal by state officials was not that all land would essentially be state-run, but rather the growth of an economy dominated by a mix of small producers and the encouragement of the formation of voluntary-based cooperatives (Borge Martínez 1980, p. 96). Government takeover occurred more at the level of foreign trade. Part of taking trade into state hands was done through the creation of the Ministerio de Comercio Exterior (MICE) in August 1979 which was to regulate everything that entered and exited the country (Berrios 1985, p. 119).

The remaining two super-rich families, the Pellas and the Montealegres, who had made up the oligarchy together with the Somozas, continued to function as important economic entities. Several leading activists of the FSLN had direct family connections to the companies connected to the Pellas family, the Grupo Pellas, and some had been involved in the management of the Ingenio San Antonio, a sugar mill controlled by the Grupo Pellas, during

the years of Somoza (Vilas 1992, pp. 424–425). The head of the Grupo Pellas, Carlos Pellas Chamorro, stayed in Nicaragua until 1987, and not before 1988 was the Ingenio San Antonio confiscated by the government (Everingham 2001, p. 71). This was only due to failing re-investments in the plants and it was agreed the state would pay the Grupo Pellas annual compensation payments (Everingham 2001, p. 71). Several Montealegre properties connected to their Banco Nicaragüense de Industria y Comercio (BANIC) were confiscated by the state (Everingham 2001, p. 71), but Eduardo Montealegre Rivas, one of the current opposition leaders, worked as vice-president of the Banking Investment Group of Shearson Lehman Hutton in the United States during the 1980s (GWU 2010).

Economic involvement of the United States

Just two weeks after the revolutionary victory, at the end of July 1979, a first inquiry was made for military aid from the US government. In August of that year, the United States decided to give monetary aid of \$75 USD million (\$201.8 USD05 million) – \$5 USD million (\$13.5 USD million) as a grant and \$70 USD million (\$188.3 USD05) as a loan. In September, José Daniel Ortega Saavedra, Sergio Ramírez Mercado and Moisés Hassan Morales, the FSLN members of the governing junta, went to Washington to ask for military help once more. Military aid was denied again (Berrios 1985, p. 112).

In January 1980, the US Congress (USC) legislated that 60% of the already decided upon help of \$75 USD million was to go to the private sector (Berrios 1985, pp. 112–113). One interpretation of this move may be that this measure would fund the opposition to the Sandinistas in the private sector (Leogrande 1996, p. 331). In Nicaragua the WB called for that – this report warned that too many loans had been given to the public sector and that the private sector was lacking behind due to uncertainties in how far Sandinista reforms would go.

It warned that if Nicaragua wanted to maintain a mixed economy as had been announced, more attention had to be given to the needs of the private sector and specifically entrepreneurs (WB LA and Carib. Office 1981).¹⁶

In February 1980, even more conditions were laid upon the aid by the US House of Representatives (USHR) even further restricting access to the limited funds. Altogether 16 conditions, including that the money be used to buy products from the United States and that no economic ties with Cuba were to be established, sought to restrict the options available to the Nicaraguan government (Berrios 1985, p. 112). Washington expressed fears that Nicaragua would develop into “another Cuba” by spring 1980 (Der Spiegel 1980, p. 191).

By the end of 1980, the last \$15 USD million (\$35.6 USD05 million) still to be paid out was suspended by the US administration under President James Earl Carter, with the excuse that the Sandinistas supported insurgents in El Salvador logistically and politically. On 2 April 1981, newly elected President Reagan formally suspended the aid altogether (Berrios 1985, p. 112; Der Spiegel 1980, p. 191; Veterans Peace Action Team Pre-election Observation Delegation to Nicaragua 1989; Dijkstra 1999, p. 299). In its place he put a policy of trying to overthrow the Sandinista run government through economic blockade and a war which lasted for the rest of the decade.

An additional economic part of trying to overthrow the Sandinistas 1981–90, was to try to block all commercial credit from abroad. Although lines of credit were officially still open due to the acceptance of the Somoza debt by the FSLN, the US government tried openly to

¹⁶ The 1981 report is the last WB economic report from the 1980s currently available publicly, but there is no reason to believe that the views of the WB changed subsequently.

discourage any further credits. Often this was done by directly threatening potential lenders. From 1981, Nicaragua was on a list of countries to which United States officially tried to deny loans, and in 1983, the United States credit rating agencies downgraded Nicaragua's creditworthiness rating from 'substandard' to 'doubtful,' which made it more difficult for the FSLN to obtain credit. This continued throughout the Reagan presidency, and institutions such as the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) were used as leverage to push through the 'no loans' strategy the United States decided upon (Leogrande 1996, pp. 331–334).

Involvement of Western Europe / countries allied with the United States

In 1979, the Bundesrepublik Deutschland (BRD, Federal Republic of Germany), Belgium, Brazil and Spain turned down Sandinista requests for arms. Only France sold Nicaragua \$15.8 USD million (\$33.9 USD05 million) worth of military equipment in 1981, but due to pressure from Washington, all subsequent sales were halted (Berrios 1985, p. 113).

Nevertheless, in the years 1979–82, Western Europe was actually a greater provider of aid than all the state socialist countries combined. During this period 38.42% of the economic value of the total amount of aid sent to Nicaragua came from Western Europe, and only 21.16% from the Soviet allied countries (Berrios 1985, p. 121).

Even though the United States tried to block aid, often times Western Europe voted with the Soviet Union and the nonaligned countries, the group to which Nicaragua counted itself (D. Ortega Saavedra 1979). In 1983, when the IDB was to vote on a \$2.2 USD million (\$4.3 USD05 million) loan to finish a rural road project already 90% complete, 42 of 43 countries voted for the loan. The United States vetoed the loan. In the end it was given as part of a

bilateral aid project from the Netherlands (Leogrande 1996, p. 334). When in 1985 the President of the United States, Reagan, announced a full trade embargo on Nicaragua without approval of the USC by invoking the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA), even such close allies as the BRD and the United Kingdom openly opposed the move (Leogrande 1996, pp. 338–339).

Involvement of Eastern Europe and other Soviet allied countries

The biggest giver of aid, in terms of health and education, during those years was Cuba, accounting for 23.37% of all help with approximately 4000 citizens on the ground in Nicaragua in 1985. The Deutsche Demokratische Republik (DDR, German Democratic Republic) helped with education, building a polytechnic institute in Jinotepe¹⁷, and gave food in the form of wheat. Additionally, Nicaragua received help during extraordinary crises, such as the 1982 flood disaster, as well as \$148 USD million (\$290.2 USD05 million) worth of farm machines and raw material in 1983, and \$24 USD million (\$45.1 USD05 million) in credit in 1984 (Berrios 1985, pp. 120–123).

Since no western countries were willing to sell arms to Nicaragua, requests were made to socialist countries, which were more willing to accommodate them (Berrios 1985, p. 113; Dijkstra 1999, p. 299). In the first year, between July 1979 and July 1980, Nicaragua doubled the number of countries it had economic and political relations with, most of which had to do with its new connections to the Soviet allied countries.

Starting in 1984, kerosene was imported from the Soviet Union, producing energy which accounted for as much as 50% of Nicaragua's total energy needs in 1985. From 1980 on, the

¹⁷ Jinotepe is a city in the departamento Carazo.

main export to the Soviet Union was coffee, while the main imports were machinery and oil, financed by a 2.5–5% trade credit to be paid back over a period of 10–25 years. The second biggest trade partner, and in 1983 the biggest overall trade partner, was Bulgaria (Berrios 1985, p. 115).

The Soviet Union became Nicaragua's main supplier of oil. Until then oil was obtained from Mexico (Dijkstra 1999, p. 299). The Soviet Union gave almost no economic aid in the first years, 1979–80, when Nicaragua was classified as more a friend than a close relative. In the years 1981–83, somewhat more money was given (Berrios 1985, p. 120). This trade with the Soviet Union and its allies created friction inside Nicaragua, principally because most production was still in private hands, and these private investors didn't particularly like the idea of trading with the Soviet Union (Berrios 1985, p. 117). Writing in the mid-1980s, Berrios (1985) predicted the continued existence of the private sector for many years to come. Leftist theoreticians Ernest Mandel and Oskar Lange warned third world regimes who were trying to introduce socialism, that nationalizing gradually would not work, as the remaining private sector, in fear of being exterminated, would sabotage the economy or flee the country (Harris 1988, p. 28), and Nicaragua seems to have been a good example of just that.

FSLN leaders argued the economy was not developed enough to be nationalised entirely. As late as 1989, Ortega Saavedra argued the speed at which socialism could advance was different for different societies, and that in Nicaragua, a speed in accordance with the special conditions of Nicaraguan society needed to be pursued (Wall 1993, p. 1).

Economic reality

In spite of all efforts, Nicaragua did not do very well during the 1980s in terms of economic development. The war drained the economy tremendously, and the economic policies did not help alleviate the situation. Full land reform was not in the immediate future. In delivering real and measurable economic growth for the masses, Nicaragua hardly improved and towards the end of the decade the situation worsened.

In 1979, \$618 USD million (\$1.66 USD05 billion) in debt payments were due, 70% to go to private banks (Berrios 1985, p. 119). Nicaraguan foreign debt rose from 107.6% of the Gross National Income (GNI) to 1210.1% in the period 1979–89 (WB 2011a, see also illustration p. 145). In 1985, the private sector still represented approximately 50% of all trade and did not reinvest significant money in Nicaragua (Dijkstra 1999, p. 298). In 1979, Nicaragua had a current account surplus of \$220.1 USD million (\$592.1 USD05 million). By 1985, it had built up a current account deficit of \$726.5 USD million (\$1.32 USD05 billion). This change was largely due to the increasing trade deficit and both fell simultaneously until the end of the decade (Banco Central de Nicaragua 2010a). Nicaragua kept a trade deficit during the 1980s¹⁸, and the growth in both exports and imports from the Somoza period was effectively halted (Banco Central de Nicaragua 2010a). In the beginning of the 1980s, the exports to other developing countries went up slightly, while imports from them went down. In relation to the CMEA a trade surplus at the beginning of the decade turned into a deficit by 1982 and it remained throughout the 1980s. Inflation rates also increased rapidly, and went beyond 1000% every year in the period of 1987–90 (IMF 2010; IMF 2000, see also illustration p. 203).

¹⁸ Nicaragua's total trade deficit was \$344 USD million (\$815.3 USD05 million) in 1980 and declined to \$241.7 USD million (\$361.2 USD05 million) in 1990 (Banco Central de Nicaragua 2010a, p. 114).

Nicaraguan trade balance

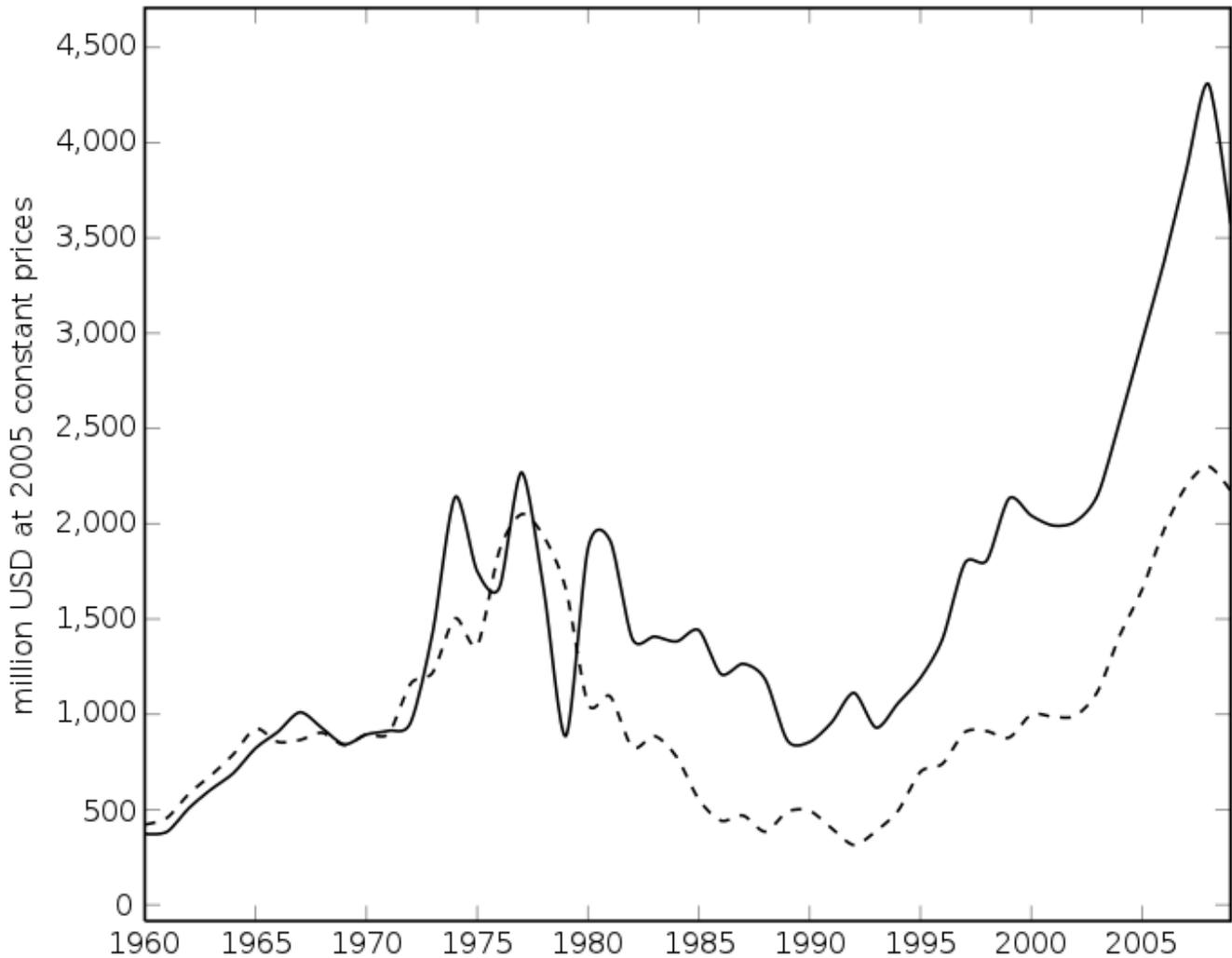
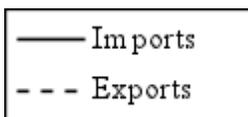


Illustration 2: During the time of Somoza and Liberal governments, both imports and exports increased. During the Sandinista years of the 1980s, imports declined, but exports declined even more, leaving the country with a permanent trade deficit. Before 1979, exports and imports balanced each other out for the most part. But since the Sandinista insurrection, imports have always been greater than exports. Instead of becoming less dependent on foreign countries, the way the Sandinistas had hoped their policies would work, ever since 1979 the country has been more more dependent on the outside world. After 1990 both imports and exports have increased once more. Yet, while exports have barely reached the level of the 1970s, imports are almost twice as high. Values have been adjusted for inflation to 2005 value of USD using the US Urban Consumer Price Index (USCPI-U). Source: Banco Central de Nicaragua (2010a); USDL-BLS (2011)



Much of this did arguably not have to do with the policies of the Sandinista regime directly. Foreign investments were generally unattractive due to the initial Somoza debt, so very little new capital flowed into the country. According to the CEPAL, Nicaragua did end up doing fairly well in the economic slump of 1983, considering a collapse in exports to its neighbors of the MCCA (Berrios 1985, p. 129). The economic embargo by the United States and the war aimed at destroying the nation's finances, made economic planning increasingly difficult. Besides the war, the negative development in terms of trade would also have to do with the fact that most trade shifted from being mainly with the United States and western Europe to the Soviet Union and the countries connected to the Council of Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA) (Berrios 1985, pp. 113–114; Dijkstra 1999, p. 299). In the later years it was the gigantic inflation rates which made most economic planning impossible.

Due to all these problems, plans meant to lead to more equality and to build up national industries were abandoned or simplified. It was initially planned to set up a cotton-textile plant in northwestern Nicaragua in order to export cotton cloth rather than raw cotton fibre. This was meant to decentralise the cotton industry. The project was abandoned, but two similar plants were installed in Managua. Several other projects that were built, and meant to increase national production in areas such as milk production and hydro-electric power. These projects, all built in the subsequent years, were financed by aid money and were highly technical to such a degree that Nicaragua and Nicaraguans were unable to maintain them (Wall 1993, pp. 6–9).

Transition from power

Known as the piñata, the FSLN used the months between February, when they lost the election, and April 1990, when power was handed over to the election winners, to redistribute

ownership on a large scale. 20% of all land distributions under the FSLN were done in this period. Some of these were redistributions for farmers who technically had been using the land already and been working on it for a long time. Critics claim much of the redistributing was in reality handing over property to FSLN leaders (Cupples 1992, pp. 299–300). The newspaper *La Prensa* listed a number of claimed property transfers, among others: 16,000 land reform titles were given to Sandinista cooperatives (Mayorga 2005a), Tomás Borge and his *Fundación Verde Sonrisa* obtained USD\$ 600,000 through sales of land they obtained during the piñata (Mayorga 2005b), Bayardo Arce Castaño became a millionaire and the FSLN created 44 companies to administrate the wealth obtained by the party (Mayorga 2005c, Rodgers 2008b).

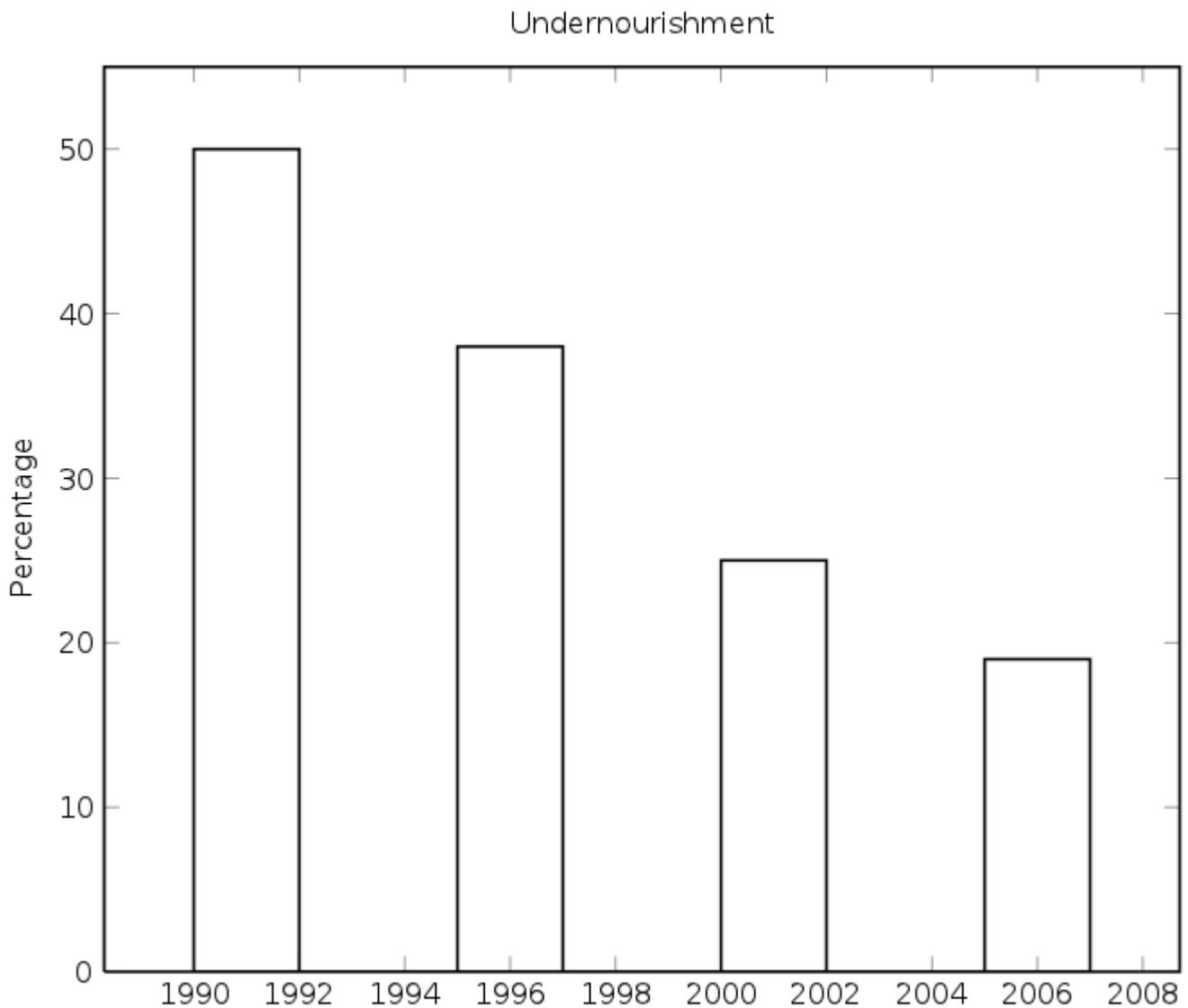


Illustration 3: Official data show that undernourishment fell considerably during the period of Liberal governments (1990–2007). Source: FAO (2010)

Liberal economic politics

The Liberal regimes after 1990 started another phase of giving access to international capital and limiting state intervention. This was clearly in line with neoliberal ideas about development. In Nicaragua, the term ‘neoliberal’ is also what is used to describe the economic policies of these governments. The years between 1990 and 2006 are commonly referred to as ‘the 16 years of neoliberalism’ due to the high rate of privatisations of major areas of

economic life, such as the pension system (Téfel et al. 2000), and the principle of constantly lowering social program expenditures as instructed by the IMF (Vargas 2006, p. 56).

Nicaraguan Foreign Debts since 1970

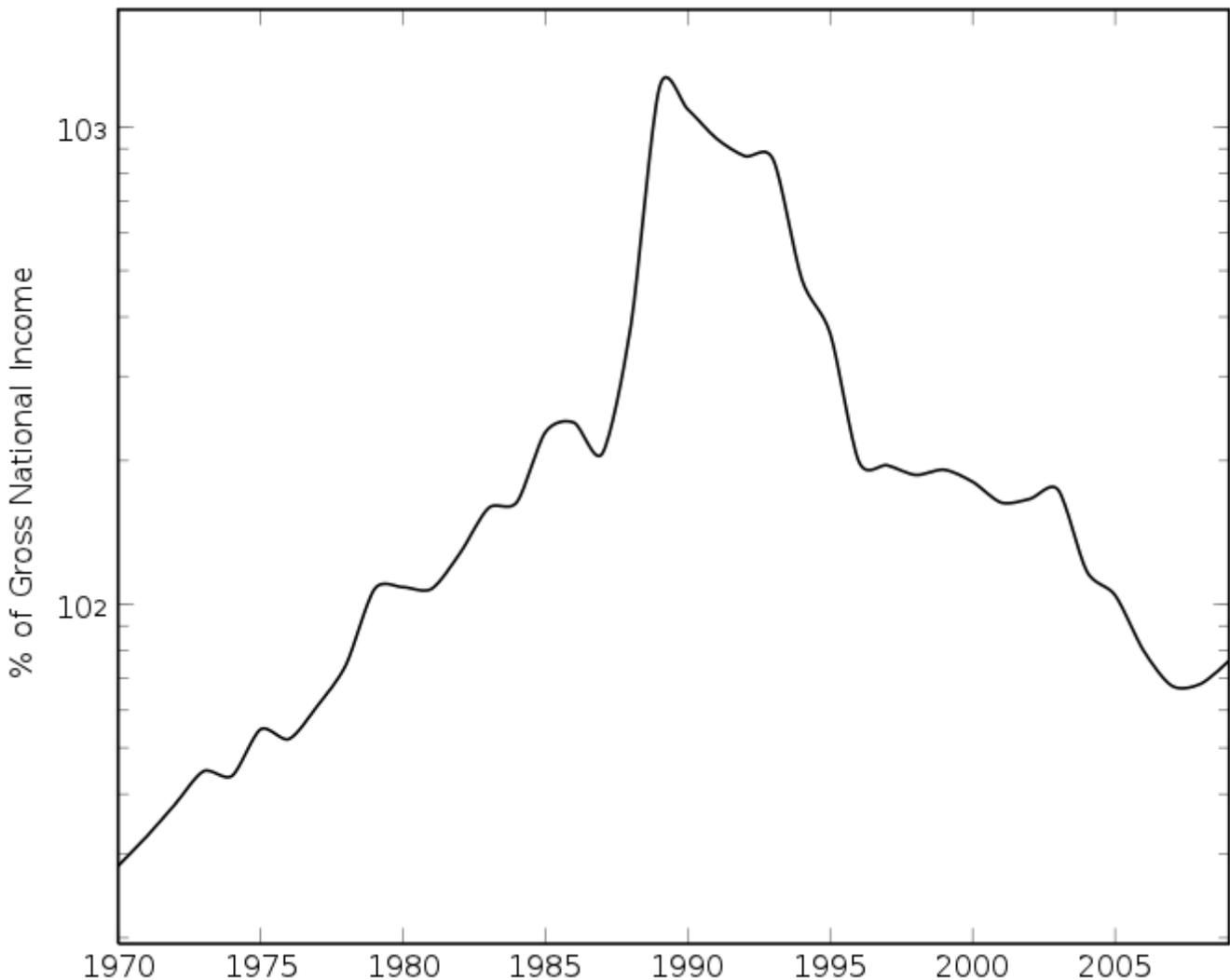


Illustration 4: During the Sandinista years of the 1980s, dependence on foreign money lenders increased. It had been hoped that such dependence would decrease. Nicaraguan external debt as a percentage of Gross National Income grew from 32.6% to 74.7% following the 1972 earthquake (1971–78). Yet the biggest increase happened in the Sandinista years of the 1980s, when it increased from 107.6% to 1210.1% (1979–89). In 2007, the external debt was down to 67.4% and that was the first time it hit pre-revolution levels. In 2009, it rose once again to 76.2%. The increase during the current Sandinista government is much less than what was the case in the 1980s. These figures do not include the \$17 USD billion (\$30.29 USD05 billion) in war-reparations, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in Den Haag had awarded Nicaragua from the United States in 1986 (Equipo Envío 1991). “Total external debt stocks to Gross National Income [(GNI)]. Total external debt is debt owed to nonresidents repayable in foreign currency, goods, or services. Total external debt is the sum of public, publicly guaranteed, and private non-guaranteed long-term debt, use of International Monetary Fund (IMF) credit, and short-term debt. Short-term debt includes all debt having an original maturity of one year or less and interest in arrears on long-term debt. GNI [...] is the sum of value added by all resident producers plus any product taxes (less subsidies) not included in the valuation of output plus net receipts of primary income (compensation of employees and property income) from abroad.”

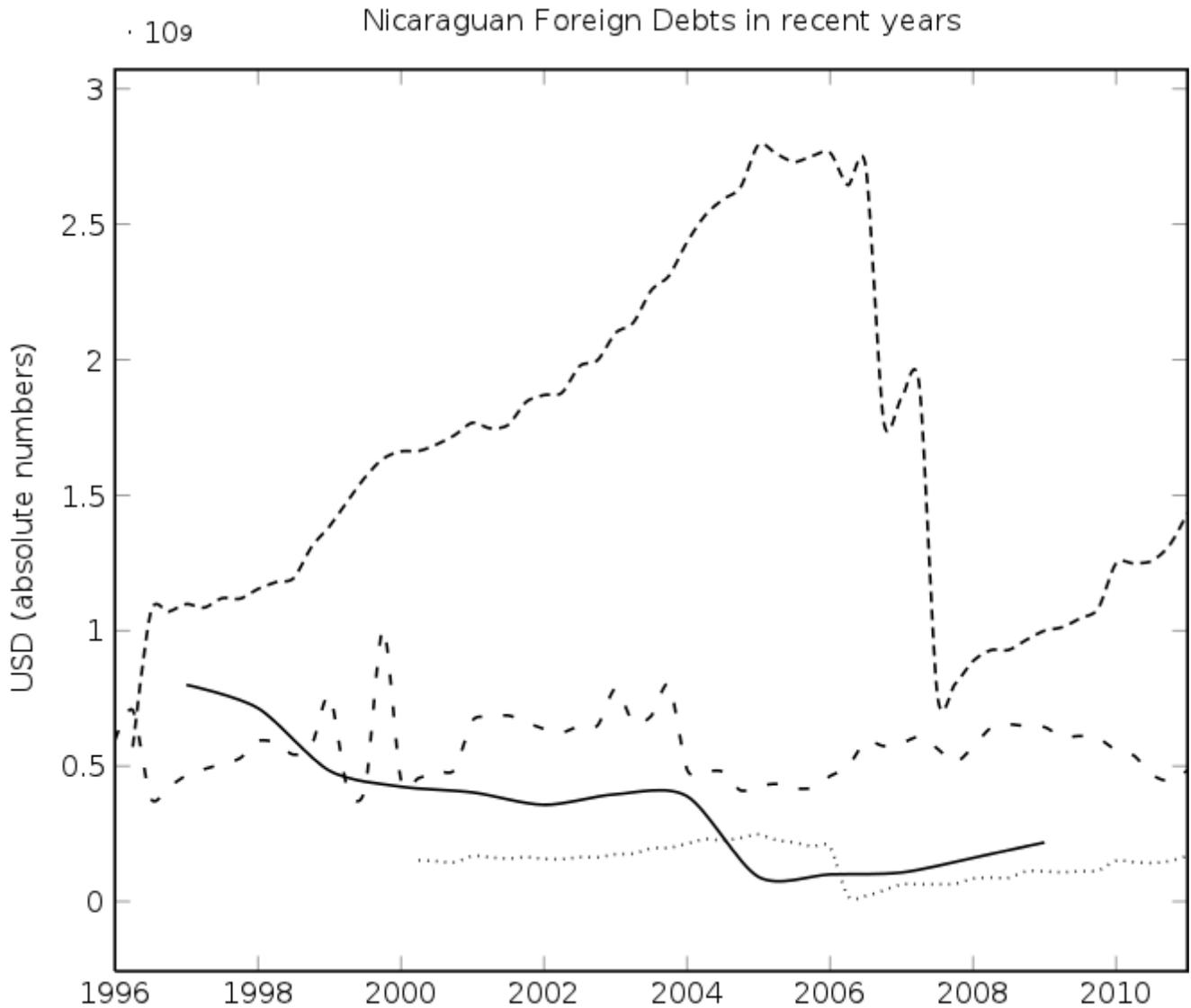


Illustration 5: Foreign debts, including those to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have grown constantly since the mid-1990s, under the Liberals and the current Sandinistas. In 2006, the IMF forgave Nicaragua its entire debt (Beachy 2006). The Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) agreed to forgive Nicaragua's debt in 2007 (IDB 2011). The Nicaraguan debt to the IMF and to other multilateral organizations has again grown under the current Sandinista government. In that sense, Nicaragua is not moving away from control by the IMF under the current government. Source: WB (2011b)

— Official bilateral loans, total
- - - Multilateral loans, total
..... Multilateral loans (IMF) **International Monetary Fund**
- - Cross-border loans, (BIS) banks **Bank for International Settlements**

It was the first non-Sandinista president, Violeta Barrios Torres de Chamorro, who opened the country for trade with South America and the United States. The Montealegres and Pellas were returned large parts of their respective properties, and promises were made to give some properties to decommissioned members of the military and the Contras (Everingham 2001, pp. 71–72). La Prensa and other media claim that among the biggest economic winners of this period were also those leading Sandinistas who had obtained large properties during the piñata, which they now made economic use of (Mayorga 2005b; Mayorga 2005a; Mayorga 2005c).

International economic ties also changed fundamentally. The economic situation on a global level changed when the Soviet allied countries fell away as trading partners. The International Court of Justice (ICJ) in Den Haag decided by 1986 that the United States was obliged to pay damages for the war on Nicaragua – a total of \$17 USD billion (\$30.29 USD05 billion). The government of 1990 forgave the United States this debt (Equipo Envío 1991), sold off most national industry, and did away with the country's train system (Grigsby 2005). Instead of sanctions from the United States, Nicaragua was integrated into a free trade zone with the United States as part of the Dominican Republic–Central American Free Trade Agreement (DR-CAFTA), which was ratified in 2004.

Among the most prominent parts of privatised public infrastructure is electricity, which was privatised in 2000 when Unión Fenosa, S.A., a Spanish utility company, obtained a contract to run the Nicaraguan electricity system. In 1998, the applicable laws were changed with the votes of all parties in a way that allowed for the subsequent privatisation of the electricity

network. Two smaller companies, Dissur and Disnorte, were set up to bid on the electricity net. There were no counteroffers. Unión Fenosa, S.A. then bought Dissur and Disnorte and has since been the sole operator of the Nicaraguan electricity network. Some Nicaraguans have since accused Unión Fenosa, S.A. of trying to make a profit by not reinvesting into the Nicaraguan electricity system. This was the cause—it is oftentimes claimed—which led to the power outages of 4–12 hours in major cities by 2006 (Tortuga – Grupo anti-militarista 2006).

Discrepancies exist in the views on what counts as Nicaraguan exports. Up until 1996, all sources seem to agree Nicaragua had a negative trade balance with the United States.

Nicaraguan statistics show the same for the following years, but according to figures provided by the United States, in the years after 1996 Nicaragua exported to the United States more than it imported. According to these figures, all trading between Nicaragua and the United States totalled just \$612.6 USD million (\$762.5 USD05 million) in 1996, with the balance being \$88 USD million (\$109.5 USD05 million) in favor of the United States. In 2008, it had grown to \$1.7 USD billion (\$1.54 USD05 billion), with \$677.6 USD million (\$614.6 USD05 million) in favor of Nicaragua (US Census Bureau 2009; USDL-BLS 2011). Nicaraguan sources show an increase in both imports and exports, yet the balance continues to be in favor of the United States rather than Nicaragua. The difference in methodology between how Nicaragua and how the United States obtained their numbers is that the United States included the production data of free trade Export Production Zones and Nicaragua did not. The US government sees these as part of the Nicaraguan export, while the Nicaraguan government does not. Singer (1950, p. 475) was the first to point out, that in cases where the

production is completely and only connected with foreign investment, it creates more wealth in the country from where the investment originates than in the country where the production takes place. Also Baran (1957, pp. 190–193) made this point. In relation to all trading partners, exports and imports once again increased, but different from the time of Somoza, a constant trade deficit remained (Banco Central de Nicaragua 2010a, see also illustration p. 139).

Infant mortality and public health spendings

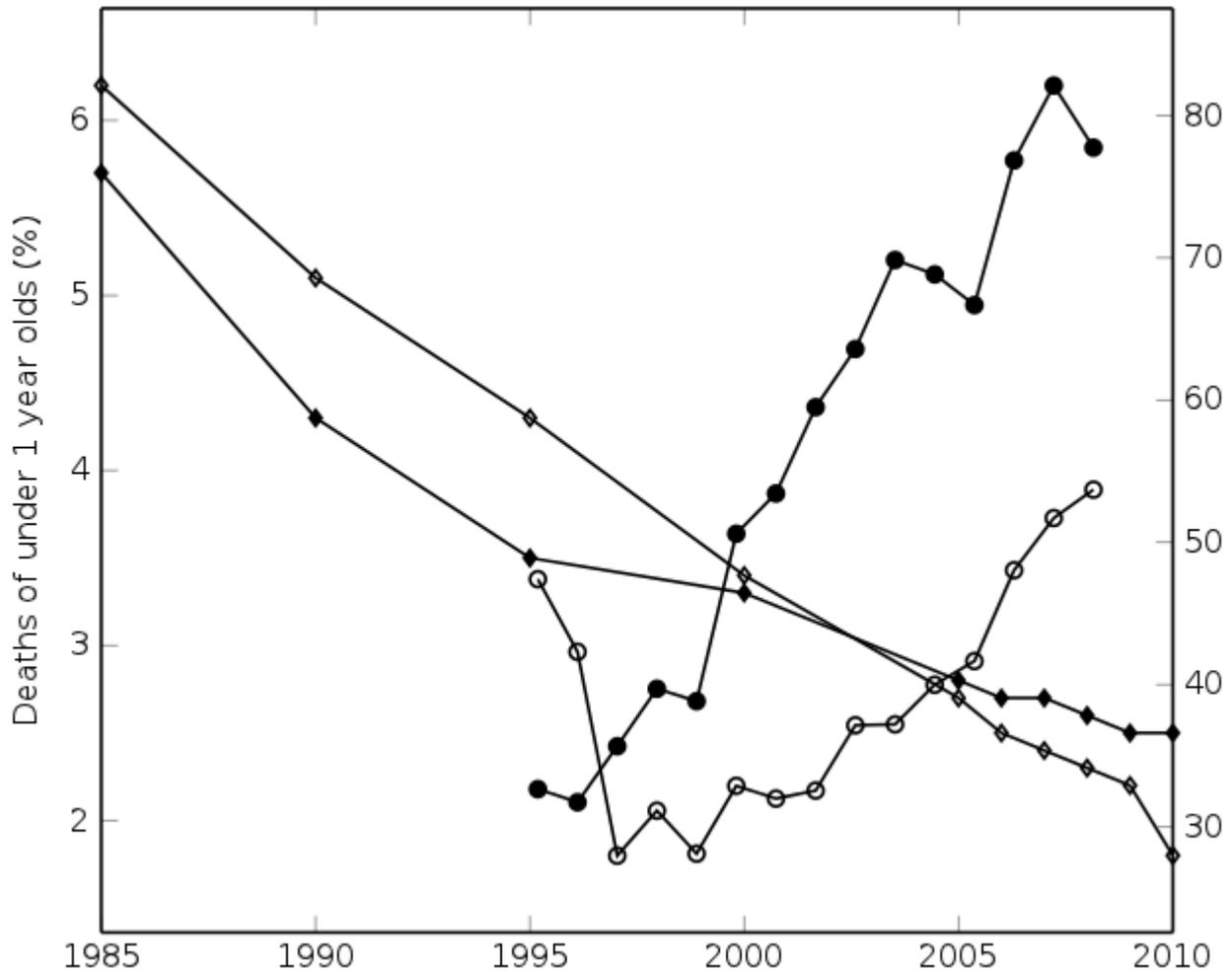


Illustration 6: The infant mortality rate of Nicaragua has sunk faster than that of neighboring Honduras, although government spending on health has been larger in Honduras 1997–2008. Liberal and Sandinista governments in Nicaragua have not shown remarkably different results nor have Nicaraguan government investments in public health during the Sandinista government developed remarkably different than those of Liberal controlled Honduras. Exceptions are found in the most recent years: In 2009, when Honduras cut spending markedly following the military coup, and in 2010, when Nicaraguan infant mortality rate fell from 2.2% to 1.8% within just 1 year. Values have been adjusted for inflation to 2005 value of USD using the US Urban Consumer Price Index (USCPI-U). Source: WHO (2011); UNSTATS (2010); UNIGCME (2010); USDL-BLS (2011)

Infant mortality rate (%) Honduras Nicaragua

Public health spendings (in USD05)



Even though the Liberal policies did not emphasise poverty reduction and social development, many statistical development indicators for this period point to an overall minor improvement of the situation for the majority of Nicaraguans. Infant mortality fell (UNIGCME 2010), the rate of undernourished Nicaraguans fell (FAO 2010, see also illustration p. 142), and the unemployment rate was kept stable (BCN 2007; BCN 2009; BCN 2011). Since the late 1990s, even the difference between rich and poor Nicaraguan families seems to have diminished (CIA 2011a; Fundación Internacional para el Desafío Económico Global 2009).¹⁹

Nicaraguan economics during the second Sandinista government

Ortega Saavedra was sworn in as president of Nicaragua in January 2007, shortly before a global financial crisis hit. Employment figures have increased since (BCN 2011; BCN 2009), and most other economic development indicators continue in the same positive direction as before. Statistics are not yet available for all indicators up to the present, but among almost all of those available, no radical shift in any direction can be noticed. There are some social programs and major economic development projects in place that may affect future statistics positively. In a sense, the current situation is somewhat similar to the 1980s, in that positive change is promised for the future, yet in many areas and look hopeful, but have not been achieved yet.

The social programs Hambre Cero and Usura Cero, which the Ortega Saavedra government started, are aimed at changing production patterns, although with much lower expectations

¹⁹ Although I have tried to find statistics that are verified by international organizations and parts of the Nicaraguan government, after having worked with Nicaraguan statistics and Nicaraguans who handled such statistics for decades, and who have very little confidence in any statistical figures obtained in Nicaragua, I am not overly confident that not at least part of these numbers were made up somewhere along the line. In particular, most of my informants were highly doubtful as to statistics that showed that the Gini-index had fallen during the time of Liberal governments.

than some projects of the 1980s. These are two profiled programs that make up part of a series of programs. Hambre Cero is a program which provides a little livestock (one pig, one cow, five chicken), shelter for the animals, food and seed to grow more food and training and monitoring by the Ministerio Agropecuario y Forestal (MAGFOR) to women in the countryside who control between 0.7 and 2.1 hectares of land. The woman then pays a total of \$300 USD of the money recovered from the sale of piglets, eggs, and other products that originate in the livestock back into a fund for her neighborhood. This money is then accessible for future collective investments, and is supposed to encourage collective decision making and the creation of cooperatives. The program is meant to benefit 75000 families during the period 2007–11 (Kester 2010). Usura Cero is a program that gives out micro-credit loans to women with small businesses, such as small shops in the cities. For 2010, the goal was to benefit 42000 women and at least a fair share of the money comes directly from donations from countries such as Taiwan (Navas 2010). The nationally owned bank 'Banco Produzcamos' started in 2010. It is supposed to handle the money for the two programs and all similar programs and give credits to small and medium producers in the agricultural production sector. The creation was for a long time blocked and dragged out by opposition politicians in the national assembly.

While land redistribution is not a policy of Ortega Saavedra, it can be seen in some places. The common practice used seems to be to put in doubt land claims of rich landowners through the legal system which is dominated by Sandinistas, and thereby unofficially redistribute some lands. Presumably such actions only affect a few families.

Ortega Saavedra has partially retaken control of some of the privatised infrastructure. Unión Fenosa, S.A. was forced into selling 16% of the local company in Nicaragua to the

government in a deal which gave the government a seat on the board of Unión Fenosa, S.A. in Nicaragua in 2009 (Reuters 2009). Energy prices are politically controlled in Nicaragua and do not entirely follow fluctuations in world markets. For Nicaraguan consumers prices rose around 9% in 2007 during a global energy crisis. During this time, government subsidies were given to public transport. General power outages due to incapable infrastructure happened in 2007 but were about to end (Fonseca Terán 2007).

When it was clear that Ortega Saavedra was elected and would assume power, Venezuela invited Nicaragua to participate in the Alternativa Bolivariana para los pueblos de nuestra América (ALBA) network of countries opposed to current global trade structures. It included Cuba and Bolivia at the time, and has since grown also to include Antigua and Barbuda, the Commonwealth of Dominica, Ecuador, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. The ALBA was initiated in 2006 with a stated goal of organising trade between its members. Unlike other trade networks, the ALBA aims not to liberalise trade, but rather to work as an economic mutual aid network. The ALBA is meant to evolve into more and more of a controlled economy in common among countries with a similar economic levels of development. This seems to be much in line with Radical Dependency Theory. Since 2006, the ALBA has grown to include a project of a common virtual currency for trade between the countries and is also linked to numerous cultural and educational exchanges (AlianzaBolivariana.org 2011). ALBA negotiations in December 2007 ended with a decision to create a telecommunications company to be set up by the ALBA members by 2008 and the making of “huge advances” in talks to set up a common bank for the ALBA countries to gain more independence from changes in the economies of western countries (END 2007). Ortega Saavedra signed Nicaragua to the ALBA as the first thing after assuming position (Rodríguez 2007b). The

ALBA network was used to bring oil from Venezuela to the Central American republic starting immediately in January 2007. By November 2007, a total of 1.55 million petroleum products had been imported through the ALBA (N. García 2007).

Origin of Nicaraguan imports

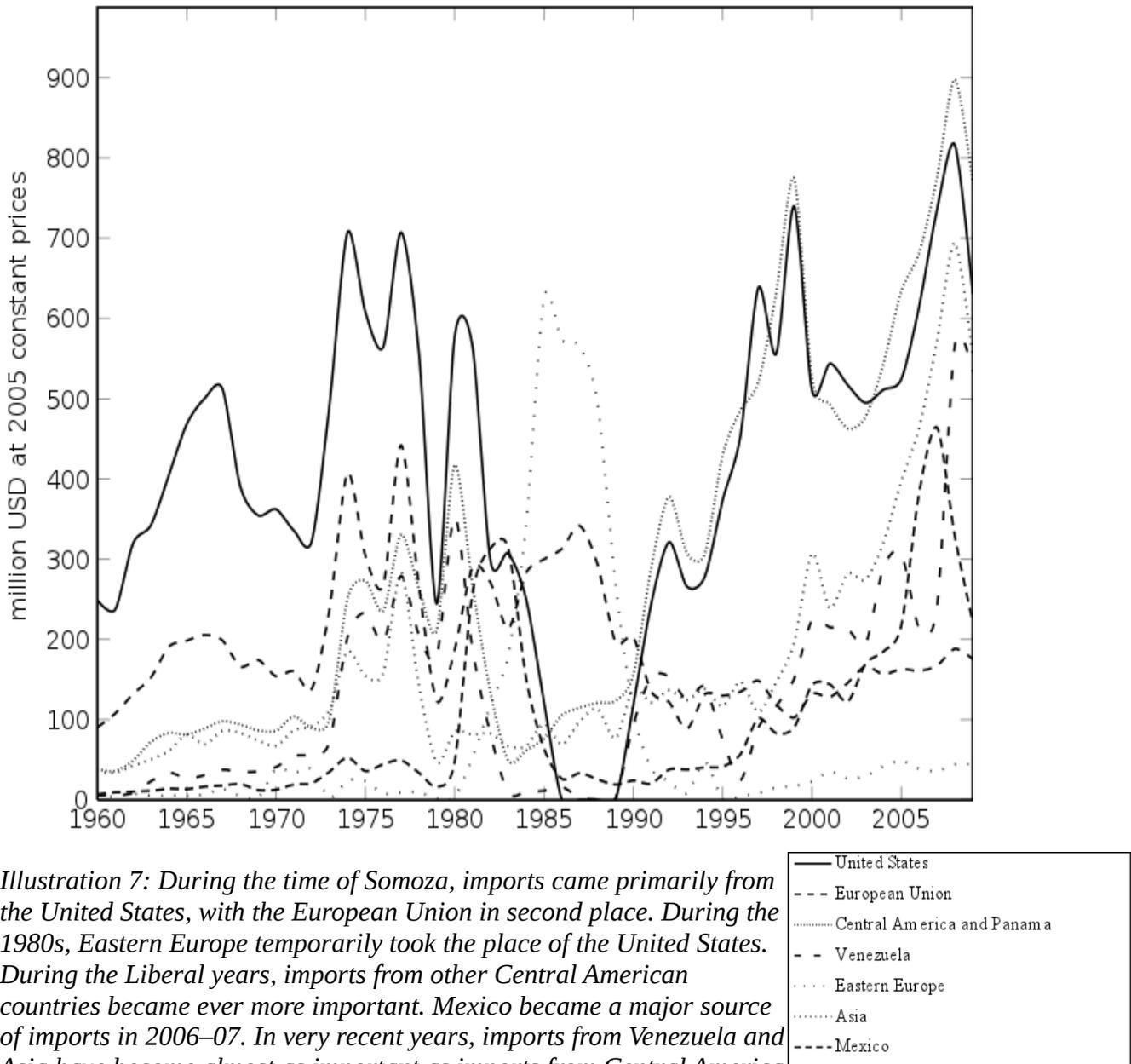


Illustration 7: During the time of Somoza, imports came primarily from the United States, with the European Union in second place. During the 1980s, Eastern Europe temporarily took the place of the United States. During the Liberal years, imports from other Central American countries became ever more important. Mexico became a major source of imports in 2006–07. In very recent years, imports from Venezuela and Asia have become almost as important as imports from Central America and the United States. Despite the political talks about renewed links to Russia during the current government, imports from Eastern Europe have not increased significantly since 2007. While in the 1970s Nicaragua imported from only one major trading partner, imports are now much more diversified. Source: Banco Central de Nicaragua (2010b)

Destinations of Nicaraguan exports

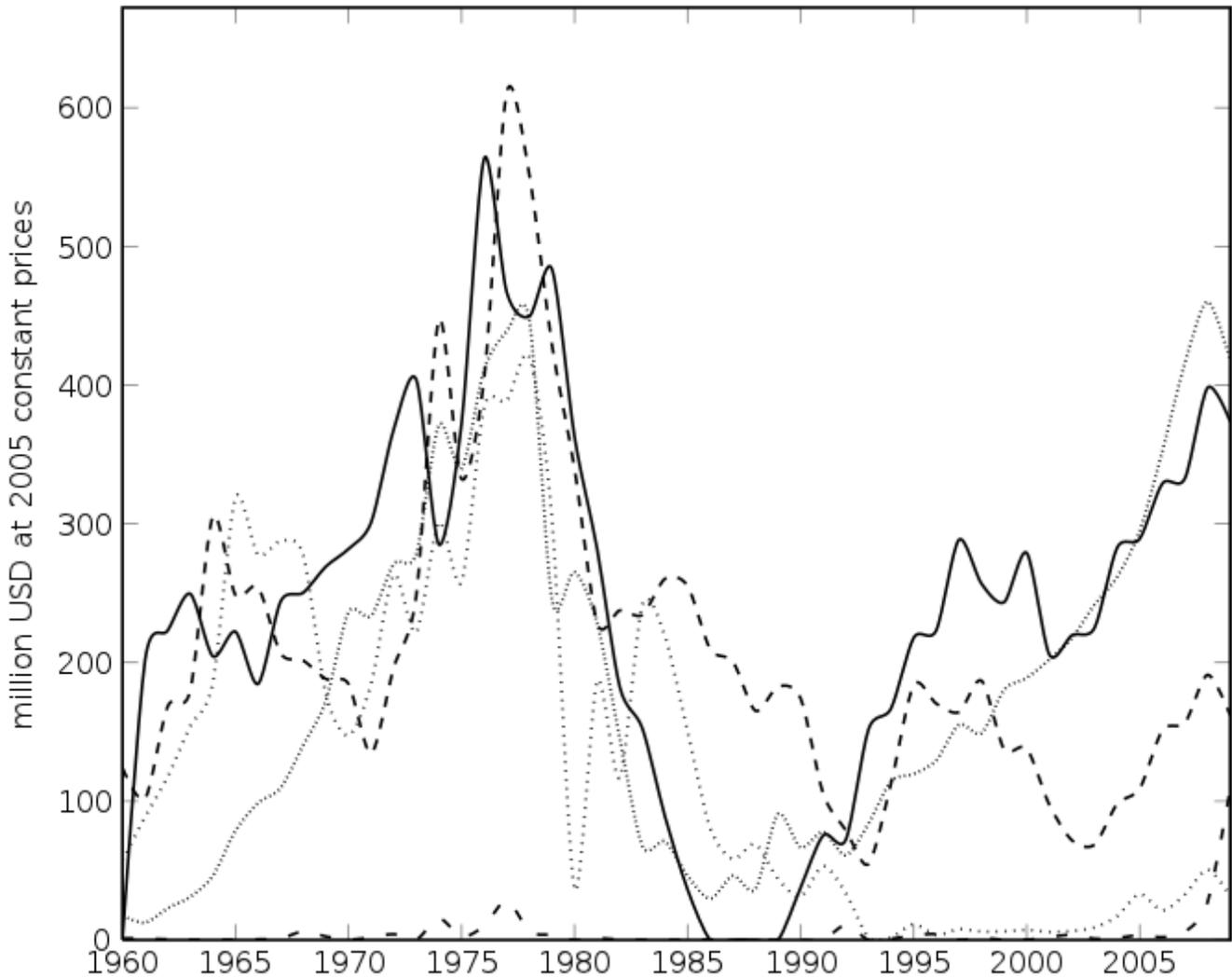
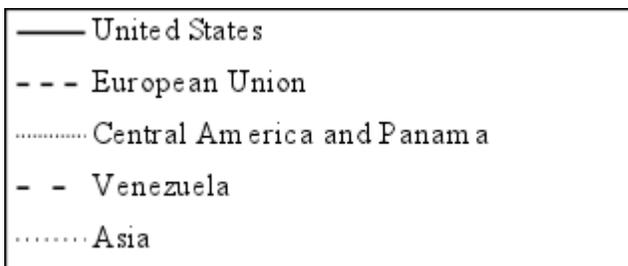


Illustration 8: Exports show a somewhat different picture than imports: exports to most markets topped in the late Somoza years and have since been much lower. Only exports to Venezuela are greater now than ever before, and the amount of that is still much smaller than exports to the United States, the Central American neighboring countries and the European Union. Exports to Eastern Europe were never significantly large. The data does not include productions in Export Production Zones (EPZ). Source: Banco Central de Nicaragua (2010b)



Even though the trade pattern of Nicaragua is in the process of change, a strong connection to the United States is still present both in terms of imports and exports. Imports have been diversified somewhat in recent years, with the share from Asia and Venezuela growing significantly. The share of Central American imports has been even with that of the United States since 1990. Exports look somewhat different. The shares going to the United States and Central America are the largest, with the European Union share at about half that and Venezuela at about a third, but growing rapidly. For all the talk there is of the renewal of relations to Russia and the negative view the current government has of the United States, trade relations at this point do not (yet) reflect that.

For Nicaragua, private ownership still stands quite central, more so than in some other ALBA member countries, reflecting in the way the Nicaraguan part of the agreement was set up. Through a layer of two sub-companies, revenues from oil sales in Nicaragua are paid to the company ALBA de Nicaragua, S.A. (Albanisa), which is 60% owned by Venezuelan state oil company Petróleos de Venezuela, S.A. (PDVSA) and 40% by 'unknown partners' in Nicaragua. Albanisa then splits the revenues, sending 50% to the Venezuelan state, 25% to a social development fund controlled by ALBA and it is not quite clear where the remaining 25% goes. José Francisco López Centeno is at the time simultaneously secretary of finances of the FSLN and vice-president of Albanisa (N. García 2007).

The role of the FSLN in relation to private capitalists is at times unclear. At the celebrations on 19 July 2009, Ortega Saavedra officially thanked the Pellas, for staying in Nicaragua throughout the 1980s, and Sandinista controlled labor unions held celebrations in honor of the company, for the stated reason of the company having helped Nicaragua. At the same time, during much of 2009, protesters against the Pellas installed themselves at the Rotonda

Metrocentro, claiming they are former workers of the Ingenio San Antonio who now suffer from chronic renal insufficiency. According to them, up to 3000 workers died due to renal insufficiency they believe is caused by the usage of pesticides. Those organising these workers seem to at least unofficially be directly connected to the FSLN. The official line of the FSLN leadership is to recognise the continued importance of the oligarchy, which according to them consists of the same families that were rich in the time of Somoza (Cuadra Núñez and Fonseca Terán 2010a, p. 2) and according to others the leaders of the FSLN have themselves turned into part of the oligarchy. There seems not to be universal agreement on this issue among FSLN Sandinistas. According to an article in the Christian Science Monitor as well as reports of certain academics, drawing on statements from La Prensa and opposition politicians, Ortega Saavedra himself has become one of the richest people in the country (Rocha 2004; Rodgers 2008a, p. 113; Rogers 2009).

The newspaper La Prensa has brought forward allegations that the daughter-in-law of Ortega Saavedra was involved in a corruption scandal relating to the take-over by Albanisa of previously foreign-owned parts of Petronic (Enríquez and Martínez 2012). Similar charges have been made by opposition media since the beginning of Ortega Saavedra's second presidency. The government has generally not responded to these allegations, and according to the journalists investigating the stories, the FSLN and the government have been extremely unhelpful in their investigations. It can not be said with certainty whether and which properties Ortega Saavedra controls.

The Sandinista policies of today seem a bit contradictory at this stage. There seems to be more of a willingness to cooperate with private capital and much less ambitious plans for fundamental economic changes than was the case in the 1980s. At the same time, grassroots

organisation against big capital continues, and the state is taking some control back and helping some poorer sectors in becoming more independent. If the official data is to be believed, class differences among Nicaraguans are in rapid decline (see also illustration p. 212). Some of these data may be easier to understand in a few years, when one knows where the current development leads.

Chapter 7

The politics of history

In chapter 5 we looked at some of the highlights of the past century in Nicaragua. In this chapter we will look at how this history is seen by different groups of Nicaraguans. It must be emphasised I cannot say anything about Nicaraguans I did not speak to and the debates about some of these themes may be limited to a small number of people. The same event can be seen in several ways. Other events are focused upon only by one or a few groups. The philosopher Hodges (1986) tried to intervene in this debate and determine the true course of events surrounding the years of Sandino. This is not what I will do here. Instead, I seek to investigate some of the more common versions of the past which exist and look at what makes them similar – the relation between Nicaraguan activists and international movements. The following sections give a basic overview of some of the main historical points discussed. Even more about the theme of history telling can be found in the following chapters, and should give the reader an idea of the magnitude of this phenomenon.

Sometimes it is possible to see the same event as having been caused by either Nicaraguans or non-Nicaraguans. In most cases, the version which emphasises Nicaraguan historical agency is preferred by all Nicaraguan groups I met, even though they disagree on most everything else. Also Hodges claimed the Sandinistas learned from revolutionaries all over the (third) world and had then tried to reinterpret Sandino in this sense. Hodges sees this as a systematic and efficiency-oriented program used by the FSLN-leadership in order to go beyond the program of the initial Sandino, and he sees this as a major reason why some Contras claim that the FSLN has betrayed Sandino. I seek to expand this to go beyond the Sandinistas and to go beyond the individual Sandino and to more concretely show a pattern

of reinterpreting history in a manner that puts Nicaraguans at the center point of all events.

I start out by giving an overview of the anthropological debate concerning culturally dependent concepts of memory, then explain how the concept of historical memory applies in Nicaragua. I give an overview of the discussion about political history and historical agency in Nicaragua. The term 'historical agency' has been used in various ways within the field of anthropology. I use the term in the way Graeber defines it, "the capacity to make history," with history defined as "the record of those actions which are not simply cyclical, repetitive, or inevitable" (Graeber 1996). The understanding employed here is generally looking at agency on the level of the individual. What it means to have 'power' is a bit more complicated. Having historical agency implies power the way it is used in Nicaragua, but also countries or groups (or foreign individuals) can have power without having historical agency in that what they do is not influencing the course of history, but rather makes it stay on its inevitable course. To describe this type of power, I have throughout this thesis chosen the word 'mechanical.'

For this chapter, I draw first and foremost upon the general political journalism I undertook, which gave me an insight into how non-Sandinistas tend to explain historic realities, and I conducted interviews with old revolutionary fighters who started the organisation 'Amigos,' as they tended to be the most thorough in their explanations of the recent historic realities of Nicaragua.

Political identities in Nicaragua

Individual identities in the Spanish-speaking part of Nicaragua contain a very important political aspect. A typical introduction of a person introducing himself to a group of Nicaraguans he has never met would be: "Hi, I am Jorge, Sandinista and worker." This Jorge need not be a member of one of the Sandinista parties in order to state this. He could be

participating in an explicitly Sandinista cooperative or some other organisation which is not directly linked to the Sandinista parties. He could also not be member of any group and just voting for one of the Sandinista parties or even not voting at all and just trying to follow what he sees as Sandinista principles in conducting his life. Nevertheless he could claim to be a Sandinista if he feels he is one. The popular participation and identification with political groups connected with different economic interests, has been present for a good while in Nicaraguan society, at least the among the workers of western Nicaragua (Gould 1989: p. 160).

The two groups with most political influence in Nicaragua are currently the 'Liberals' mostly connected with the Partido Liberal Constitucionalista (PLC) and the Sandinistas aligned with the party Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (FSLN). Two other fairly large groups are Sandinistas aligned with the party Movimiento Renovador Sandinista (MRS) and 'Somocistas.' Somocistas are the only large group which generally will not speak about themselves as a group. Smaller groups are the 'Conservatives' and those affiliated with the 'Contras' (from 'contra-revolutionaries'), who fought against the Sandinistas in the 1980s and who now tend to use the term Resistencia to describe themselves rather than Contras. This term is still used by other Nicaraguans to describe them. In addition, countless tiny groups of people, mostly without formal organisation, cross all the above categories in very local ways.

What all groups have in common is they refer to a group that was in power in Nicaragua some time during the last century, with very abrupt and mostly not very democratic shifts between them. For the Sandinistas several phases exist which are thought to have exerted power and which are referred to with differing importance by different Sandinistas. That is an important factor as to why history lives in everyday life. When a Nicaraguan is currently affiliated with

one particular group, it normally also means that in his interpretation/discussion of the past he will emphasise certain historical moments in a way which makes his particular group seem significant.

Ideological differences between the groups mean differences in how historical events are understood and how history progresses. The fact that the same history can be understood in several ways has a tradition in Nicaragua from before the time of the Sandinista movement (Gould 1989). An idea of dependency between the core and peripheral countries manifests itself in most accounts from members of all political groups, but with different amount of emphasis. In general Sandinistas have a strong overtone of Dependency Theory included in any history telling (Velasco 2002). That applies also to written historical works that originate within the Sandinismo project, written by high-ranking activists of the FSLN such as Román, Fonseca Amador, and Fonseca Terán (2008c). Pronounced supporters of the Contras or the Somozas seem to largely agree on the exploitative aspects the first world has towards countries like Nicaragua. Liberals and Conservatives emphasise this aspect less.

The controversies around historical representations in Nicaragua

Historical representations in Nicaragua are selective and have to do with the politics one tries to promote in current times. This has been shown among others by the historian Elizabeth Dore (2006). She looked at the influence particular history writings had on the politics of Sandinismo of the 1980s and how leading actors in the state used their interpretations of history to further a political program. In particular, it is Jaime Wheelock Roman's *Imperialismo y Dictadura: Crisis de una Formación Social* that she explains was the basis for the politics of the party. Additionally, the FSLN quickly established historical studies after taking power in order to further their own version of the past. Given her own research on the village of

Diriomo, Dore quickly discovered the town/village does not appear in the Sandinista discourse on history, not because nothing has happened there, but because Sandinista historians decided to focus on other events used as the official history at a national scale.

The historian Jeffrey Gould (1990) explored the history of agricultural workers in North-Western Nicaragua, and through that he also focused on how history is often employed to legitimise one's own action in the present. Gould's analysis is locally focused in just one *departamento* of Nicaragua, and it was done with the backdrop of an official, state-sanctioned Sandinista version of historical events, against which farmers build up a counter-hegemonic version which put a positive emphasis on historical figures that the campesinos he talked to believed followed a political line that would have favored themselves.

David E. Whisnant (1995) looked upon the difference in how certain historic persons were portrayed -- Augusto Sandino Calderón or Ruben Dario by the Somoza regime in comparison with the Sandinistas of the 1980s, as well as Sandinista activists during the Somoza years. He makes it clear a significant amount of myth building was involved that related to legitimise current political actions, or to delegitimize these. Much like the other two authors, Whisnant seems to write about a period during which it was very clear that the state sanctioned a certain version of historical events in a much more specific way than what is the case now.

Different from Dore, Gould and Whisnant, I do here not seek to find the official history of the Nicaraguan state during a certain period -- a task which it would seem would be much harder now than in the 1980s, given there are so many versions of the past among state officials -- nor a version of history that contradicts such an official version. I investigate versions of the past I could find among my informants and then to look at what points they have in common.

I present some of the main points of how history is discussed by my informants and, through that, give an idea how these themes are discussed generally in Nicaragua today. The point I make with this is, although some parts of Nicaraguan history remain highly controversial and are presented in very divergent ways generally linked to the ideological group of the person telling it, all versions seem to put agency in the hands of Nicaraguans and very seldom acknowledge some thought or action originated outside the borders of Nicaragua.

From the 1850s to 1920s

It is generally accepted today, from the 1850s to the 1920s the United States could invade Nicaragua without having to face too much resistance. This worked until the advent of the anti-imperialism movement of Augusto Nicolás Calderón Sandino in the 1920s. Among Sandinistas, the invasions of the United States are not presented as a result of a conscious decisions. Instead, the United States merely acted mechanically like any empire would. Those portrayed as having historical agency are those Nicaraguans who—ultimately unsuccessfully—opposed the interventions of the United States or those who are claimed to be responsible for inviting the US military to Nicaragua.

My Sandinista informants today generally identify with the Liberals of this time period. Those Liberals and Conservatives to whom I spoke with generally do not have much to say about the time period. My Sandinistas informants claim the Liberals invited the troops from the United States who Andrés Castro Estrada fought, and the Conservatives brought the intervening troops from the United States which then removed President José Santos Zelaya López. When I asked Carolina Fonseca Icabalzeta when US interventionism in Nicaragua started in the 20th century she answered:

That was in 1909/10, when the Conservatives invited the United States to intervene against

President Zelaya [López].

Her father, Fernando Fonseca, proudly explained how his grandfather had first fought with Zelaya López and how that also was part of the foundation that inspired some of his later deeds as a Sandinista:

As a family we have an ancestor [...] my grandfather, who [fought] in the revolution of Zelaya [López]. [...] But after a while he lost faith in Zelaya [López] because he saw his project as unrealistic and later opted for [Calderón] Sandino, as a Liberal. So as a child I was influenced by my grandfather. Not because he made me... convinced me of anything, but rather because I saw how certain people came to visit him. They were very old and came from Honduras, because he had been exiled in Honduras for 11 years.

Two of the three main national heroes from before 1920 recognised by the Sandinistas today were Liberals – Zelaya López and Benjamín Francisco Zeledón Rodríguez. Those Sandinista informants who I pressed on an opinion about the party political affiliation of Castro Estrada, admitted he was most likely a Conservative, but generally not much focus is put on his party affiliation. All three from this time frame are now celebrated by the Sandinistas for their acts of defying the United States, and not by Liberals or Conservatives. Castro Estrada is pictured as throwing a stone at a US American soldier. Oftentimes he stands next to Calderón Sandino, as part of the branding on many government products and websites under the current FSLN government. The explanation by Sandinistas as to why they focus more on these persons than other political groups, generally centers around their nationalism and struggle against intervention by the United States.

Calderón Sandino

Calderón Sandino is today regarded as the founder of the modern-day anti-imperialist struggle in Nicaragua by all my Nicaraguan informants, although anti-imperialism in the form

of native American struggle against European invasion existed earlier. According to Fonseca Amador (1969, p. 29), Calderón Sandino's actions were part of a Nicaraguan tradition of violent resistance as a response to the very violent exploitation, and this tradition was not the same as what existed in other parts of Latin America. Perhaps as an explanation, Sandinistas often recount how Calderón Sandino, at 17, watched the lifeless body of Zeledón Rodríguez dragged through the streets after his death (Calderón Sandino 1929), and how this had a profound effect on Calderón Sandino's view of the world. Yet, anyone who stays in Nicaragua for a few minutes and takes his first taxi ride will very likely hear about Calderón Sandino and how he initiated the struggle, as it is one of the most discussed themes, both among Liberals and Sandinistas. A great deal of the ideology and organisational model of those calling themselves Sandinista has changed since the days of Calderón Sandino. The concept of imperialism as a force negatively influencing the people in Nicaragua and other third world countries, continues to play an important role as part of the Sandinista ideology (D. Ortega Saavedra 1979), but also many Liberals seem to have taken parts of it to themselves. Calderón Sandino in this sense is strangely less controversial among my Nicaraguan informants than one may have thought given that one of the two main political groups invokes his name and the other does not.

Sandinismo and the forgotten debate on Imperialism

Although the Sandinistas today often refer to Calderón Sandino and all that he did, the version they focus on is somewhat tainted. One of the more important concepts connected with Calderón Sandino is that of 'anti-imperialism.' In his 1933 proclamation To abolish the Monroe doctrine, written to defend the establishment of a small rebel army to rid the country of US occupation soldiers, Calderón Sandino specifically named imperialism as the enemy:

...Deeply convinced that the grotesque Yankee imperialism, day by day is infiltrating the domestic and foreign policy of Central America, turning our cowardly leaders into mummies – the vibrating spirit of the Indo-Hispanic race becomes at this time the Autonomous Army of Central America to save its racial dignity, flinging militarily, politically and economically away from its territory the Wall Street bankers, even if to do this we will have to leave our bodies dead, lying face up towards the sun (Calderón Sandino 1933).

When I first read of Calderón Sandino and his reference to the term ‘imperialism’ and ‘anti-imperialism’ I was reminded about the discussion of the same terms in Europe just a few years earlier. ‘Anti-imperialism’ was a concept developed in the international socialist movement only a few years before Calderón Sandino’s entry into Nicaraguan politics (Lenin 1917c; Luxemburg 1913; Bukharin 1920). Around the First World War and the time of the creation of the Soviet Union, the issue of imperialism was highly debated in various forums worldwide. Different Marxist theorists pointed to slightly different aspects. To a certain degree Marxist theoreticians clearly disagreed, but in the end their common framework was that they saw the entire world as part of one single capitalist system, which evolved and now spanned the entire planet and had an exploitative character.

Closely linked, was another term often used when discussing Calderón Sandino, that of a ‘nation’s right to self determination’ (Lenin 1914) – a concept that continues to be a central part of Sandinista ideology (Hoyt 1997, p. 16). At the time of Calderón Sandino, this concept was somewhat more controversial, and critics said it is not always clear what constitutes a nation and why these nations’ interests—which they saw as nothing more than a product of the establishment of capitalism—should be part of socialists’ program for change (Luxemburg 1908–1909). Altogether the theories of ‘anti-imperialism’ and ‘nations’ right to self-determination’ do deliver the ideological groundwork for the organising of revolutions in

third world countries such as Nicaragua with the objective of not only overthrowing the local government, but also hurting the international capitalist system. Thus it is not strange Calderón Sandino would make use of these terms.

H. Ortega (1980, p. 53), brother of Ortega Saavedra and leader of the armed forces during the 1980s, claims in his writings that Calderón Sandino was about applying concepts and ideas present at the time to Nicaraguan reality. Fonseca Terán (2010a, p. 48) defends the same hypothesis, that Calderón Sandino referred to the international debate occurring at the time, when he invoked the term 'imperialism.'

Interestingly, while my initial idea seemed supported by those written by Nicaraguan sources, I never heard about the influence of the European debate in conversations with Sandinistas or other Nicaraguans. It is often argued that Calderón Sandino's anti-imperialism came 'naturally' through living under such exploitative conditions and seeing what happened to his country. This interpretation of the ideological origin of Calderón Sandino's struggle places all historical agency in Nicaraguan hands and it leads away from any possible European or outside influence.

In the case of third world countries, the concepts of anti-imperialism and of the right to self-determination were and are attractive concepts not only to left-wing revolutionaries who want to change the entire structure of society, but also for those from the elite who are quite pleased with their position within their own society, as the perpetrator of most exploitative mechanisms is placed outside the country. Potential political support from the local bourgeoisie may be a factor why leading Sandinistas chose to leave out the connections to international radical movements the term had in the past, when speaking about anti-imperialism in a Nicaraguan context.

Calderón Sandino – nationalist or socialist or ?

In the many conversations I had with Nicaraguans of all types, Calderón Sandino sometimes is portrayed as having gained knowledge about radical politics through his stay in Mexico and meeting left-wing ideological groups of different types. Others deny all ideological connections to Mexico. The denial of Mexican involvement is generally assumed by those Sandinistas who put a lot of emphasis on the nationalist character of the early Sandinista movement, who prefer to focus on the nationalist aspects of Sandinista ideology.

The disagreement is part of a wider disagreement among Sandinistas today as whether Calderón Sandino was a nationalist or a socialist, and if he was a socialist explicitly or implicitly. Most Sandinistas I met who believe he was a socialist, believe he was so implicitly through his belief in anti-imperialism, having lived under very exploitative circumstances in Nicaragua and reject his alleged learning experience in the Mexican class struggle (Leiva 1982, p. 165). Part of the proof employed to defend this view is that Calderón Sandino, at one point in time, is said to have claimed land for his soldiers, to be run as cooperatives. This, they believe, gives some insight into Calderón Sandino's general view on how society should be run.

In contrast to this stands Somoza García (1976, pp. 150–151), who portrays Calderón Sandino as a communist by linking him to communist contacts in Mexico. Calderón Sandino tried in some of his letters to combine liberalism with communism and Christianity, calling Jesus of Nazareth a revolutionary and communist (Calderón Sandino, cited in Somoza García 1976, pp. 251–255). Calderón Sandino made this alleged statement without any reference to any of the greater socialist theoreticians. Some of the most well-studied of my Sandinista informants claim that the documentation of Somoza García is a falsification, yet among

Sandinistas, similar viewpoints about the character of Calderón Sandino remain present.

Fonseca Terán, who describes himself as a ‘Marxist–Leninist,’ focuses on the involvement of cadres sent by the Communist International in Calderón Sandino’s group. In addition, Fonseca Terán mentions that Calderón Sandino made an international call for workers to join the labor union associated with the Communist International (Fonseca Terán 2010a, pp. 48–49). This view is the one which makes Calderón Sandino most explicitly a socialist. It is generally agreed that Calderón Sandino was not a studied Marxist, but those who follow less prominent radical ideologies within Sandinismo, generally try to base their belief in the actions of Calderón Sandino. Carolina Icabalceta Garay, a Sandinista and history teacher in Managua, sees herself as an anarchist:

When [Calderón] Sandino worked in Mexico, in the petroleum company [...] there was a lot of presence of the labor union movement which was very influenced by the anarcho-syndicalism that came from Europe. I think [...] that the anarcho-syndicalists have greatly influenced the political left of Latin America. Yes I know that in the Sandinista party, when you speak of anarchism you receive a reaction like “argh, crazy-talk! Marx and Lenin!” I really think that’s sad, because one has to learn from all.

Icabalceta Garay did not try to say that Calderón Sandino was an anarchist, but it is clear that she thinks he must have been influenced in his political thoughts by this ideological tradition. In some of the written literature I find similar claims. Muro Rodríguez et al. (1984, p. 42) describes how Calderón Sandino encountered anarcho-syndicalists and socialists groups while working in the Mexican oil sector some years earlier. This may have provided him with direct access to the European debate on anti-imperialism and nations’ right for self-determination. Icabalceta Garay is the only one of my informants who used the precise word ‘anarchist’ to describe herself. However, this exact passage is essential for most who

claim that Calderón Sandino had a left-wing ideology of some kind. Instead of anarchism, it is generally whatever ideology they follow themselves they claim Calderón Sandino picked up in Mexico in this way. It is as close to an admission of foreign influence on the thoughts of Calderón Sandino as one can get among Sandinistas.

Some of my Nicaraguan informants claimed they adhered to the original Calderón Sandino and the vision of anti-imperialism he held, but that he did not hold the socialist views that Sandinismo later entailed, and this misrepresents Sandinismo during the time of Calderón Sandino. Some of these people today identify with the Contras. I also meet Sandinistas with this same view. These generally think the current government should act more nationalist and less socialist.

One focus point when it comes to Calderón Sandino's possible rejection of radicals, is his treatment of the El Salvadorian Marxist Farabundo Martí. Martí, according to most descriptions, fought together with Calderón Sandino against occupation of the United States. The stories diverge on how their cooperation ended. Rigo Sampson Davila, who is said to represent the right-wing of the FSLN, explained the issue to me as that once Calderón Sandino discovered Martí's Marxist belief, he told him to leave the country within a day or so. Sampson took that as proof that Calderón Sandino was not particularly fond of Marxism or socialism. Fonseca Terán (2010a, pp. 48–49) describes the situation as a product of the Mexican communist party thinking which complied with the newest party line of only working with movements who explicitly worked towards socialism, and that Calderón Sandino honored Martí upon his death in 1932, and made it clear that he never was in disagreement with the ideology of Martí. The difference in opinion on who Calderón Sandino was and how he should be classified using today's political categories seems to be present at all times in the

self-presentation of anyone who claims to be a Sandinista.

In all versions of Calderón Sandino's encounters in both Mexico and with Martí, the ultimate decision making power is portrayed as lying in the hands of Calderón Sandino and whatever may have come from outside Nicaragua only came as inspiration and a starting point for his own ideological development. Historical agency lies again with a Nicaraguan. The difference in opinion as to what ideology Calderón Sandino really held, is not reflected in the way Sandinistas generally present what Sandinismo means to them. An example of this can be seen at the start of the interview with one of the members of 'Amigos', Víctor Cienfuegos, previously a revolutionary fighter now in charge of a social club for common people in a poorer area of Managua:

I think that in order to understand Sandinismo, to understand the nationalist character of Sandinismo, one needs to understand the figure [Calderón] Sandino. One needs to know where [Calderón] Sandino came from, what Sandino fought for. Because we, the Sandinistas, follow [Calderón] Sandino. He is the base, and we also have [ideological] fathers, [like] Carlos Fonseca [Amador], who also formed Sandinismo. [...] Generally, people come who don't know the history. They come and ask us very basic, very fundamental things [...about] the spirit of Sandinismo, the nationalism of Sandinismo. [...] So we are continuing this nationalism of [Calderón] Sandino. We are not communists, not orthodox [Marxist-Leninists], nor do we have anything to do with internationalism. We are very nationalist. [Calderón] Sandino was a guy who was nationalist, who fought to give Nicaragua back to the Nicaraguans. [...]

As this passage from the interview shows, Cienfuegos seems to be irritated by the fact that foreigners do not know the real Calderón Sandino, yet his own definition of Calderón Sandino and Sandinismo is very specific and is not shared by all other Sandinistas. Observing the difference in ideas about what Sandinismo means for different Sandinistas may very well

have been what led other foreigners to ask him what it means for him in the first place. The description of Cienfuegos once more falls into the pattern of placing only Nicaraguans into the center of all attention. Possible foreign influences on Calderón Sandino or Sandinismo are not considered.

Calderón Sandino – a foreign agent?

A version of the history of Calderón Sandino not getting any attention, is one in which the concrete actions of Calderón Sandino may have been much more influenced by another country. While some Sandinistas put some focus on the ideological influence from Mexico, no Nicaraguan I have met, no matter what ideological camp, ever focuses on the possible importance of economic support for Calderón Sandino from the Mexican government. While all other aspects of Calderón Sandino receive a lot of attention, any possible connection with Mexico is at best portrayed as being of an ideological kind.

Historian Toynbee (1927–1930, pp. 21–90) argues that the main cause for Mexico considering involvement, besides the ideological support it gave to leftist groups in all of Latin America, was that Mexico could play a role it could not in conflicts with the United States at its northern border. Culture, language and geographic proximity allowed Mexico to play a much stronger role in Central America than it could at the US-Mexican border.

Some of my informants attacked Toynbee for representing a tradition of British and US American historians and for being heavily influenced by the propaganda of the governments of those countries. His book has been translated into Spanish in Nicaragua and sold as one of very few books on Nicaraguan history at one of the very few university book shops in Managua. One of my informants, a young and critical intellectual, referred to the book when I confronted him about the issue of possible Mexican financing of Calderón Sandino. I tried to

question a small group of Sandinistas in Managua with the version of the events as presented by Toynbee and it did not seem to surprise any of them.

It can be concluded that some Managua students have heard about this theory. Although they generally discuss history a lot, none of those I meet sees a point in pursuing this particular theory or ever pointing to it. Given that just about all aspects of Calderón Sandino are questioned and quite a lot of Nicaraguans strongly oppose Calderón Sandino or the Sandinismo that grew out of him, it is surprising this version of events has received so little attention. Different from all the other accounts, it would place historical agency outside the borders of Nicaragua.

The Somoza years

Sandinistas today generally see the Somozas as puppets of the United States. Somocistas focus on the difference in leadership style between the three different Somozas. According to the Somocista version, each Somoza governed and had an alliance with the United States, rather than that the United States governed through the Somozas. It is important to note here that while the Somozas were three different dictators, Somocistas are those Nicaraguans who either ideologically were and are in favor of the Somoza-regimes, those who materially benefited from it, and those who fall into both groups. Largely both groups are treated as if they were the same, although that is not always the case.

The Sandinista version of Somocismo lends little historical agency to the individual Somozas or to the United States. The actions of the Somozas are just mechanical and follow the general pattern of how empires behave. The Somocista version of events does lend much more agency to each Somoza. That is why they were free to be different in their government style. It would seem another purpose of their leadership styles was to show they were not

all-out dictatorships. In neither version is historical agency admitted to lie outside Nicaragua. Historical agency does not exist or it lies with a Nicaraguan and within the national boundaries.

First oppositional voices

Some events, such as the assassination of Somoza García, are today commemorated by Sandinistas of both the FSLN and MRS, who often claim López Pérez and the 1950s social movements represent their own beginnings. Similar to the treatment of times before Calderón Sandino, FSLN Sandinistas commemorate people who were members of other political groups in the time before the forming of the FSLN, while Nicaraguans who serve as members of these groups now, often do not celebrate them. Individual Nicaraguans and movements that went against the otherwise given order, i.e. those engaged in historical agency, are universally celebrated by the Sandinistas as part of their past.

One such date is the 23rd of July in León, when the students who were killed on July 23 1959 are commemorated in the form of a gigantic street party in downtown León. This celebration follows a number of other important celebrations in June and July, during which mainly Sandinista historical events are commemorated. The high point of these celebrations is the celebration of the triumph of the insurrection on the 19th of July. The 23rd of July is the first day when the Sandinista red-and-black can be seen less than during all the previous events.

Some disputes always seem to exist as to how these events should be commemorated. Both years I was present, the event was eventually taken over by FSLN Sandinistas who claimed the student movement was exactly about what FSLN Sandinismo stands for today. They then went and turned on the popular FSLN Sandinista music which one hears for most of the early summer.

The initiative to put less emphasis on the FSLN in such commemorating events which cannot directly be linked to the FSLN, generally comes from students connected to the MRS who claim to see a historic parallel between the Somoza dictatorship of the past and what they claim to be the José Daniel Ortega Saavedra dictatorship of the present. They claim to see a historical connection between themselves and these activists of the past.

Organising for revolutionary insurrection

It is my experience from discussing with many Sandinistas who were active in the early years that although the FSLN represented a break from the Soviet-allied Partido Socialista Nicaragüense (PSN), the influence of Marxism nevertheless could not be neglected within the FSLN. They used several concepts from Marxist terminology—most prominently ‘class war’—in their descriptions of how and why they were organising.

The emphasis on the importance of the Soviet Union in the pre-revolution years differs among Sandinistas. Very few portray it as Fonseca Amador following a new model that came from the Soviet Union. Most see it as Fonseca Amador having the historical agency and it was he who changed his strategy because he was annoyed with the previous strategy of left-wing revolutionaries, because it gave no hope to any revolutionary effort in Nicaragua. Fonseca Amador (1964) described himself as a radical and an anti-imperialist who had some respect for the Soviet Union and its achievements.

German Bravo Urbina, whose mother operated a Sandinista safe house and who was fundamental in running arms in the last period before the revolutionary triumph, according to Bayardo José Fonseca Galo (brother of Fernando Fonseca and uncle of Fonseca Icabalzeta), explains he started involving himself in Sandinista politics “because all youths were repressed, independently of whether they were actually guilty [of being active Sandinistas] or

not” Many of those who see themselves as Sandinistas today, explain they initially became opposed to the Somozas because they suppressed all youths. The repression, due to false accusations of subversive activity, led, according to their own accounts, to their getting involved in precisely such activity. According to this version of events, the reason for the revolution can be found entirely within Nicaragua and not in the Soviet Union or anywhere else.

The state under Somoza presented those organising against the government as ‘terrorists’ as one can notice when looking at old news clips. While that term is not used much any more, Somocistas today generally focus much on the amount of chaos the Sandinistas brought through their actions.

The FSLN as an underground movement

Palmer (1988, p. 93) claims that Fonseca Amador spent much of his time between founding the FSLN and his murder by the Guardia Nacional in 1976, appropriating Calderón Sandino to the Sandinista movement. As a conversation starter, I often asked informants what they thought of the idea that Calderón Sandino as known today is largely the product of Fonseca Amador. Surprisingly I received no protests when making this claim, neither from Sandinistas nor others. Some Somocistas today claim it is unknown whether Fonseca Amador’s death was due to any wrongdoings of the Somoza regime or whether the Sandinistas were complicit, either by committing the murder or by informing the Guardia Nacional of his whereabouts, in order to martyr him for the movement. Most others seem to believe the official story. Many MRS Sandinistas claim that if Fonseca Amador had survived, he would be a member of the MRS rather than the FSLN. This theory is based on the fact that Fonseca Amador had a background from the university, which most MRS Sandinistas also have. Given

his generally left-wing agenda, which the MRS abandoned, it seems rather far-fetched.

Fonseca Amador is generally portrayed as being a person of great thoughts and fundamental principles by all those seeing themselves as Sandinistas. The Sandinismo of Fonseca Amador stands in contrast to the day to day Nicaraguan politics in which horse trades of every kind are fairly common. The FSLN put Calderón Sandino, who had been displayed as an outlaw and an enemy of order in the Somoza-rhetoric (Palmer 1988; Jansen 2004), up among Ernesto ‘Che’ Guevara and other revolutionary leaders as one of the great inspirations of any revolutionary (Palmer 1988, pp. 91–92).

The tendencies that emerged in 1975 remain present today, at least unofficially, in that they represent different views of the past. Most of my informants who were politically active before 1979, can still easily be classified according to the tendency they followed then. For many of them, their tendency in this period continues to be integral in explaining how they define Sandinismo. I am able many times to correctly guess to which one they belonged.

When I interviewed Margarita Guevara Montano from Managua—another one of Fonseca Galo’s connections—she explained what the Sandinista struggle was about in the late 1970s in her view:

At that time there were masses of people who did not know how to write or how to read. But of course they had their own experiences with Nicaraguan political life. [...] And so we students took it upon ourselves to organise the popular masses; the peasants, the factory worker... most of all the factory workers. They had experiences with repression, but they lacked clarity in their political analysis. They knew they were repressed, but not why...

I guessed correctly that Guevara Montano belonged to the Tendencia Proletaria (TP).

Generally speaking, most of those who were active at that time give their own tendency a

more fundamental role in the process than the other ones. Many of those identified with the TP now claim that those from the Tendencia Tercerista (TT) had no clear class analysis, many coming from bourgeois backgrounds, and the majority of them left the FSLN in the 1990s and are now members of the MRS. When they left it was at least in part as protest against Ortega Saavedra – a former member of the TT.

Strategic alliances

A large part of Sandinismo today is the concept of strategic alliances with non-Sandinista sections of the population to achieve a concrete goal – a strategy borrowed from the TT. The criticism from abroad and from foreigners since 2006 largely centers around the alliances of the Ortega Saavedra government with right-wing political sectors. The origin of these policies of alliances must be seen in the years of the three tendencies. The TT not only cooperated with right-wing groups, but also cooperated with the PSN to form a common front, and invited other similar groups of organised laborers to do the same (Miranda, D. Ortega Saavedra, and Gorman 1979, p. 117). The three tendencies in the party made it possible to attract proletarians and peasants simultaneously, but I have never spoken to a Nicaraguan who puts much emphasis on a tendency to which he did not belong.

It struck me during many conversations, how those formerly belonging to the TP today often speak of the alliance with bourgeois sectors of society that the TT argued for, as meaning the TT itself consisted of members of the bourgeoisie. I have not been able to investigate whether this concept of what the TT stood for or consisted of has changed over time, or whether it was just always assumed if one spoke for cooperation with bourgeois sectors of society, it was because one belonged to that part of society.

Under the Sandinista in the 1980s

When speaking to non-Sandinistas about the 1980s and how the government was set up, they generally leave out the initial years with the junta and the fact that non-Sandinistas participated. Those with a background from the MRS are often, but not always, more critical towards what they claim to be an authoritarian government style. Nevertheless, both MRS and FSLN Sandinistas generally look upon this phase positively. Sandinistas generally view the elections of 1984 as being the first free elections. The next ones, in 1990s, which the FSLN lost, generally are portrayed as a choice between “an end to the war or continued freedom.” Those against the Sandinistas generally point towards the 1990 elections being the first free ones. The international context in which the decision was made to have a multi-party system is not mentioned.

Direct democracy or surveillance society?

The political scientist Hoyt (1997) who spent large amounts of time in Nicaragua in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, pointed out that Sandinista views on the role of both participatory and representative democracy underwent changes in the period before the revolutionary insurrection and up until 1990 – towards more understanding of the need for real elections at parliamentary level and towards understanding that institutions of direct democracy needed to be controlled from the bottom up and include non-Sandinistas.

According to Hoyt (1997), the Sandinistas at first saw elections for parliament as not needed, then as needed for tactical reasons and finally as a necessary part of a truly democratic society. The CDSs were used until 1988 mainly as a top-down vertical organisation to spread the politics of the Sandinista leadership, before they started to transform into more of a bottom-up organisation.

None of my informants communicated such differentiated views of the relationship between the Sandinismo of the 1980s and the question of democracy. The Comités de Defensa Sandinista (CDSs) that existed in the 1980s are described in very differing ways, yet not with an emphasis on change/development.

According to Liberals and some Sandinistas the CDSs took control of absolutely every local decision to the point where the individual could not decide anything independently. Another accusation against the CDSs is they made out an extremely tight surveillance network that would report anything its members deemed inappropriate to the government. These accusations mainly remind me of westerners speaking of the Staatssicherheit (StaSi) of the Deutsche Demokratische Republik (DDR, German Democratic Republic).

On the other hand, those who liked them explain that together with popular militias and trade unions, the CDSs made it harder to influence parts of the upper party hierarchies to fundamentally change the political course of the country during Sandinista reign, because major decisions had to be carried by a popular majority. Corrupting the upper strata of political society was how it was done in other countries where aid packages from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) were given in return for privatisations and investment access for foreign companies (Irvin 1982, p. 41). In this sense, those positive to the CDSs describe them as having been a way for the public to have a say in politics, and they in effect forced the government into more rapid implementation of already promised reforms in such areas as aid for the peasants, health, education and housing programs (Irvin 1982, p. 42).

Some of the wording both sides use when describing the CDSs is even the same. Nicaraguan informants of all types told me they functioned as the 'eyes and ears' of the revolution (Mayorga 2007), but while supporters read this as positive, those opposing it see it as a

negative. Another allegation is Marxists/Sandinistas allegedly used them to control and radicalise the revolutionary process. Sandinistas in favor of the CDSs generally see that as a heroic action which also included 'educating' the non-Sandinista members of the CDSs and the neighborhoods about the revolutionary process, while other groups see it as fundamentally undemocratic.

Whether the CDSs and the general setup of government were the result of foreign influences is not generally discussed. No-one asks why Nicaragua would adopt a government instrument from Cuba and whether the plan to do so ultimately originated in Nicaragua, in Cuba or in the Soviet Union. My Nicaraguan informants either blamed the FSLN Sandinistas for these instruments of government or credit them for it. In that way, no matter whether they are in favor of or against the setup of the government of the 1980s, historical agency is at all times placed in Nicaraguan hands.

Sandinista relations to foreign powers

The Soviet Union still holds a very central place for most of my Nicaraguan informants since its involvement with the country in the 1980s. To the Liberals among them, it serves as a scare and the FSLN Sandinistas see it as a power for good. Most MRS Sandinistas I met, did not mention the Soviet Union. I only heard two basic versions of the relationship to the Soviet Union by both Sandinistas and anti-Sandinistas. According to one version, the Sandinistas were allied with the Soviet Union the entire time. The other version claims the alliance with the Soviet Union was something certain Nicaraguan leaders decided upon right after the revolution. No emphasis is put on agency on the part of the Soviet Union and no president or important decision makers from the Soviet Union are ever mentioned. Also, it is not questioned whether the main decision concerning the possible cooperation between the two

countries could have been taken in Moscow and not Managua.

The relationship between the United States and the Sandinistas in this period is generally explained as the result of one of three: According to some MRS Sandinistas it was Ortega Saavedra who overstepped the line as to what the United States could not accept – such as first promising to not send aid to the Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (FMLN) in El Salvador and then doing just that. According to those who identify with the Contras or the Somocistas, the US government gave aid to the Contras after they had made an appeal for support and after the Sandinistas had instituted a bloody dictatorship which the United States “could no longer ignore.”

The third position can be seen in what the Sandinista Cesio Argentina García López from El Rama told me. In El Rama the Contras were somewhat stronger than in Managua and León, and he explained the reason for the confrontation between Contras and Sandinistas as: “It was the capitalist system which made us fight, poor against poor. Neither side benefited from the war.” This is much in line with how most FSLN Sandinistas portray the actions of the United States and of Contra revolutionaries. For the FSLN Sandinistas, the actions of the United States and the Contras are mechanical and go against any revolution in the third world. They are done without any consciousness (historic agency) behind it, due to a combination of world capitalism and imperialism.

In all three versions, the United States seems to lack agency, while Nicaraguans are those who changed the path of history.

Reasoning the electoral failure in 1990

The electoral failure in 1990 was internationally seen in connection with the falling apart of the

Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact. Castro Ruz (1990) tried to explain the logic of the election campaign by the Violeta Barrios Torres de Chamorro camp in 1990:

...[T]hey said to the people: the economic crisis will end, if the opposition wins, the economic embargo [by the United States] will end, if the opposition wins, large sums of money will come. In addition they added: the Sandinistas are not able to resolve the crisis; the Sandinistas will not receive help from the United States; the Sandinistas cannot continue to receive the help, the cooperation they have received hitherto from a number of socialist countries, because – they said – your friends [the political establishment of Eastern Europe] have been overthrown. (my translation, Castro Ruz 1990, p. 282).

Castro Ruz may be right that international circumstances were the most important argument to vote against the FSLN at the time. Few Nicaraguan informants talked about such external influences on the elections. The Liberals I spoke to generally saw it as a victory of democracy against antidemocratic forces, which were responsible for a war and for sending young Nicaraguans into this war during their military service. Those informants I discussed with what a Sandinista victory in 1990 might have meant, commonly held that the war might have started again. The explanation Sandinistas give for the electoral loss is generally implicit, and only when I asked directly did they say it directly. The main point given by Sandinistas seems to be that the United States was aware of the Nicaraguan people's strength and that a Liberal, more or less democratic government was the closest they could have to the direct dictatorship they really wanted.

For my Sandinista informants it seemed to be a given fact that the majority of Nicaraguans wanted Sandinista policies and only voted against the FSLN out of this fear of more war. Icabalceta Garay in her explanation was a little more complex. Instead of blaming the election results on the change in international circumstances, she explained how she and her

compatriots did not notice what the sacrifice of participation meant for many Nicaraguans at the time:

We signed up for the popular militias, we signed up for the CDSs, we signed up for the harvesting of coffee and the help that needed to be done voluntarily...many of us. We did that with a lot of love. Yes, it is true there was some institutional pressure, I think. I wasn't able to observe those who felt forced to go, there was a line to follow... Given that I went voluntarily, I didn't notice those who went without wanting to do so. Yes, there were some autocratic, dictatorial measures. I think it's hard to determine how much of this was a culture of colonialism and dictatorship which preceded us, and how much of this was the reality of war which changes everything and which is the exact opposite of development.

Icabalceta Garay accepts some collective guilt for the Sandinistas, but then rapidly defuses much of this into cultures of dictatorship and colonialism and the general logic of war. The Sandinistas are presented as a group that acts or reacts; whereas other Nicaraguan groups are seen as being part of a culture that seems to have come into being mechanically. In her case, groups outside of Nicaragua are not even mentioned. The difference between the explanation of Castro Ruz (1990), which is consistent with most European explanations, and Nicaraguan explanations is that, historical agency lies in the hands of Nicaraguans while in the international explanations events in Nicaragua are more or less dictated by worldwide developments.

Three neoliberal governments

'The 16 years of neoliberalism' and not being in power, (really closer to 17 – 1990 until 2007) are treated as a dark part of history by FSLN Sandinistas. FSLN informants do recognise at least in part distinct periods during those years. In that sense, the concrete political reality is portrayed as a combination of mechanical empire type politics from the United States

irregardless of who heads the United States, and the concrete stupidity and corruptness of the Nicaraguan in possession of the presidency at any given time.

The MRS Sandinistas point out that Humberto Ortega made sure to leave his position in 1993 with as much money as possible and that he started his business in Costa Rica. That generally gets mustered as evidence to show José Daniel Ortega Saavedra is corrupt through and through and has no principles. When I point out that they are two different people, Humberto Ortega being José Daniel Ortega Saavedra's brother, I am often reminded that other Sandinista leaders also are said to have walked out with great amounts of money after losing the 1990 elections; however, without showing what advantages José Daniel Ortega Saavedra may have gained. This is generally used to discredit the morals of FSLN Sandinistas. FSLN Sandinistas often point out that the MRS Sandinistas were still part of the party in 1990, and then claim it was really the current MRS Sandinistas who became rich during that period, and that's why they gave up on the struggle of the classes.

The term of the first neoliberal government, that of Barrios Torres de Chamorro (1990–97), generally is viewed by my Sandinista informants as a time of economic sellout, and disarming the country. Barrios Torres de Chamorro is not generally seen as having been corrupt, but people around her are seen as such. Barrios Torres de Chamorro is often accused of having sold out the Nicaraguan railway in a heartbeat and to have forgiven the debt the United States needed to pay Nicaragua as war reparations, something people from all sectors of Nicaraguan politics continue to be angry about.

The second presidency, that of José Arnoldo Alemán Lacayo (1997–2002), is generally viewed by Sandinistas as a time of outrageous corruption and further economic sellout of the

country in a way that Barrios Torres de Chamorro had not been able to accomplish. One favorite tale is that Alemán Lacayo at a party sat in a small pool with all his ministers, and relived himself into the water. He then announced that anyone who would get up, would be out of the government and everybody sat still. Whether true or not, it gives an idea of how Alemán Lacayo is perceived. Of all the figure heads of the political right, Alemán Lacayo seems to be generally respected by FSLN Sandinistas as having a 'real' following. "He represents the petty bourgeoisie, so it's better to make a deal with him than with [the banker] Montealegre," I am told at the municipal office of the FSLN León. Those views seem to be shared by many FSLN Sandinistas.

When speaking of the presidency of Enrique José Bolaños Geyer (2002–07), informants of all types focus on his helping to imprison Alemán Lacayo. He is seen as much less of an activist type and more of a laissez faire type president in that he is said to have claimed he could not do anything about power outages in major population centers. Although the influence of the United States is acknowledged, no similar focus is paid to the difference between the presidencies of Bush Sr., Clinton and Bush Jr. The actions of the United States generally are portrayed as being the same at all times and not the result of historical agency. The fact that the United States chose to support a dictatorship up until 1979, and after 1990, a series of formally "democratically" elected presidents with a very different record on human rights issues receives little attention. Such a focus could be seen as lending historical agency to individual factors outside of Nicaragua.

The FSLN out of power(?)

For many Sandinistas, their strategy of continuing to exert some power despite having lost the elections seems to have been legitimate in that they feel the country was hijacked by the

political right and under the control of the empire. Others seem to be rather irritated by this intervention on the part of the Sandinistas. The Sandinistas are criticised for their strategy during their time in opposition as having undermined the democratic rule of law. The criticism comes from the current Liberal opposition and is reported in much of the right-wing media. This criticism is also heard from Liberals in the streets. “In Nicaragua it’s always the Sandinistas who govern,” one anti-Sandinista taxi driver told me, “If they don’t govern from above, they govern from below. Be sure to write that in your book!” The difference in views can be seen as being based upon two different views in concern to agency. While Sandinistas see the period as lacking historical agency if it were not for their actions, Liberals see this as the period in which they legitimately were to govern and the interference by Sandinistas was uncalled for.

Governing without a majority

FSLN Sandinistas generally portray the whole liberal-democratic setup as being foreign to Nicaragua and the third world in general, and nothing more than a way for the United States to ensure continued oppression of Nicaraguans. According to them, it took 16 years to understand how to work the system, so the political right in the end had no other choice but to hand power back to them. They believe all election results when the Liberals were in charge to be fraudulent. Some FSLN Sandinistas use that to explain how they could score below 50%. Another very common explanation for why it is acceptable to govern against a majority in parliament from FSLN Sandinistas comes from Rigoberto Irurzum Alonso Moreno, a Managua friend of Fonseca Icabalzeta from university, who is not a member of any political party, yet counts himself as Sandinista:

There is no opposition in Nicaragua that wants the best for the country. [...] 40% are Sandinistas. The other 60% had 16 years to fix this country, and they could not manage to do it. So now it's our time to try again.

FSLN Sandinistas, with their explanations, put an emphasis on the need to take historical agency upon themselves. The appearance of Venezuela on the international stage as a means of financing another Sandinista experiment of state power does not receive much attention. Explanations are sought only within Nicaragua, even though FSLN connections to Venezuela are well-known.

The two groups who emphasise change between the 1980s and now are the MRS Sandinistas and the Contras. The Contras generally approve of the current government and disapproved of the old one, and the MRS Sandinistas feel the opposite. The Contras now generally explain that the Liberals in the 1990s did not help them in any way, and it is only now with the current FSLN government their voice is heard. Sometimes it is explained that Ortega Saavedra finally understood how to listen, other times they admit it was they who finally understood their real friends. Noticeably absent from both MRS and Contra explanations as to what the difference between the 1980s and now constitutes foreign powers such as the United States, Venezuela and the Soviet Union. When a Liberal or a MRS Sandinista does focus on Venezuela, it seems to be a portrayal very similar to that which the Sandinistas have of the United States: An empire that acts mechanically. The historical agency and choice to follow Venezuela lies under all circumstances with Ortega Saavedra and other Nicaraguans and not with Hugo Chavez or other Venezuelans.

Problems understanding the discussion of Nicaraguan history

Some readers may argue that Liberals, Conservatives, Somocistas and Contras are not fundamentally different groups. It seems easy to cross from one to the other. Historically they are somewhat distinct (Hüeck 2006, p. 9), and in my experience people classify themselves as belonging to one of them specifically rather than to a mix of all of them. It seems it has more to do with their personal preferences of what they like to be identified with rather than with any clear ideological distinctions.

Calderón Sandino and the FSLN up until 1979 are generally presented as individualists and makers of history, while the general populace is left out. After 1979, there is more focus on the collective involvement, rather than the involvement of single individuals. The extent to which the FSLN changed its policies according to popular demand are not mentioned. This is not by accident. When talking to people who experienced the time from before 1979 until now, it is very common for them to tell how they first started their involvement in the movement, then what they did at the precise time of the insurrection and maybe what their own position was in the 1980s. After that, their own persona tends to get lost and I am presented with a general history of the country – “We lost. Then Violeta Chamorro...”. For some, this collective history sets in right after insurrection, while others focus on their own lives during the 1980s. Any distinction between self and Sandinista state seems to be nonexistent in their explanations. For many, this likely has to do with their personal experience being intensely negative or positive. For others, it may be seeing themselves as being of little importance in comparison to what happened around them.

More confusion lies in the fact that several of the main historical actors also figure as

historians who publish written material, mostly on periods preceding their own time. This underlines the importance generally given to historical descriptions, and I have found it confusing to try to find out when an explanation is part of political argument in the present for a certain cause and when it is the most objective description a certain political actor manages to produce.

The material presented here may at times resemble a patchwork of very different ways of citing historical accounts. That is mainly due to the different nature of the sources. Some points or accounts are the same or very similar and I have heard certain points made many times by Nicaraguans who declare themselves to belong to some certain faction. Usually the setting for gathering this type of information were informal interviews, i.e. when sitting in a public bus, sharing a cab or just randomly being approached by unknown Nicaraguans in the street who felt they needed to explain 'historical facts' to me. I have included most of that material in a generalised form. Other points I first heard in this manner, before I decide to investigate further by asking more questions in the same direction to members of the same faction or approaching those from another faction with it, to hear their reaction. The next time I confront someone from the first faction with that reaction to get a counter-reaction, etc. Many of these accounts are described with a particularly concise answer which I felt beneficial to the reader.

Other types of data contain written accounts, which are cited according to common citation standards. It is not to be understood that these written accounts represent the real and objective history, while the spoken accounts represent an imperfect and partisan account. Both types are really of the same quality, and I have treated the material similarly. In addition

to what is discussed within Nicaraguan society, I have in some cases included material which goes beyond the explanations given by Nicaraguans in order to show what alternative accounts of the same phenomenon could be given if Nicaraguan agency were not prioritised. Terms such as 'Liberal,' 'socialist,' 'Conservative' and 'anarchist' are used by my informants and within Nicaraguan society and they are not always used in the same way, I chose not to use these same terms to try to classify informants, historical actors or ideologies. I use broader categories such as 'left-wing' and 'right-wing' to describe some informants who I believe need to be classified further within the Sandinista movement.

Concluding remarks

The internal power structure and implementation of democracy and participative ways available to the population have been common problems for revolutionary movements that drifted away from their original path. The exception of the former might exactly have been Nicaragua, as the loss of the FSLN in the 1990 elections showed. After all, the red-and-black of the Sandinista flag does represent anarchism in many parts of the world, but the question of popular participation in the actual decision making process was an essential issue in Nicaragua. The acceptance of a popular majority may have been the main reason why the Sandinista movement was not discredited completely after the fall of the Soviet Union the way many similar movements fared. It is likely one important cause of different accepted versions of history being present in Nicaragua.

Much in the same way that the FSLN taught about Calderón Sandino in the 1980s and also again does currently, under the regime of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) from 1946-2000²⁰ in Mexico, Mexican schools taught about the Mexican revolutionary Emilio

²⁰ The party operated under other names since 1929.

Zapato (Gilbert 2003) to justify the Mexican government's current political line (Gilbert 1997).

The PRI is seen by much of the left as a party that may have been socialist once, but by the time of their electoral defeat had degenerated and just clung to an image of revolutionary icons while having lost much of the meaning behind them. Icabalceta Garay made the same connection:

Sometimes I think—as a Sandinista it hurts me—I feel like the PRI – the Mexican revolutionary party. It hurts so much, but yes I know there are ugly things, bad things that happen.

The difference between Nicaragua and Mexico is that in Nicaragua it is not only the FSLN that follows this pattern of transferring all historical agency to Nicaragua and Nicaraguans, it also holds true for all other Nicaraguan parties. As we have seen, Sandinistas today focus very little on the financing Calderón Sandino may have received from Mexico. The Frente de Liberación Nacional (FLN)/FSLN 1961–90 quite clearly followed that strategy and was financed by Eastern Europe and Cuba. They are viewed as acting completely on their own and without any links to these powers. Similarly, the Somocistas see the Somozas as acting on their own without any US influence, and the Contras see their actions as rather unrelated to decisions made by Washington. The same holds true with the Liberals for their time in office. Even when a foreign power is mentioned as having provided resources or troops, it is qualified with a story on why some Nicaraguan individual or group convinced them to do so. Lancaster (1988, p. 46) saw the ultimate base for Nicaraguan revolutionary consciousness of the 1980s—through the local version of liberation theology—to lie in Nicaraguan traditions and history and the foreign revolutionary concepts and theories employed would

consequently be removed from the context of their original (foreign) origin. My field data from the current period seems to show the opposite: A pattern that can be seen throughout the entire current presentation of Nicaraguan history is the absence of agency on the part of foreign powers. All parts of history are universally attributed to Nicaraguan actors. Even when a foreign power is clearly involved, it does so because a Nicaraguan actor has mobilised it to do so, according to the thinking of Nicaraguans. In other examples, agency is transferred to individual revolutionary leaders in tales of a revolution at a later stage when the revolution is taken as part of a nation building project under much more institutionalised conditions than those the revolutionaries lived under.

There may have been a shift in Nicaraguan in the period between the two studies, which may account for the difference in conclusion. Marx, Lenin and other non-Latin American thinkers seem to be studied less than before. Another part of the explanation may be the difference in perspective: While Lancaster seems to look at the roots of the Nicaraguan situation almost purely in terms of the consciousness/opinions of Nicaraguans, I also look at material factors that restricted or permitted what options were available.

Chapter 8

Perceptions and expectations of economic development

In this chapter we will look at the Nicaraguan perceptions of economic realities and ways of judging different regimes of the past in view of the economic reality of those times. Although views differ, the economics stands quite separate from the views on politics previously looked at, which is why it needs to be treated separately.

The fact that Nicaraguan economic policies followed international patterns is not always acknowledged by all Nicaraguans. My informants tended to put more emphasis on the wishes and views of the Nicaraguan government at the time than on international trends. At the same time as we have seen, Nicaragua does switch between different theories for how development can be achieved more so than other countries, and it can be argued that this switch is the result of decisions made mainly by Nicaraguans and not foreign powers.

Most foreigners I met initially think when arriving in Nicaragua that all Sandinistas are in favor of a Soviet-style command economy and all Liberals favor laissez faire style capitalism.

Nicaraguan reality is much more complex, and most Nicaraguans seem to favor at least some state intervention and some level of decentralised decision making on issues relating to economics. As part of this chapter, I show how Nicaraguans use very different criteria for judging the success of the three governments. The Sandinistas of the 1980s are judged by where their policies could have led, had foreign intervention ceased and the Sandinistas not lost the 1990 elections. The Somozas and Liberals are instead judged by what the economic reality for Nicaraguans was during the time they were in power.

While the discussion on political history showed us how in many aspects Sandinistas and

other groups legitimise themselves through their historic past, in the aspect of economic policies, Sandinismo stands out in that it is legitimised through possible improvements in the future, rather than the past or the present. In order to demonstrate this difference, it is necessary to look at both the actual economic realities of the different regimes Nicaragua has lived and compare it with how Nicaraguans talk about economic aspects of different times. The theoretical underpinnings of the Sandinista ideology of Dependency Theory are, as we have seen in the previous chapter, of importance to their understanding of history and they are important in relation to economics when comparing to actual economic situation that existed in the 1980s as they show how far off target the country actually moved. We will come back to the Sandinista preference for Dependency theory when discussing relations to Eastern Europe in a later chapter. It is also important to understand the difference between this and other theories of development in order to understand the differences in economic policies and differences in expectancies and ways of judging other governments that have existed in Nicaragua.

In the first part of this chapter, I outline the international discourse about development on a world scale since the Second World War. In the second part, I focus on how the economic situation of Nicaragua and its government's economic policies changed between the Somoza government until today. I also show what theories were employed when creating these policies. In the fourth part, I look at the differences in how Nicaraguans judge the different historic periods and the governments that stood and stand behind the economic policies.

The research for this chapter mainly took place among Sandinista professionals and ministry

workers and the founders of the organisation 'Amigos.' These groups were happy to engage in discussions about economic policy in the past, and the professionals who were still working were the most interested in relating it to the current government and what possibilities exist today. Both groups discussed it at a very theoretical level. They helped me find important Nicaraguan literature on the subject. This help does not show in terms of quotes as much as coherence in my presentation. I would have to read about a particular fact many times and then discuss it with informants before I would understand whether it is generally seen as important.

Popular ideas about economic realities and models of the past

The difference in economic policies between the different governments over the past decades is a major point of political controversy in today's Nicaragua. Very few seem to believe it possible to return to the economic policies of Zelaya López, but the late Somoza years, the Sandinismo of the 1980s, and the policies of the subsequent Liberal governments, all seem to be seen as offering possible policies for future governments in the view of most Nicaraguans. Simultaneously, most of my informants judged the economic policies of a given historic period rather independently of their own political affiliation. The criteria used to judge the Somozas and the Liberal governments is very different from the criteria by which most Nicaraguans judge the Sandinista government of the 1980s. I think it is important to look at some common judgments about the last one or two decades of Somoza government and the years since, in order to understand how Nicaraguans evaluate the economic realities and policies of these times.

The 1970s

Today, a surprising number of Nicaraguans want to go back to how things were in the 1970s. I found this opinion primarily among urban elites. These Nicaraguans generally want someone to be put in charge as president who tries to re-implement all the economic policies and follow the same plans of development the Somoza regime of the time used. Their argument is that economically everybody was better off before the revolution. “Back then, everybody who wanted to work to make money did make money,” my second host in León explained to me once. She owns a large downtown house and her family operated several buses during the times of Somoza. The defense of the Somoza times does not focus on political freedoms or the amount of capital created by foreign companies due to their economic activities in Nicaragua, but rather on the total amount of money accessible at the time. Somocistas seem not to focus upon the fact that opportunities to create wealth were extremely unevenly distributed.²¹ Another aspect they tend to leave out is the earthquake in Managua in 1972, the bombarding of cities at the time of the Sandinista insurrection, and the Contra-war which all greatly contributed to the loss of wealth, and for which the Sandinistas cannot be held responsible.

Those Nicaraguans in favor of the revolutionary insurrection of 1979 focused on how Fonseca Amador’s plans would change Nicaragua as well as the exploitative aspects of the Somoza era and end the unequal distribution of wealth of that time. They did not talk about how the overall amount of wealth present in Nicaragua at that time may have been greater than now. None of the Nicaraguans I talked to seemed to wonder how Somoza’s economic plans would have developed, had they been allowed to continue. When talking about the economics of

²¹ Whether opportunities in reality were less evenly distributed, is something I have arrived at purely by letting myself be convinced by the majority of my informants. To my knowledge the Somozas recorded no data on economic inequality.

Somoza, Nicaraguans describe what concrete economic realities were at the time of Somoza. I never heard anyone claiming Somoza's policies, had they been extended for another few decades, would have led to better welfare and prosperity for a greater share of the population or that they would have let Nicaraguan business owners enjoy increasingly greater returns.

The 1980s

The 1980s economic history seems to be largely simplified by both Sandinistas and Liberals. Liberals often claimed that the land reforms of Sandinistas scared away all owners of capital. Some Sandinistas claim that all lands were redistributed to the land workers, while others claim it was something in-between. The various political acts which still left three quarters of agricultural production under private control and were not portrayed as particularly communist/socialist. Some of those Sandinistas who had studied political theory pointed out that transition periods of nationalisations are necessary when socialists come to power.

A few professional Sandinistas, who realise that socialism in much of Eastern Europe was less popular than Sandinismo in Nicaragua, portrayed this as a virtue of Sandinismo. The Sandinista Fernando Fonseca explained how he believed Nicaragua in the 1980s was different from its East European allies as part of an explanation of why it made sense to work for the return to power during the 1990s, when the 'real socialism' of Eastern Europe had disappeared:

Yes, we did use Marxism, but we used it as a method to analyse reality. [...] We never gave up on Christianity. We took that in. Here, we never did away with private business. On the contrary, we said that Nicaragua would be a mixed economy.

According to most theories by Sandinistas I have come across written in the 1980s,

Nicaragua followed a development path which eventually would lead to a more prosperous society for all. According to these, complete nationalisation of all oligarchy property may have been planned at a later stage, when the country would be ready for it. At the same time several Sandinistas told me things such as: “It has to be recognised that the Grupo Pellas stayed during the entire period.” This seems to show they were unaware of the nationalisations of Grupo Pellas property in the late 1980s. Such statements were mostly made by those Sandinistas who emphasised the nationalist aspect of Sandinismo.

Most Sandinistas saw the economic involvement of the United States and the meddling in Nicaraguan politics of the US government as through-and-through evil and directly opposed to the plans of the Sandinistas and the interests of the Nicaraguan people. The economic aid the Carter regime gave in the very beginning was not considered by any of my informants, independently of political views. The differences between Carter and Reagan were also never discussed. The actions of the United States seemed to be seen as mechanically linked to its role as an empire and not as the result of any decisions by individual people. The fact the worsening of terms for loans to the third world happened globally to allies of both the Soviet Union and the United States, was also not considered by any of my informants.

Inflation rate for consumer goods

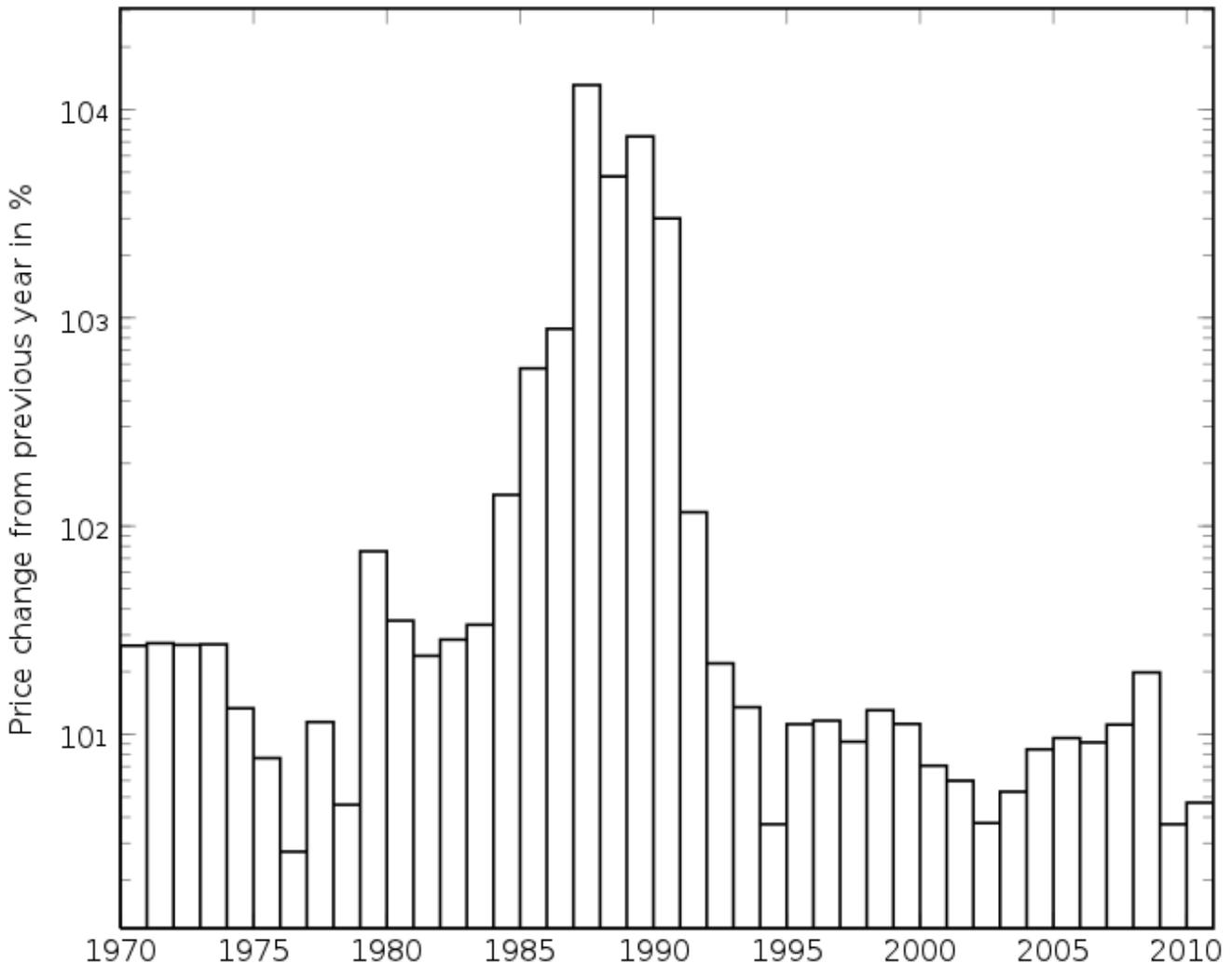


Illustration 9: Inflation rates were more stable in the Somoza and Liberal years than in the Sandinista years in the 1980s, reaching 13109.5% in 1987. Also during the second Sandinista period, the years 2007 (11.127%) and 2008 (19.826%) showed the highest inflation rates within a decade. “Due to political and economic events (civil war and hyperinflation), data [after 1979 and] prior to 1995 are less reliable.” (IMF 2010). The two databases of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) do not agree on inflation rates for several of the years in this period. Data from the 2010 database has been given preference over those from 2000. Source: IMF (2000); IMF (2010); CIA (2011b)

Due to the Cold War, some Nicaraguans from both political camps argue the radical policies eventually adopted were mostly due to external pressure from trading partners in Eastern Europe, rather than any internal ideology. In that sense, it is difficult to determine whether the

use of Dependency Theory was central due to the will of the Sandinistas, or because this was expected by the Eastern European governments they dealt with. Most Sandinista informants who spoke about their own involvement and experiences since the time of Somoza left out the late 1980s or just mentioned them in general terms, stating what happened to the country rather than to themselves. Carolina Icabalceta Garay was one of very few Sandinistas willing to mention the economic problems of the late 1980s and how these were felt at the time:

...It was quite hard. It was not only a war, but also an economic embargo which meant that certain measures were taken, such as the condensing of the state apparatus, which meant letting thousands of people go. If there was a source of employment in Nicaragua, it was the state. It was always the state who maintained the people and kept them busy. Obviously when they let people go that means there are things happening in the economic sphere that are very serious.

Now we from the popular classes and those with some... let's just say: level of culture, didn't feel that the 3000% inflation hurt us much. We felt, that we were always reimbursed every week and it was only hard to manage so many bills. Other than that, however... Maybe it's because we didn't have a culture of economics, knowledge of economics – it had been negated: about how a budget works or that what was happening wasn't good.

We didn't feel alarmed by it. There were so many things to do – the health campaign, the vaccination campaign, campaign for cleaning up, the campaign to plant trees... All that we liked and were very animated to do. We were many who just didn't feel like getting into the structure [of state or party], because we felt there were certain people who wanted their position of power there. Many of us simply wanted to do things.

Serafín García Torres is a friend of Bayardo José Fonseca Galo, the brother-in-law of Icabalceta Garay, from the days of the revolution. When I interviewed him, he described it as one of the initial tasks of his group before the revolution to go out into the countryside of

Nandaime²² and explain to the population, they were fighting for an agrarian reform to empower the poor. García Torres then went on to explain:

It is a historic conquest. And it continues to be a struggle today, because the revolution did not manage to achieve this goal and for other reasons – the economic situation, and the war – it didn't permit us to develop an agricultural reform that would permit the Nicaraguan citizen, the poor, to be a fundamental part of the economic and social development of the country.

Lancaster (1992, p. 284) reported a marked shift in the views of Nicaraguan prospects of most of his informants became significantly more pessimistic between 1984 and 1988, with hyper-inflation being a significant reason. I have not heard any histories of personal hardship due to the inflation from either Liberals or Sandinistas is significant.

I have often heard, the land redistributions and social policies were meant to benefit the populace immediately, and it was due to factors outside the control of the Sandinista government, especially the war, that made this impossible. The difference between dreams and reality in the 1980s is considered by many Sandinistas today. "See, in the first phase of the revolution we had war," one informant told me, "In wartime you cannot plan anything. Now in this second phase, the war is gone, and we finally get a chance to do something."

Sandinista informants generally blamed the blockade and war perpetrated by the United States for all the problems of the time. Most Sandinistas pointed out that the Contras destroyed crops and infrastructure, and this was a major detrimental factor for the economy. They believed it would have been much easier to turn the economy around without the war and that the economic problems would eventually have vanished. Sandinista informants often speculated on how their policies would have continued, and they seemed to believe that

²² Nandaime is a small village situated in the departamento Granada.

eventually all the problems the government faced would have been resolved had the same politics continued.

Some informants opposed to the Sandinistas did not focus on blaming the Sandinistas for where the country was economically at during the 1980s, but rather for where they allegedly were going to lead the country – some kind of central economy with no freedom for the individual. Other anti-FSLN informants blamed the FSLN for corruption of their own principles – that they were about to establish a system quite different from what they had initially promised.

No matter whether the story was told by Sandinista or Liberals, the economic problems that did exist do not seem to count much against the Sandinistas. The Sandinistas seem to be judged more by their plans or where things would eventually end up, rather than the reality of their accomplishments. In a sense, this has a certain similarity to the form of Rostow's phase model and several other non-socialist theories of development: The economic welfare of the masses is seemingly the focus of economic policies. Yet, it is assumed by these theories that improvements in overall living standards are not achievable in the short term and a phase of economic hardship, which temporarily may even worsen the individual's position, is necessary before an improvement will be possible.

The transition from power

Some Sandinista informants interpreted the Piñata as the government trying to bring at least parts of the dream of the future into the present. Informants opposed to the FSLN generally talked about the piñata as proof of massive corruption within the FSLN. None of those opposed to the Piñata discussed whether the incoming non-Sandinista government should have reversed the Piñata based on moral considerations of justice. This is quite different from

the moralistic judgments often passed upon the actions or inactions of the FSLN during the 1980s.

Gross Domestic Product per Capita

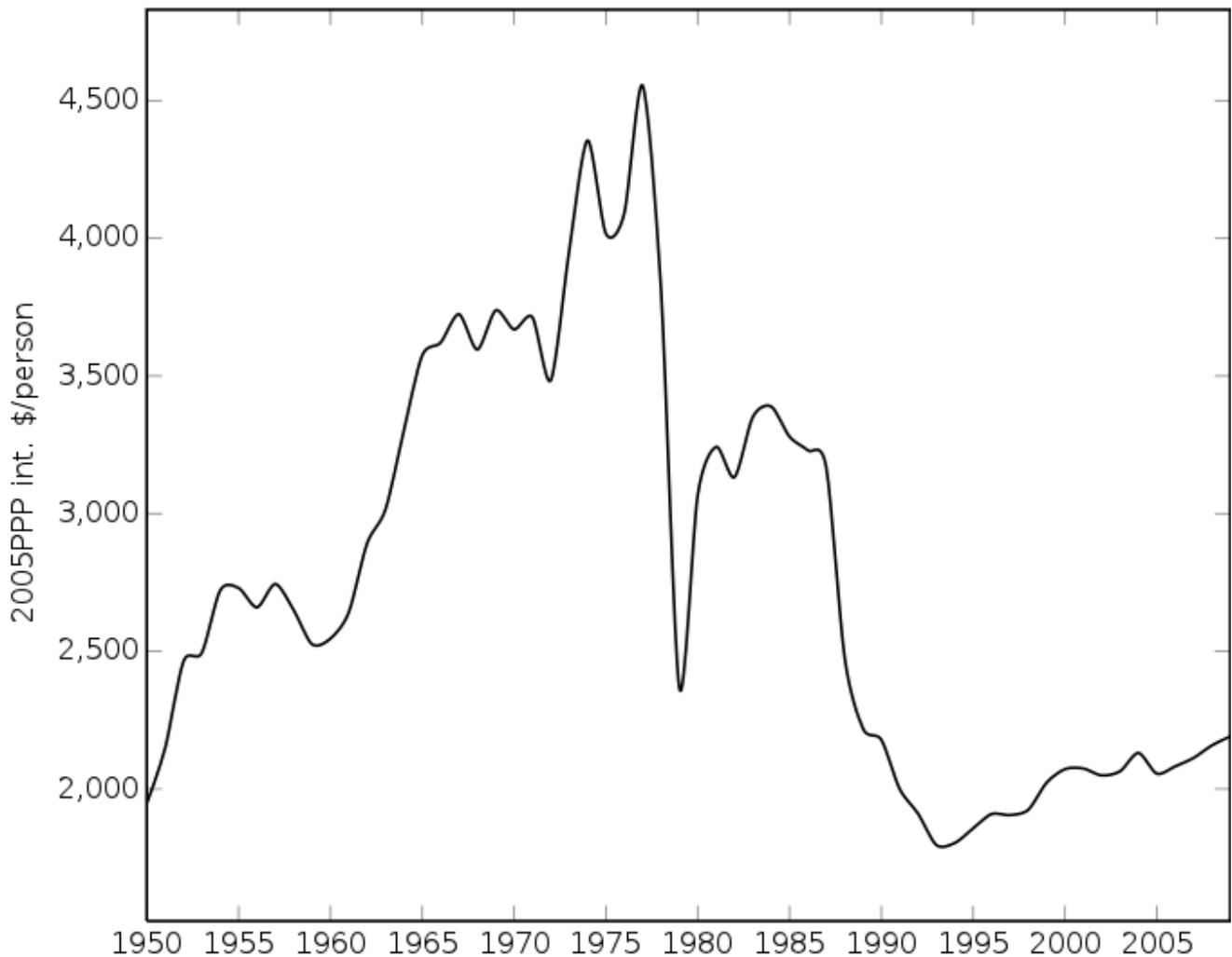


Illustration 10: The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per Capita rose for most of the period from 1950 until the revolutionary insurrection of 1979, with cyclical downturns in 1958–59 and 1968 and drastic downturns in 1975–76 and 1978–79 which likely were caused at least in part by the fights between Guardia Nacional and Sandinistas. In the period 1950–77, GDP grew at an average of 5.0% a year. GDP rose again 1979–84, although it only reached 3/4 of the 1977 level. 1985–90 it fell again drastically until it had reached just 48% of the 1977 level. The Liberal governments stabilized GDP with a moderate increase of 1993–2004 of 1.7%, but did not manage to increase it overall as GDP fell in 1990–93 and 2004–06. In 2006, GDP was under the 1951 level. GDP has been rising again during the current Sandinista government again at an average 1.7% a year. The Gross National Income (GNI) per Capita which is used by many newer data sources closely follows the development of the GDP in the case of Nicaragua (WB 2011c). The figures presented here do not seem to be accepted universally. Large discrepancies were noticed in comparison with other data sources, some of which showed up to a 300% overall increase in GDP in the period 1960–2009. The data source chosen here is the only data source that includes the full data range from 1950 to 2009. Source: Heston, Summers, and Aten (2011)

The 1990s–2007

Some informants looked back at the period between 1990 and 2007 as a period of economic opportunities. This was a small group which able to build up business during this period. Most of them in opposition, but also a few Sandinistas saw it this way. It was easier to find Nicaraguans with a positive opinion of the economic policies of Somoza than of the Liberal regimes after the Sandinistas, even though it was a formally democratic period. Largely this seemed to have to do with the slow (but overall positive) economic development according to several indicators during this period. One typical subject just about all informants seemed to agree on was that the Unión Fenosa, S.A. operation of the Nicaraguan electricity net was scandalous. All of those I spoke to agreed that the privatisation of 2000 was wrong and that Ortega Saavedra did not go far enough in his re-nationalisation.

No Nicaraguan I met fantasised about some better future that may have come if only the economic plans of the Liberals had they been allowed to continue without interruption. This period was judged differently than the Sandinismo of the 1980s. It seems that while some Nicaraguans wish to revive the Liberal party as a stronger political force, the economic part of their time in government hardly finds any proponents, even though economically this period was more prosperous than the war-torn 1980s.

As the above example of opinions of the Unión Fenosa, S.A. well illustrates, most had an issue with the development model used at the time: The neo-liberal model. Among my informants I could not find any proponents of this model. Many seemed to define it as just the lack of a development model, while others saw it as having failed. Particularly Sandinista informants often portrayed the access given to multi-national companies as a type of corruption on the part of Nicaraguan political leaders.

Gini coefficient for families

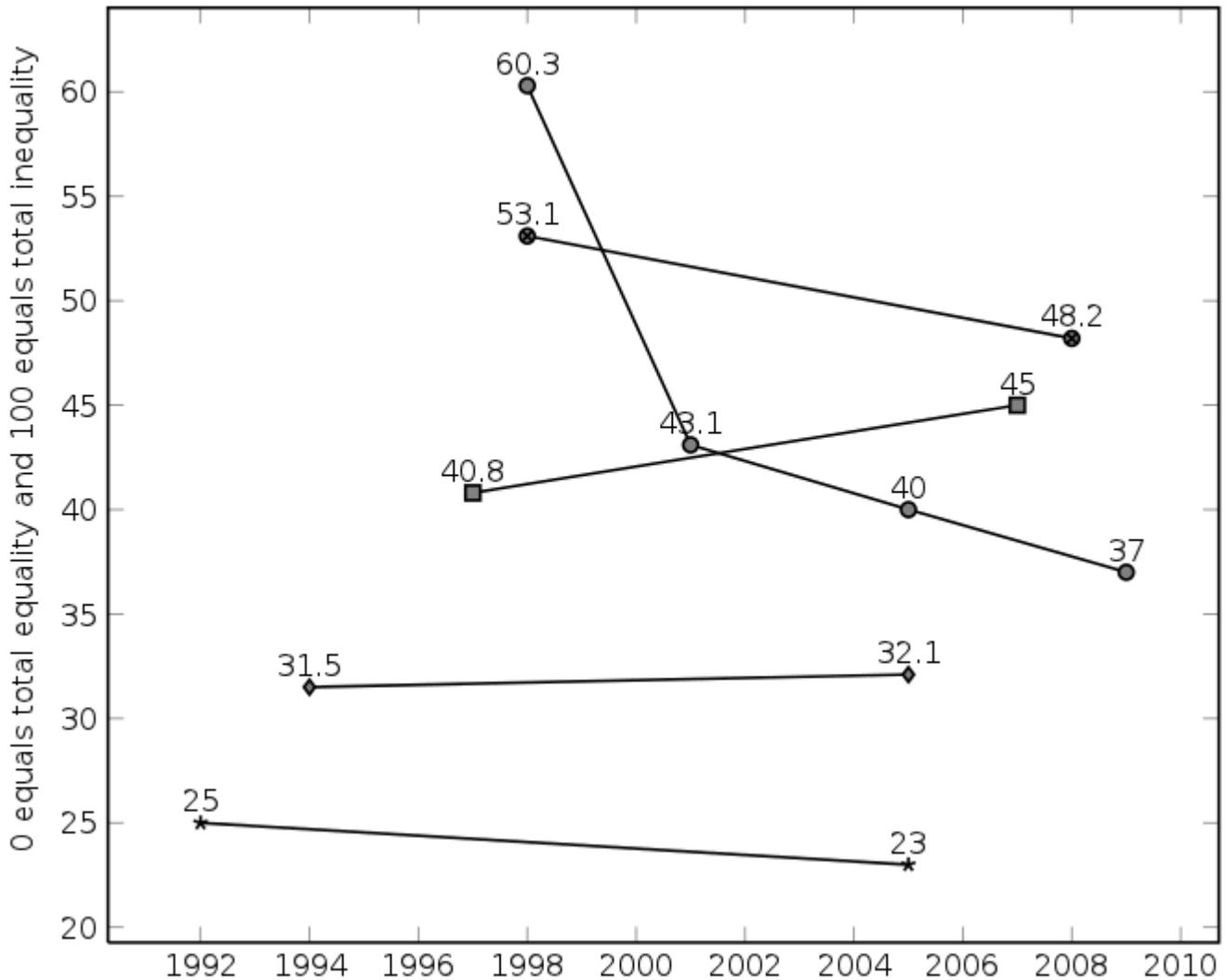
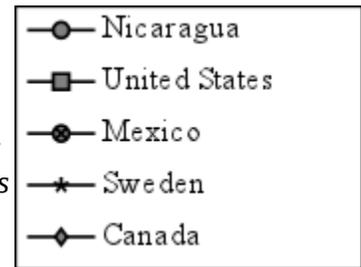


Illustration 11: Even though Liberal economic policies are seen as unconcerned with the poor, official figures show that economic differences between rich and poor have been diminishing, similar to Mexico and opposite to what has happened in the United States. One explanation for this could be that the governments indeed were successful in promoting the cause of the poorest. Other plausible explanations could be, that the figures have been manipulated before publication, that the rich have discovered more ways of hiding their money efficiently, and that Nicaraguan capital lost in the struggle with multinational, foreign-owned companies. None of those I talked to knowledgeable about this type of analysis were confident in their explanation of how this could have happened. Source: CIA (2011a); Fundación Internacional para el Desafío Económico Global (2009)



The current FSLN government

When the second Ortega Saavedra government took office, many Sandinistas explained that they hoped for the return of some of the economic policies of the 1980s, but that expectations were somewhat limited, because when the position of mayor of Managua was won by the Sandinista candidate Herty Lewites in 2000, it did not bring with it leftist economic reforms. After the Sandinistas had regained national power, party officials emphasised that the system about to be created would focus not only on the material well-being, but equally on spiritual satisfaction without any loss of freedom of expression (Fonseca Terán 2009a). As some saw it similar to Vargas (2006, pp. 85–86), the neoliberal development model had been made compatible with Sandinismo, while a few Sandinista informants expected to switch to another development model.

Unemployment rate

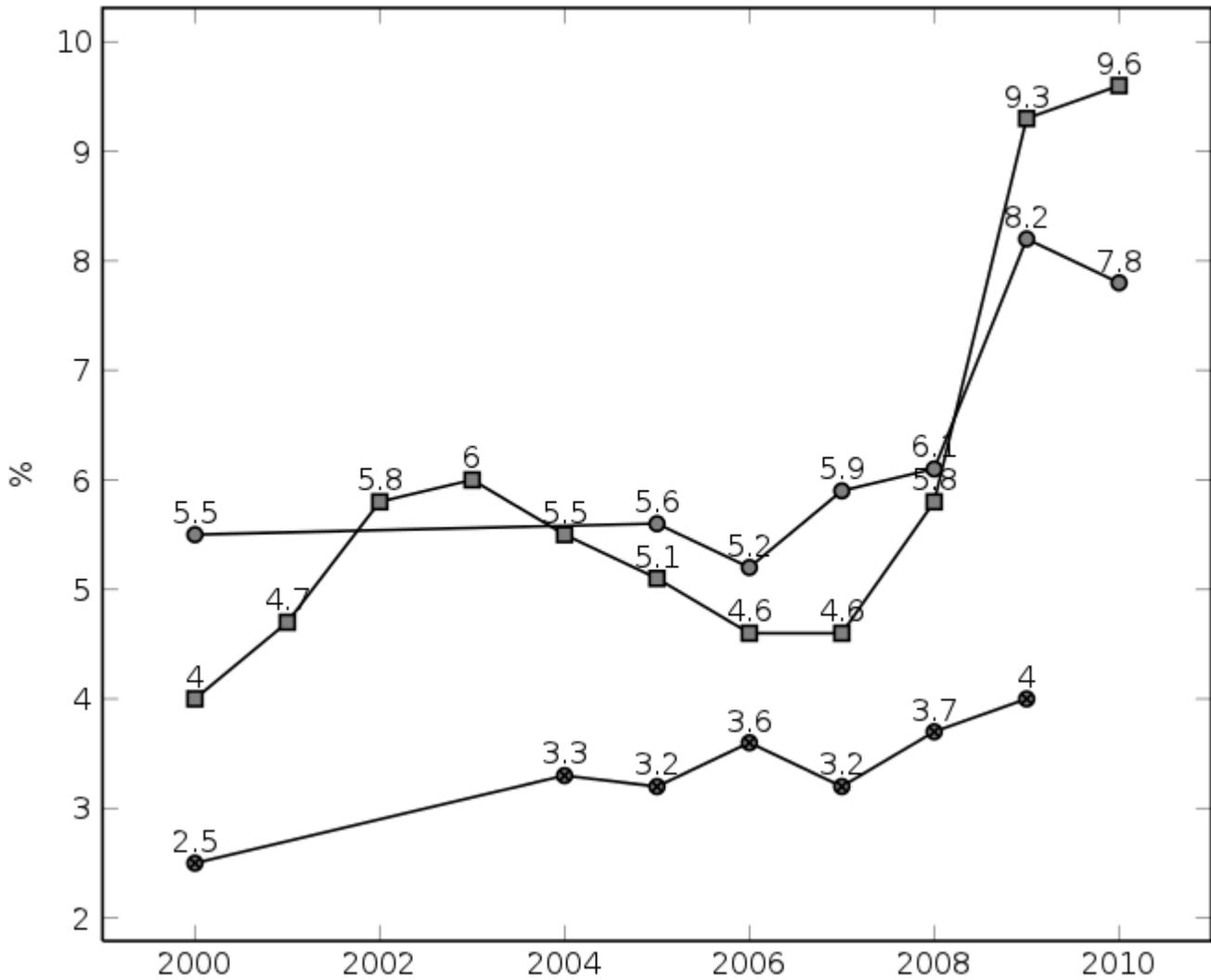
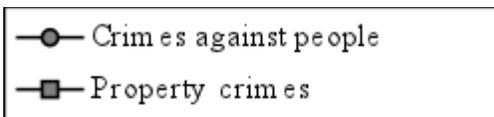


Illustration 12: The government of José Daniel Ortega Saavedra has to deal with higher official unemployment figures than its predecessors. The problem is global. It touches countries such as Mexico and the United States during these years. The 2010 figure for Nicaragua is based on the average of a new monthly survey, whereas the older figures were based on annual more general surveys. Both in the case of Mexico and Nicaragua and to some extent also in the United States, underemployment rates are large. Therefore, unemployment rates say little about whether most people are working or not and cannot necessarily be compared meaningfully between countries. Nevertheless, the curves of these graphs are similar when including various types of underemployment and give a somewhat accurate picture of developments within each country. Source: BCN (2007); BCN (2009); BCN (2011); BLS (2011); IM (2010)



The attitude that state-intervention could not go back to the level it had been at during the 1980s was widespread. “See, we have already had an agrarian reform,” one Sandinista told me, explaining why it was not possible to once more redistribute lands. Many informants believed that conventions with the IMF prohibit any further land redistributions.

Nevertheless, most Sandinistas had some hope for change, and explained the programs Hambre Cero and Usura Cero to me, and portrayed them as positive measures. Even though poverty levels had not changed much since they were put in place, many FSLN Sandinistas expect this to change in the future. “Nicaragua will be a very different country,” I was told more than once in relation to these programs. Those Sandinista informants who spoke about it, mostly hoped for the state to buy portions of lands that could then be distributed among those without land. Most FSLN Sandinistas realised some type of wider land distribution was needed, if the goal was for the poorest sectors of society to benefit from Hambre Cero, because the minimum requirement for participation in Hambre Cero of owning 0.7 hectares of land. Without this land ownership, they would never be eligible to participate and advance, it was argued.

Some felt the need to explain that a change had taken place, even though there was no immediate visible effect in terms of dramatically increasing living standards of any group. Their general claim was Ortega Saavedra’s policies were preventing a worse scenario. The exact effect cannot be measured because it is impossible to know how bad a crisis otherwise would have been. Their claims followed much along the lines of Fonseca Terán (2007) in claiming that subsidies given for public transport in 2007 would have been unsustainable if not for the arrival of Venezuelan oil and according to Albanisa officials, who claimed the price hike in 2007 would have been around 16–18%, instead of 9%, if prices were not subsidised

(Rogers 2007).

Hidden criticism came from the side of Sandinistas who were working for more radical reforms. Fonseca Terán (2008a) clearly not speaking in name of the party as a whole, continued to argue that Nicaraguan capitalism should be replaced by a Cuban style socialist economy. Such a system he distinguishes from a social-democracy where capitalism continued to exist and in which only gains are redistributed at a higher rate. He portrayed the ALBA as a stepping stone in that direction.

Those who saw Sandinismo as a socialist ideology, always saw this as a project of the future and not something to be implemented right away. At times this project stood in contradiction with the day-to-day policies of the party. This shows in an underlying debate on what to do with the ultra rich. Even though Ortega Saavedra officially pronounces support for the Pellas family, 'the oligarchy' is a term frequently used by Sandinistas today to describe their enemy. At the celebrations on 19 July 2008, banners with slogans such as "Our enemy is the oligarchy" were evident. Such banners may at the time mainly be targeted at the Montealegre family and Eduardo Montealegre's bid for the presidency or any other political office. No Sandinista I found said openly that the properties of the Pellas or Montealegres should be nationalised immediately. All the Sandinistas I spoke to seemed in some way to accept such a contradiction which would lie in the proclamation of socialism in combination with the continued existence of such oligarchy groups.

In economic relations with other countries, there is a discrepancy between currently existing trade flow and of what Sandinistas talked, and what is to happen in the future. While the importance of the United States clearly had not faded in real economic terms, the way it was discussed and seen as if the connection to the United States already was terminated, and

Venezuela already was the main economic force in Nicaragua. Besides Venezuela, a few other countries were often mentioned as delivering economic help and being future trading partners. Among these are Taiwan (“Ma highlights Taiwan-Nicaragua ties” 2009), Russia, Libya (Castro 2007) and Iran (Morrissey 2007). These countries were mentioned as a secondary level, with their support seen as less significant when compared to the support provided by Venezuela.

During the time of my fieldwork, almost no Liberals I spoke to considered any of the current government programs positively. For them, everything the government did was corruption and the development model had not changed. A few Movimiento Renovador Sandinista (MRS) followers had some positive things to say about the programs when I asked them, but immediately pointed out that while “socially this government is doing great, in terms of democracy it’s much worse [than during the Liberal governments].” The lack of democracy seemed for them to be equal to corruption.

Most pronounced was this view when discussing the ALBA. I heard two main interpretations among Nicaraguans of what the complex setup with the ALBA-related businesses meant. Those critical of the government claimed the FSLN used aid money for private financial gain. They said that the usage of the state for private gains was not the first time in the history of the FSLN. Whereas those in support of the government claim it is just an accounting trick to get around the regulations the IMF had on caps of employment in the public sector, and to get the money around the national assembly, where the opposition had a majority. The same informants who claimed the Piñata was first and foremost a rush to make land deals official, and had already been put into practice but for which the corresponding paper work had not been filled out were those who defended the ALBA. Those who claimed the Piñata was only a

scheme of corruption were also the same ones who claimed that the ALBA was a scheme of corruption.

As in the case of the first Sandinista government, the new Sandinistas were in charge of a country which was not doing well during the time of my fieldwork, with future plans for a completely different economic system that will not be implemented fully for a long time. Nevertheless, my informants did not judge the FSLN by this in the same way as Liberals were judged by the economic reality of Nicaraguans in their period of government. FSLN Sandinistas expected economic success some time in the future, given that Sandinista policies are continued, while Liberals did not complain about bad present economics, but rather what it would eventually lead to.

Concluding remarks

As The last chapter showed, the political outlook is highly informed by the past. Yet in this chapter we have seen that ideas of the economy are for a great part concentrated on the future. The measure of success for most seems never to be the current economy as much as the future economy if the developments started during Sandinista governments are allowed continued indefinitely. In this sense, a marked difference in how the groups are seen as compared with the last chapter, in which it was presented that largely two groups (Liberals and Sandinistas) have two equally valid versions of history upon which they hope the future will be based.

Chapter 9

The forming of the politics under the FSLN

I want to present some of the main political events during my time in Nicaragua. Several, for me, surprising events took place during this period, but having followed the country closely before and after my fieldwork I think that overall it was fairly average for the current presidency (2007–11). The following presentation should, give an overall insight into the political life of Nicaragua since 2007.

Most significant political events in Nicaragua have an element of popular participation. In each of these events, Nicaraguans interpret them as being in line with well-known historical events. Since then, several of those events happened during my time have turned into historical events of their own, and Nicaraguans refer to them as such. These events demonstrated to me how FSLN Sandinista politics are influenced by a combination of events on the world scale and the organisation efforts of the popular masses within the country. Similar to how Nicaraguans portray their national history, also when describing current events it is common that they place agency in Nicaraguan hands, even when they relate the actions taking place in Nicaragua to international movements. Complicating matters even more, different groups believe they speak in the name of Sandinismo as much as the government does and try actively to shape the politics of the José Daniel Ortega Saavedra government. These factors jointly make up a dynamic which means popular participation and interpretation of international events is an essential part in shaping the country's policies. This, coupled with popular participation in Nicaragua, is at times used to try to achieve gains internationally. This chapter demonstrates Nicaragua is not as centrally controlled by President Ortega Saavedra as the Nicaraguan right tries to make the international media believe. Following the daily

politics also made me realise the Ortega Saavedra government and the FSLN Sandinista part of the population can be creative in their portrayal of international politics, in order to achieve gains at a national level. To gather material for this chapter, it was vital for me to be present when politically relevant events happened. Subsequently interviewing people who heard about the event while being unrelated to it, gave me another side of the what transpired.

Several other political groups engaged in campaigns of import to them, I focus exclusively on events related to the FSLN. These were events important to my FSLN Sandinista informants.

Transport worker strike (May 2008)

This strike showed me how an international event (a rise in oil prices) influenced the premises for inner-Nicaraguan conflicts, although this was not recognised by most of the Nicaraguans with whom I discussed the issue. One of the first events of political significance I witnessed during my stay in Nicaragua was a transport workers' strike. It lasted for 12 days, during which transport in-between cities in theory came to a complete standstill. In the city of León, where I stayed, all transport stopped, and transport workers stood at the entrance road to the city from Managua to hinder anyone from entering the city. From other parts of the country, I heard that the situation was not as serious. León is known as the most Sandinista of cities, and most of the transport workers I spoke to used that as the explanation for why the protests were the largest there.

The issue fought over was gas prices. The government obtained petroleum at favorable prices from Venezuela, in a scheme in which Venezuela sold oil to the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (FSLN) party at market prices. Only 50% had to be paid within 90 days, and the remaining 50% were to be paid 23 years later, with a favorable interest rate of 1–2%. Nevertheless, the FSLN decided to sell gas at market prices to consumers, and allegedly

spent the money they saw as a loan for 23 years, to finance social projects.

Before and during the protests, the right-wing media tried to prove that gas prices in Nicaragua were higher than anywhere else in Central America, despite the favorable terms with Venezuela, and hinted that the money was going into the personal pocket of Ortega Saavedra. At the time, oil prices peaked, and because the government regulated the fare price for the intercity transport, profits and wages of the transport workers shrank.

During the days of the protest, I ran back and forth between strikers and FSLN headquarters. Until then, transport workers were one of the strongest bases for the FSLN. Also, it is a common rumor that the police force is heavily infiltrated by Sandinistas. The police were sent to stop the transport workers from blocking the road. The city of León was where the biggest clash between demonstrators and police occurred, and at the press conference, the transport workers held after the clash, the spokespeople of the transport workers publicly stated: “We have not seen a massacre of this magnitude since the time of [dictator] Somoza”. The newspaper La Prensa announced that one of the transport workers had died in the clash. They did not retract this statement when FSLN officials pointed out that this had not, in fact, taken place, but they acknowledged it quietly by not reporting on it any further. The León police and local party officials showed some sympathy for the demands of the transport workers in their public announcements. When speaking to me, the party officials highlighted that the money recovered from the Venezuela oil deal was not only meant to benefit the transport sector, but also other areas, therefore, the transport workers should not win the conflict.

At first, I believed I witnessed the end of the FSLN as a united political force; It seemed logical the party would split into various factions. At one time, I sat on the curb while the transport

workers blocked the road, and next to me sat the La Prensa reporter covering the confrontations. La Prensa had been positive towards the strikers, and I wondered why, given that the La Prensa normally is a newspaper of the right. “This is a battle in-between ‘them,’” the reporter explained to me. This ‘them’ is the certain Sandinista part of the population. Both the Sandinistas and those not belonging to the them, all seemed to believe that 40% of all Nicaraguans identify with FSLN Sandinismo. Most transport workers I spoke to and asked about the Sandinista connection saw themselves as part of said 40%, but explained they felt cheated by Ortega Saavedra. One of them stated:

For all those years we have been helping them in all the campaigns, so of course we expected them to give us something [once in power].

As the strike drew to an end, Ortega Saavedra went on TV and showed how the government spent the money they obtained from the oil deal. The explanation seemed to satisfy most Sandinistas, but some of my informants remained sceptical. The cynicism did not seem to have reference to any concrete point in Ortega Saavedra’s explanation, but was a general scepticism as to whether any information originating from any Nicaraguan government could be accepted as truth. The government promised to give transport workers a discount on gas prices at certain gas stations, and it seemed the transport workers forgot about the alleged ‘massacre.’ Half a year later Liberals and FSLN Sandinistas clashed under entirely different circumstances, and the transport workers once again held with the FSLN. I learned through the Sandinista part of the population uses such physical manifestations as part of their repertoire of internal negotiations. Although all the people involved used strong words, it seems to be clear to all involved that they can retract these at a later stage without any

permanent damage. When the arch enemies, the Liberals, show up in the political arena, the Sandinistas forget all about their internal disagreements.

At the end of the same year, the government withdrew the transport subsidy. At this time, prices had fallen considerably, and the transport workers did not complain much about the re-institution of market gas prices. Although made into a Nicaraguan event, the transport worker strike was ultimately caused by fluctuations in the international oil markets. The focus by all parties involved in the conflict is the part that played out in Nicaragua. Protests did not launch against international oil companies, but against the Sandinista government.

Award given to last Minister of Education of East Germany and alliance with Honduras (19 July 2008)

The following showed me how Sandinistas invoke international relations symbolically, even though this may make little sense in gaining any foreign aid or cooperation. 19 July 2008 was the date of the celebration of the 29th anniversary of the Sandinista revolution. The day is usually celebrated in Managua by the FSLN supporters who gather in the John Paul the Second plaza near Lake Managua. This year the celebrations were planned with more international guests than usual.

The MRS also planned celebrations. They had for the past years held their celebrations in alternating places around western Nicaragua. This year they held them in León, in the part of the city called Subtiava, a somewhat poorer neighborhood with a partly indigenous population. The celebrations were to take place in León because the MRS allegedly had a lot of support there. I loitered around the MRS office at the time. I knew the MRS did not trust their local chapter in León with the preparations, and they had sent people from Managua to

take care of all planning efforts. For them, the celebration of the 19th of July was just as much a protest against Ortega Saavedra and the loss of their license to run in elections, as it was a commemoration of the revolution they fought together with the FSLN and which they now (at times) believe only themselves to be the true representatives.

Most international FSLN guests came from allied South American countries. The two exceptions were José Manuel Zelaya Rosales, President of Honduras, the neighboring country to the north and traditionally not an ally, and Margot Honecker, last minister of education and wife of the late general secretary of the central committee of the Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands (SED, Socialist Unity Party of Germany) of the Deutsche Demokratische Republik (DDR, German Democratic Republic).

Zelaya Rosales declared that day the Honduran people had “always” followed the social struggles of their neighbors to the south, since the time of Calderón Sandino. Honecker was present to receive the Ruben Dario medal for the help of the DDR in the literacy campaign of the 1980s. Zelaya Rosales was not yet ready to sign any concrete agreement with Nicaragua, but his mere presence and what he said was enough to be the talk of the town. The concrete signing of various treaties came between that date and 28 June 2009, when he was deposed through a military coup.

The fact Honecker received the medal, a somewhat minor event no Nicaraguans I met saw as controversial, caused headline news in Germany. Honecker had been absent from public life since her escape to Chile together with her husband in the early 1990s, and it came as somewhat of a surprise that she reappeared in this way. German media highlighted her nickname in East Germany was the ‘purple witch’ (a reference to her hair-color) and what

horrible policies the media believed she was responsible for in East Germany. In Nicaragua, not everybody knew who she was. To find qualified opinions, I went to the FSLN headquarters in León and asked about what the significance of the visit a few days after the ceremony had taken place. Instead of putting me in contact with those giving the official party line, the secretary asked everybody waiting in line to explain the matter to me directly. She had by now seen me many times, and seemingly was not worried about what those waiting would tell me. I told them, that in Germany reactions were rather negative. The secretary looked somewhat angry at me and then said: "The entire German working class should be proud of this prize!" Everybody cheered.

The Sandinistas I met all had rather positive views of East Germany in comparison to West Germany. In terms of terminology, it is common in Nicaragua to shorten the official term for East Germany, 'The German Democratic Republic,' to 'The Democratic Germany,' and to shorten the official term for West Germany, 'The Federal Republic of Germany,' to 'The Capitalist Germany.' 'Capitalist' for them has a clearly negative connotation, so the terms they use clearly position the value they place on the two countries.

Openly allying oneself with the former minister of education of a nonexistent, and in some parts of the world almost hated, country can hardly have been done in order to receive more economic assistance or other political support. This was in effect a move highly influenced by the historical past of Nicaragua and an understanding of international relations originating from it. The relation to Honduras may to a higher degree be relevant to Nicaragua today, yet the reinterpretation of Honduran history by Zelaya Rosales hardly helped him gain any

support in Honduras. This must have been aimed at the Nicaraguan audience. Both appearances seem to have caused problems for the Nicaraguan government and its allies at an international level. The popular support from sectors of Nicaraguan society for these appearances must have been the most crucial factor when the government decided to invite them. Although the MRS was able to organise an event in León in spite of their undisciplined local planning, it ended up being the FSLN that drew the largest crowd.

The Georgia conflict

The following showed the Sandinista understanding of the importance of what happens in Nicaragua has an impact in an international context, and at times can impact on the country's politics. The next major conflict focused upon in Nicaragua was the conflict between Georgia and Russia of August 2008. Two territories of Georgia, South Ossetia and Abkhazia, had not been under Georgian government control since the end of the Cold War, and the majority of those living there were Russian citizens. Georgia attacked South Ossetia immediately after a joint Georgian-US military training exercise (Wikileaks 2008; Centre for Research on Globalization 2008). The conflict quickly spread to Abkhazia (Harding and Tran 2008). After the initial Georgian attacks, Russia retaliated and after securing the area, continued to send its ground troops far into Georgian territory (Agence France-Presse 2008). In the end, the two territories declared themselves independent from Georgia, but no country other than Russia accepted their independence (Levy 2008).

In Nicaragua I initially followed the Georgia conflict through European Internet sources.

Nicaraguan papers certainly did not make this their main theme at the start of the conflict. I wrongly assumed this matter would not have any importance for Nicaraguans. Some days into the conflict, at the UNAN–León, I attended a lecture about Nicaraguan history for Nicaraguans – part of a series heavily controlled by Sandinistas who tried to give their students a revolutionary perspective. The issue of Georgia was discussed there. One of the lecturers, representing the party line, used part of his lecture to criticise the United States and its role in the conflict of supporting Georgia. Russia was described as merely being responsible for keeping the peace in the area. Nobody seemed to disagree. Shortly thereafter, Nicaragua was the second country in the world officially to recognise the independence of these two territories (NYT 2008). When I discussed this with Sandinista informants, they all seemed to think this is the most natural step for Nicaragua to take.

Russia is seen uncommonly positively, and any foreign intervention the United States is involved in is seen as negative by most FSLN Sandinistas. Initially, Nicaragua had no stake in this event, and none of Russia's allies initially recognised the independence of the territories from Georgia. Thus, it is only logical to assume the most important reason for the Nicaraguan government's actions was their own political opinion and that of the majority Sandinista part of the population. The event led to Nicaragua renewing relations with Russia. This included several visits by the Russian Vice-President, a visit of the Russian navy and the signing of various aid packages. One of these included a donation of 130 buses (RIA Novosti 2010). Russia donated these buses directly to the FSLN party (Potosme 2009), who then sold them to Managua cooperatives for \$25,000 USD each (Morales A. 2009).

It is noticeable the help was sent to the FSLN instead of the Nicaraguan state. I can only speculate, that this setup was arranged to prevent the Liberals from having access to the money. Ortega Saavedra said as part of a speech during those days that Russia was "illuminating the planet" by struggling for "peace and social justice," and that the United States "turns its military force against these in an attempt to shatter them" (Silva 2008). These words seem exceptionally sharp and as if Ortega Saavedra would be speaking of the Soviet Union of the 1980s rather than Russia in 2008. In my experience, Nicaraguans use 'Russia' and 'Soviet Union' interchangeably and Russia is not seen as something fundamentally different from what the former Soviet Union. Ortega Saavedra's statement reflects that. The entire incident shows two points of understanding of the world on the part of the Sandinistas. They see Nicaragua as significant enough to play a role in incidents that take part in Eastern Europe, and the country can have a policy independent of the United States, Western Europe and all the regional Latin American powers. Furthermore, an understanding of the continuance of Soviet Union and Russia is unique to Nicaragua.

It can not be disregarded that the situation shows through this understanding, the international communication of this Nicaraguan perspective on the events, did allow for a shift in the international positioning of the Nicaraguan state in relation to Russia and the United States. While I initially viewed the Nicaraguan intervention in the conflict as a product of an ill-informed picture of the world in which Russia would help Nicaragua and other countries in similar situations escape the domination of the United States, I came to recognise the application of this view in the forming of Nicaraguan state policy led to geopolitical realities

moving closer to the initial Sandinista perspective.

León FSLN candidate for mayor clashed with police (September 2008)

To me, this showed how not only the actions of the government, but also how grassroots activism is believed to be a reflection of worldwide events on the part of the Sandinistas. A much talked-about 'clash' between police and FSLN supporters took place as part of the election campaign in fall of 2008. I was not in León on that day, but the next day I saw a number of pickup trucks with Sandinista flags drive up and down some of the main streets. I asked if I could join them and was allowed to sit on the back of one. A girl sitting next to me explained:

See, the political right at a world level is trying to halt the revolutionary process by arranging these marches. Here in Nicaragua, it is the Liberals who try to take León, because it was the first capital of the revolution.²³

As we drove around, it turned out to be a victory parade with Calderón, on the day of the clashes photographed hitting a policeman, and Gladys Báez, a local FSLN member of the national assembly, mounted on the back of pick up trucks. The trucks went through some of the poorer parts of León, cheered on by the masses. The episode of the day before apparently did not hurt Calderón's image as much in León as in Managua and other places. In León, this was one of several such events during the next few months with many forceful FSLN marches, which looked as though the liberation from Somoza's forces were re-lived by those participating. It is the only logical explanation why the FSLN, while in control of the

²³ A reference to the fact León was liberated by the Sandinistas before Managua, and that it has always had FSLN city governments since.

government, the police and the military, took the step of digging trenches and chasing small groups of Liberals when these wanted to march in a city where the FSLN had a clear majority.

The incident of the clashes between Calderón and the policeman was noticed nationwide, and most other places it was not seen as positive. Calderón since then had a reputation for not being equipped for the job of mayor. Outside of León, it was mainly the scene of that day to which people referred when talking about him over the next year or so. In León, other rumors about him seemed more prominent in giving him an image, such as the rumor according to which he allegedly ate at a fish restaurant without showing the proper manners of cleaning his hands at a time when he was mayor.

The matter of Calderón's clash seemed relevant to many Sandinistas, especially in Managua. While there may have been a certain class difference between those approving and those going against the actions of the candidate for mayor with middle-class Nicaraguans less likely to support his attack on the police, and an undeniable difference existed between León and Managua in what events were taken as fundamental. My informants in Managua talked about the incident as an isolated act by Calderón. For the Leónese participants of the marches, the Calderón incident seemed to be part of the marches against the Liberals and was not attributed much importance.

No-one I met questioned whether the clashes between Liberals and Sandinistas represented an international tendency. The difference in understanding between León and Managua, and many other places, must be something of which many Sandinistas are aware. From that they should have been able to deduct that the perspective from outside of Nicaragua would be

even more different, yet somehow this seemed not to have been done.

FSLN wins local elections (November 2008)

Nicaraguan elections are events which take on significance for both Liberals and Sandinistas that go beyond electoral politics and are seen not only as a formal process, but as a part of popular organisation. This was apparent during the preparations for the 2008 municipal elections, and in the reactions to the results. Also, the elections showed how central international relations are for Nicaragua, while Nicaraguans again place agency on the Nicaraguan side.

International observers from the European Union and United States were not allowed to observe the elections but various Latin American countries did receive observer credentials. This was somewhat new and reflected the fact Sandinistas were in charge. It also caused the election results to be questioned by those excluded from observing. It seemed just about everybody remotely related to politics was somehow involved in the electoral process. On the days before the election, I circulated with Javier Díaz, a former student of mine in his late 40s who lived in Ciudad Sandino, just outside of Managua on the road to León. On the night before the elections, we visited his mother-in-law. The family of his mother-in-law was preparing food for the FSLN fraction which sat at the election stations in a certain sector of Managua the next day. Instead of organising food for members of all parties who sit at an election booth together, the food preparation is done party by party. It is just one of several election related activities which involve the public, and it reinforces the personal alliance of the food preparer with the party.

Díaz was involved in the Juventud Sandinista (JS) in the 1980s and studied in Cuba in the late 1980s to early 1990s. Now he said he was disappointed by the movement, without specifying the overall reason. Nevertheless, he still voted for the FSLN. He explained his vote was part of what is popularly known as the 'voto duro' (hard vote) which refers to those who will always vote FSLN, no matter how much they disagree with the day-to-day politics of the party. No equivalent term exists for voters of other parties. Manuel Corea, one of those who went to the cadre school Wilhelm-Pieck in East Germany at another time presented to me a category of Sandinistas which seems to cover the same group, and he explained the distinction between them and other Sandinistas this way:

There are those Sandinistas who are Sandinistas because it is where they receive something. They will dance to the tune of whoever feeds them. And then there are those of us who are Sandinistas out of conviction. We will always be Sandinistas, even though we recognise that the Frente... the upper leadership of the Frente, commits errors.

During election day, Managua remained calm, and in the early afternoon, I stood at the Rotonda Metrocentro. FSLN Sandinistas were already present before polls closed, waving Nicaraguan flags. Once election booths closed, they exchanged their flags for red-and-black Sandinista flags. At this time, I joined one of the JS gatherings a few blocks away and encountered a friend, Ninfa Patricia Ramos. Ramos was involved in the student section of the Sandinista movement for a prolonged period, and she had worked at exit polls on election day and already knew the FSLN had won in Managua before the official results were in. She introduced me to another type of voter, the 'voto oculto' (hidden vote). These are people who do not tell pollsters how they vote. Nicaraguan pollsters count them as likely voting in favor of one of the Liberal parties.²⁴

²⁴ The analysis of those who work with this terminology seems to be lose to that of Lancaster (1992, p. 286), who speculated that those who did not tell pollsters about their true intentions of voting in the 1990-elections did so out of a

The four types of voters pollsters operate with are: FSLN voters who vote due to the politics of the FSLN, FSLN voters who vote in spite of the politics of the FSLN ('voto duro'), open Liberal votes, and hidden Liberal votes ('voto oculto'). This indicates a vote in favor of the FSLN seems 'more correct' morally or otherwise, than casting a Liberal vote for Nicaraguans.

The FSLN won the elections of November 9th 2008 overwhelmingly. The FSLN won 105 mayors, while the PLC won 37 and the ALN 4 mayors (Hurtado 2008). Immediately after the preliminary result became known, the opposition cried foul and called for marches. I listened to all sides of the story. In the end, I must admit that Fonseca Terán (2008b) was right in his analysis that, at least at a formal level, the elections were legally and correctly won by the FSLN, as allegations of electoral fraud could not be substantiated. Even though this seemed to be recognised by most Liberals, it was of little practical importance to them. A protest against a Sandinista victory for them seemed only normal. The Latin American election observers approved the election results. The Consejo Supremo Electoral (CSE) leadership, and the two Liberal representatives within it approved the results of most major cities where the FSLN won according to their data. The two Liberal representatives were then consequently expelled from the PLC.

The next days the Liberals in Managua tried to cause havoc by physically attacking Sandinista positions. They managed to capture a few of the rotondas, but as soon as Montealegre Rivas called one of the rotondas 'liberated territory,' the Sandinista activists took it back immediately. Fights broke out all over the city with several dead Sandinistas, and for the next few weeks, Ortega Saavedra disappeared from the public scene. He was replaced by the members of the CSE who seemed to lead the country during this period. Marches

feeling of shame for not voting for the Sandinistas.

broke out everywhere. The statements of the CSE members spread through mass media and mouth-to-mouth propaganda in a highly politicised atmosphere.

In many cities like León, the PLC and MRS claimed to be the real winners and only electoral fraud kept them from taking over the city government. On the day of their first announced march in which Montealegre Rivas was to participate, FSLN activists blocked the roads from Managua, and a few thousand Sandinistas chased about 200 Liberals, who managed to arrive in León. Among others, I met Sandinista farm workers from the countryside who had come to León to 'defend' the city against the Liberals. When I asked what was taking place between Liberals and Sandinistas, Liberals claimed strongly they had been robbed of their victory, while the Sandinistas claimed their march was a demonstration of 'yet another victory' and the Liberals were to blame for all violence which may still occur.

Young and old Sandinistas were in the streets that day, and both groups seemed mostly interested in the physical manifestation of political differences. Even the police looked very happy and did not actually try to stop the Sandinistas from chasing the Liberals. Some blocks from the front line between the two groups, one could see groups of young Sandinistas shoot homemade firecracker-arms at police lines, who 'defended' themselves with shields as if they were in a war. Yet, behind the police there were no Liberal marchers. One policeman filmed the confrontation with the young Sandinistas with his mobile phone. No attempts at arrests were made. It just seemed like a part of an action-filled happening for both police and activists which both sides seemed to enjoy.

At first, I was amazed the Liberals dared march in León. The number of people they managed to assemble showed quite clearly it was highly unlikely they could have won in León, whereas other cities, such as Masaya, where the FSLN also won but has much less support historically, would have been easier targets for claiming voter fraud. After talking with the Liberal candidate Ariel Terán and some of the MRS people, I became aware of why their confrontation with the Sandinistas in León was so crucial for them. The reason for their march seemed to lie outside of Nicaragua. Many representatives of western countries made comments during those days to the effect that cheating and fraud had occurred in the elections, even though none of their countries' observers had been observing the elections. Had the Sandinistas additionally attacked the Liberals, not with demonstrators, but using the police or military, both firmly in their control, it would have received headlines throughout the United States and Europe, and could have ended in the funding of another Contra war. The opposition tried to involve international pressure, and attempted using the tactics of popular organising to take control the way the Sandinistas had. Ultimately, they were unsuccessful in their attempt.

For the Sandinistas, the day held a different significance. Calderón explained it well, when he spontaneously tried to connect the events with its history as a Sandinista stronghold when I asked him what he thought about the events of the day:

Well, today was a momentous victory for the people of León, and I would say for the people of Nicaragua. León has shown always to be able to bring victory to Nicaragua. Because in 1956, the execution of the tyrant Somoza meant the beginning of the end of the

dictatorship. And the taking of the fort [of León] on 7 July [1979], finished the dictatorship and made the establishment of the government of Nicaragua—here in León—possible. Today, with this victory over the [political] right, over the modern-day Somocismo, León gives Nicaragua the chance to recover the level of stability that is needed to fight and overcome poverty.

I did not hear Calderón's specific way of connecting the event with history but the same event was explained in several other ways in the next few days by various León Sandinistas. Every time it was put in a historic context, somehow connecting it to 1979. For the younger Sandinistas who were not alive in 1979 and had not experienced the 1980s, the event seemed to be the closest they got to having participated in the revolutionary struggle.

In municipal elections, it is essential that either 'they' or 'we' win, and not so much which particular candidate wins. This became apparent to me a few months later. In theory, the candidacies for most top posts are individuals, in that the elections are set up like elections in the United States which are more about individual candidates rather than a party. Yet, Nicaraguans typically see the importance of the candidate as secondary to his or her party affiliation. When in Managua Alexis Argüello (FSLN) was elected and the opposition fought it, there was a great uproar. When Argüello was replaced by the FSLN with Daisy Torres (FSLN) the following summer, after Argüello committed suicide on 1 July 2009, hardly any grumbling was heard, even though many conspiracy theories would have it that Ortega Saavedra was behind the death. No-one suggested that new elections should be held which Liberals would have a chance of winning. Some of the other FSLN mayors were exchanged before their term ended in the following years, and while, at times, it ended with two different factions within the

FSLN supporting different candidates, at no time was it suggested having an open vote with participation of all parties to decide who should take over.

Parliament stopped working (November 2008 – February 2009)

For four months, between the elections in November until February 2009, the country was ruled by presidential decree. The Liberals initially decided they would declare the municipal election results invalid through the use of their parliamentary majority. Ortega Saavedra explained that this was unconstitutional, and that he would write a presidential decree against it. For the next few months, a standoff ensued between Liberals and the FSLN in which neither was able to form a majority in parliament and nothing was passed through parliament, which, according to both sides, led to foreign help to be cancelled due to lack of decisions by parliament. A few marches by Liberals against what they claimed to be electoral fraud were organised, and the FSLN countered them with marches and celebrations in connection with the 30 year anniversary of the 1979 triumph of the Sandinista revolution. None of these later marches reached the size of the earlier marches at the end of 2008.

The crisis was resolved when Liberals voted for the Sandinista proposal of parliamentary leadership and a group of judges lifted the house arrest of their leader Alemán Lacayo. The MRS people were quick to point out this proved the existence of the pact between Alemán Lacayo's PLC and the FSLN. Meanwhile, Montealegre Rivas left the PLC again, and tried to establish his own group, the Banca Democrática (BD), to which several of the Managua city council members followed. Then Montealegre Rivas changed his mind and asked his followers to join the Partido Liberal Independiente (PLI)²⁵, until that party decided they did not want Montealegre Rivas because he had too many connections to the Somozas. The Liberals

²⁵ The PLI was a party believed dead by most Nicaraguans I talked to.

then started to subdivide themselves into various groups, to the joy of the FSLN Sandinistas. The episode showed that after not being able to make advances in the popular arena, the opposition was for once again able to unite and pressure the government at parliament level. Also the FSLN was unable to counter this with any form of popular organising to force the opposition into accepting the result. At a general level, one can say the FSLN is willing to give in to a more or less corrupt deals which give them most positions of power. Different from most other actions, which included popular organising in some way or other, the deal with Alemán Lacayo was universally criticised by all Sandinistas. Yet, few of them saw any other solution to the crisis in the country, and ultimately they accepted the actions of Ortega Saavedra as necessary. The issue they seemed to have with it, was that a critical decision was made without involving events of mass popular participation, as that is what usually gives legitimacy to Sandinista initiated projects.

Military coup in Honduras (June 2009)

The most direct way, Nicaragua politics were influenced by the international scene during this period, besides the cutting of aid, was when the military coup in the northern neighbor of Honduras took place. Since the appearance of President Zelaya Rosales on 19 July 2008 in Managua, Honduras joined two alliance agreements to which Nicaragua also subscribed, the political alliance/trade network Alternativa Bolivariana para los pueblos de nuestra Américas (ALBA) and the Caribbean alliance to buy oil from Venezuela called Petrocaribe. Honduras then experienced a military coup on 28 June 2009, the day when President Zelaya Rosales planned on holding a referendum on whether the people wanted to hold a constitution assembly, to change some of the land rights and open up for institutions of direct democracy, such as the Consejos de Poder Ciudadano (CPC) in Nicaragua.

In Nicaragua, the reactions to the coup followed the classic divide FSLN vs. the Liberal parties. On one side, the Liberals decided they wanted to march in favor of the coup. The MRS parliamentary group had at this time split, with two of four members leaving. Most importantly the Movimiento por el Rescate del Sandinismo (MpRS) and their one member of the national assembly left, criticised the MRS for helping an electoral campaign in El Salvador against the Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (FMLN). The MRS left-leaning elements exited, and the rest of the party did not object to the protests in favor of the coup in Honduras.

At the time, I associated with younger FSLN party activists in Nicaragua. Erick Saul Rios Juarez, a 20 year old Sandinista radio show host and activist, spent many days occupying the *rotondas*, to prevent the political right from showing their solidarity with the Honduran coup makers. Sandinistas in the border region with Honduras wrote protest songs and housed some of the Honduran exiles following the coup. I visited the Sandinistas in the border town of Ocotal in early August 2009. They made the point that they did not help the Hondurans organise a revolution against the coup. "That has to be the work of the Hondurans themselves," the guy in charge of the FSLN office explained to me, "Our help is humanitarian more than anything." The theme of Nicaraguans planning a revolution in Honduras was extremely common in conversation during those days. All the Sandinistas I met agreed, a revolution was the solution for Honduras, and many of them were interested in helping Honduras do that. One of the Honduran youth organisers showed up in Nicaragua and went

on Rios Juarez's show. "This guy suddenly said that 'Zelaya [Rosales] is not the right person to lead this,'" Rios Juarez told me after I came back from a trip to Honduras where I met the same youngster. Rios Juarez was hesitant in giving me contact details and the party ultimately decided against providing them. It was by coincidence I met the same fellow. This episode demonstrated the Nicaraguan understanding that popular mobilisation is essential in day-to-day politics. Even the Liberals, who by then had managed to build up some respect internationally through the elections they supposedly won, believed they needed to march, even though no government in the world officially was in favor of the coup. If international media were to focus on their marches, they would lose all credibility they had built. For Sandinistas, the coup marked a difficult time, and from some of the comments heard, there seemed to be a fear higher up in the party that individual Sandinista groups would try to organise a revolutionary effort in Honduras in disregard of the understanding of the events of Honduran activists who fought in the resistance against the coup.

30 years of revolution and some advances (summer 2009)

On 19 July 2009, the 30th anniversary of the revolution was celebrated. Yet instead of saying '30 years since the insurrection,' my Sandinista informants insisted on calling it 'the 30th year of the revolution.' The director of the Oficina de Ética Pública (OEP) explained: "Well, during those 16 years, we did not stop. We just prepared ourselves for this phase of the revolution." Her life seems to confirm that. It is remarkably similar to the life stories of many other Sandinistas I interviewed: during the early years of Liberal governments she studied for a higher degree as a lawyer and then spent the last few years working at the NGO-level.

Adult illiteracy rate

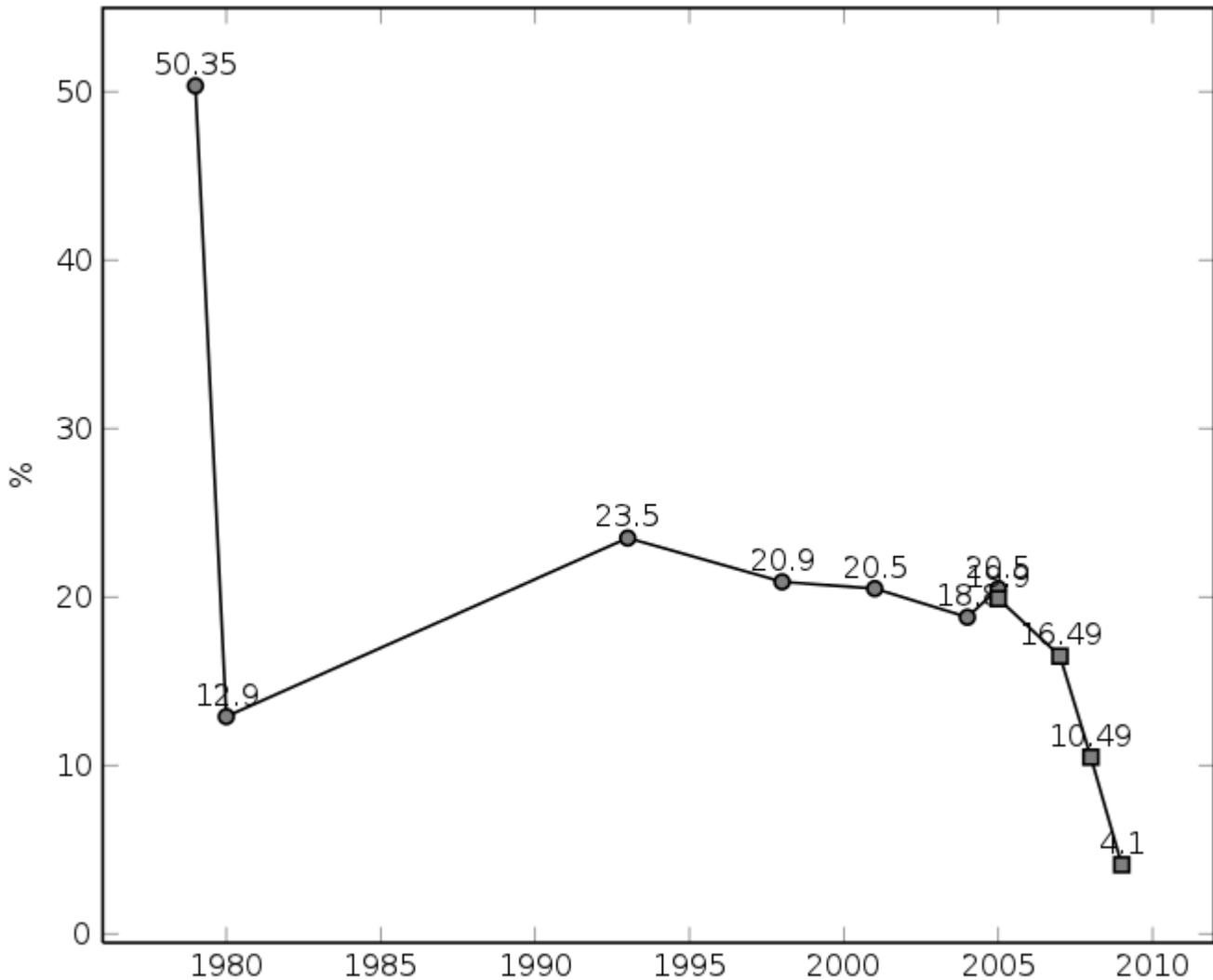
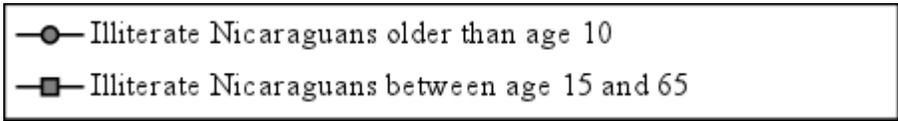


Illustration 13: The literacy campaign is one area in which a marked difference can be seen between Sandinista and non-Sandinista governments. The latest campaign had already started in 2005 at a regional level in municipalities where Sandinistas were in charge. In 2007–09, it moved to the national level. The 2007 figure is an estimate by the Nicaraguan government. The 2008 figure is based on survey results, and the 2009 figure was calculated by taking the 2008 figure and subtracting the amount of people who had gone through the literacy program that year. The exact meaning of ‘illiterate’ is not specified for any of the figures. Source: Arrien (2006); Paguaga (2006); MINED (2009); Hanemann (2005)



In August 2009, in the middle of the financial crisis, the FSLN declared a success in reducing illiteracy from 20.7%²⁶ to 3.56%²⁷ with the literacy campaign it started in 2007. The figure is approved by the United Nations Education, Science and Culture Organisation (UNESCO) (Nicaragua Network 2009a). The government also celebrated the start of a hydro-electric energy program, that supposedly some day will generate 40% of all electricity produced by the Tumarín Hydroelectric Project on the Río Grande de Matagalpa. With cooperation from the international company Eolo, S.A. and the international consortium Amayo, S.A., the government built wind farms scheduled to produce another 12.5% of Nicaraguan energy needs (Nicaragua Network 2009b).

The government made several similar points at this time. Some of them, such as the literacy program, involved large amounts of popular participation, while others were highly technical and would most likely require the collaboration of highly skilled professionals. All these projects have as a stated goal the improvement of the standard of living of the general population and eventually to make the country more self-sufficient. The approval for such programs is almost always looked for in international organisations. Instead of using the

26 The figure 20.7% is quoted in all news stories about the event. In my own calculation using the base numbers from Paguaga (2006), I arrive at 19.9%, which is the figure used in the graph.
 27 The figure 3.56% is disseminated widely. Asking Sandinistas, it was explained that the UNESCO certified an illiteracy rate of 4.1% and that subsequently the figure fell to 3.56% during the same year.. See also illustration p. 239.

numbers of the Ministerio de Educación (MINED), the government mostly refers to the numbers produced by the UNESCO. For all the talk of independence from the empire and the unique national discussion, multinational companies and organisations were strongly involved in these Sandinista projects.

Concluding remarks

We have seen how a diverse range of political challenges is handled by Sandinistas on various levels. This includes how internal Nicaraguan conflicts often originate from developments at a world level which are not referred to in the country. At times, actors on an international stage are called for by various Nicaraguan groups and this can mean the Nicaraguan reality changes quite concretely. Through all their actions, the Sandinistas seek to make Nicaragua a more independent country. Sandinista leaders also seek approval for the success of their programs in international organisations and work on programs together with international companies. Various events have shown popular organisation is a central element in Nicaraguan political life, and some events such as elections, have a distinctively parliamentary connotation, and in Nicaragua are cause for popular organisation. At times, mass gatherings are staged in order to provoke a reaction internationally, and at times the international political scene is invoked in order to appease the Nicaraguan masses.

Altogether, the whole structure of international influences, and uncertainty in the command hierarchy of the FSLN and the relationship between various groups all believing to represent Sandinismo, presents a picture of a vibrant, but chaotic, political landscape. This is truly representative of Nicaraguan politics.

Chapter 10

Ways for Sandinistas to involve themselves in politics

In the aftermath of the 1980s version of Sandinismo and a succession of different right-wing governments, the return of José Daniel Ortega Saavedra/Sandinismo in 2006 was cast against a much more variegated backdrop of sub-versions of Sandinista ideology. These different versions are not so much reflected in different fractional versions of Sandinismo, although such diffuse tendencies certainly exist.

The current situation of the country is mostly portrayed in foreign media as being extremely centered around President Ortega Saavedra and the decisions he makes. In reality, the Sandinistas are in power (2007–12) in more than just the sense that the Nicaraguan President happens to be a follower of the Sandinista ideology. The last chapter looked at age as a major factor in terms of what it means to be a Sandinista. This chapter looks at different types of Sandinistas and how they act politically. We take a look at the historic structure of the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (FSLN), and how the party now works differently and has changed to a model in line with what is known as the ‘Socialism for the 21st Century.’ Then the significance Sandinistas attribute to political alliances and the different ways one can be a Sandinista activist are viewed.

The historic structure of the FSLN

When the FSLN first started in 1961 it consisted of only one ideological tendency with one national directory. In the 1970s, two other tendencies came into existence, and, for a few years, the party operated with three rather independent leaderships. In early 1979, the party held a unification conference in Honduras where it decided a group of nine Sandinistas, three from each tendency, would make up the national leadership. This organised division of power

remained the same throughout the 1980s. The party was not one unified bloc, and the divisions were institutionalised. In addition to participation in the ideological tendencies and work inside the party, a number of activities were offered to engage the general population so they could see themselves as part of the Sandinismo project. So-called 'mass organisations' were created to facilitate this. They were given formal representation at various levels. Party membership was not acquired by most people involved in these activities, yet they soon referred to themselves as Sandinistas. During the 1980s and into the 1990s the party controlled TV stations and the newspaper 'La Barricada.' Opposition newspapers were allowed during Sandinista rule, but complained about being censored frequently by Sandinista authorities. Working in the Sandinista media outlets was nevertheless one way to become somewhat creative and independently involved in the Sandinista project. Most involvement with the politics and the FSLN party in the 1980s was rather hierarchically organised, most of my informants claim. In short: Many ways existed of being a Sandinista in those years.

In the post-Sandinista years, around the time when the Movimiento Renovador Sandinista (MRS) split off from the FSLN in the 1990s, the national leadership of nine dissolved. After that, Ortega Saavedra has served as the General Secretary of the party. Several other individuals hold high party posts and are known for it. The names I heard people mention are the Organisational Secretary, Reinaldo Gregorio Lenín Cerna Juárez,²⁸ Communication Secretary, Rosario Murillo, the International Secretary, Jacinto Juárez, and his media-savvy vice, Carlos Fonseca Terán.

The formal structure of the party that decides how the individual leaders arrived at their posts

²⁸ The post of organizational secretary of the FSLN was suspended in May 2011 (Arévalo Alemán 2011).

are conducted is of little concern to most Sandinistas. No-one I met outside the FSLN offices was quite able to explain how it worked, and no documents or charts existed on the web pages of the FSLN which explained what offices existed and who was elected to what position. After visiting the department of organisation of the FSLN León to ask specifically about this issue and searching for the statutes of the party on other websites, I discovered that the national leadership of nine in the 1980s was replaced by a national Sandinista council of 40–50 members, which is appointed by national congresses of around 1300 Sandinistas every 5 years, and additionally includes the FSLN mayors of **departamento** capitals and political secretaries of the party at the departmental level. It appoints all the heads of the party that I had heard about already, and additionally secretaries and vice secretaries for the areas of women, youth, political education, and finances, as well as two committees: one that organises party-internal elections and one that insures that all structures of the party stick to the statutes of the party. At a level in-between the national congress and national council is the national assembly of around 300 members. The national assembly includes the political secretaries and mayors at the **municipio** level. The assemblies make all decisions of major importance that come up in-between national congresses. The structure of the party at a national level is largely copied at the *departamento* and *municipio* levels. At a neighborhood level, the party consists of general assemblies and *Consejos de Liderazgo Sandinista* (Sandinista Leadership Councils, CLSs) (FSLN 2002).

While the fact that hardly anyone knows about the formal structure of the party may at first

glance indicate an extremely closed leadership model, upon closer inspection it is only so in the limited sense of determining who the presidential candidate is to be. Power differences among Sandinistas exist, but the party does not function as hierarchically as one may initially think. When I visited Nicaragua for the first time (December/January 2006/2007), and was in Managua for the inauguration ceremony of Ortega Saavedra, I was amazed to discover only one party/group with one set of symbols making up the Left of Nicaragua. Compared to Mexico with its wealth of social organisations and parties, it was noticeable how in Nicaragua everything was centered around the FSLN and the symbolism connected to Augusto Nicolás Calderón Sandino. This gave me an initial picture that the FSLN had not changed much since the 1980s.

With time, I noticed marked differences among various parts of the Sandinista movement, involving many activities. Ortega Saavedra once called the FSLN an 'anarchist party' (Gaynor 1999). For him, this seemed to mean the party was not as centrally controlled as was the case with many Soviet aligned parties. Similarly, with the FSLN in power, the party control of the country is not as tight as one might think. This is evident given the media coverage of Ortega Saavedra's administration. At the same time, it cannot be denied the FSLN connected part of the Sandinista movement exerts power. A good example of how the party functions decentralised, yet exerted limited power, could be seen in the current structure of the media. The only three daily papers in Nicaragua are La Prensa, Hoy and El Nuevo Diario. All three of these are Conservative or center-Conservative. This would under other circumstances seem like a media scene controlled by Conservative forces. The papers only print 100,000 copies altogether daily— in a country with a population of 5.3 million. Radio is much more influential – 95% of households have radios and 180 FM and 65 AM radio stations broadcast. The state,

much of which during Sandinista governments is an extension of the party apparatus, only owns one station – Radio Nicaragua. The FSLN owns one news program and holds shares in the national station Canal 4 and nine of the many local radio stations²⁹. In addition, another 20 stations call themselves ‘Sandinista,’ but they are outside the party’s direct control. Around 80% of all Nicaraguans are reached by the Sandinista news program and around 30% by their other programs. William Grigsby Vado, current director of the Sandinista radio station La Primera, explained the relationship between the various stations this way as part of an interview with a German newspaper:

The various stations partially also pursue different political interests. We are all children of the revolution, but these days every radio fights on its own. [...] We are Sandinista and we are autonomous. (Berger 2008, 3, Wilm translation)

The independent Sandinista radio stations are still bound to the state, and partially sponsored through government advertisements. The media are clearly not wholly controlled by the Sandinistas, although Sandinista media make out a crucial part of the media landscape. The Sandinista media are not entirely controlled by Ortega Saavedra, but have a number of different Sandinista groups controlling each of the various outlets. This structure of the Sandinista media is similar to the structure of the party overall. The rest of the chapter shows this.

The principle of alliances

While the party is not quite united and decision making structures oftentimes unclear, in many instances, alliances are sought with other groups outside the Sandinista camp to achieve single advances on certain issues. Tricks, such as passing laws to please one alliance

²⁹ The FSLN ownership of media outlets is changing rapidly. The data are from 2008–9; Canal 8 and 13 were also Sandinista stations by 2011, and are directed by the sons of Ortega Saavedra.

partner, only to subsequently subvert it by not enforcing it or using other laws or judicial practices to counteract the initial law, and advanced schemes of short-lived alliances with various groups to achieve a certain goal by some Sandinista subgroup, I find to be typical of Sandinista rule. We now look at some of the most well-known examples of this in recent years.

Therapeutic abortion

One of the two most known examples of Nicaraguan politics outside of Nicaragua is how Ortega Saavedra apparently finds Jesus just in time before the 2006 presidential elections and marries his partner of over 20 years, Rosario Murillo, in a Catholic ceremony in 2005 (Gooren 2010). That same fall, the Catholic church mobilised against women's right of abortion even in certain limited cases when the woman's life is in danger and only the life of the woman or the fetus can be saved. This right had been part of the constitution for about a century. The right was first removed in 2006, and officially outlawed by 2008 – all with the approval of the FSLN and all the right-wing parties. In exchange for that, some Catholic priests supported the FSLN in the elections (Gooren 2010). “In the 1980s, the Catholic church was against us, and now they are with us,” an elderly person at a León center for old revolutionaries tried to convince me as to why the step (on abortion) was needed tactically in December 2006. It gradually became clearer during my time in Nicaragua, that ‘forbidding’ abortion did not mean and was not meant to mean stopping its practice or even to stop the state from organising it.

It took another investigator, Rakel Helgheim of the University of Bergen, Norway, to conduct a

series of interviews with members of civilian society to find out what exact legal situation existed after therapeutic abortion had been made illegal. We stayed at the same place in León during the first months of my stay. She was furious about this change to the law. One day she came home and explained she had just found out, that around the time abortion was made entirely illegal, a change publicised in both national and international press, the code of conduct of hospitals had changed. According to the new code, hospitals had to prioritise the survival of the patient higher than any other law. This was not published anywhere at the time. It was not before the summer of 2009 that the *El Nuevo Diario* carried a story attacking the FSLN for the Ministerio de Salud (MINSa) having conducted abortions after it was officially forbidden (Aguilera 2009b; Aguilera 2009a). I received some private talking points from Fonseca Terán (2010b) in July 2010. He used them in conferences with international participants who heard about the MRS version of events. Most of his points mirrored the conclusions I had arrived at after investigating the matter for months. In the end, both MRS and FSLN favor abortion in case of the mother's life being in danger, even though the FSLN does it in a more hidden manner. In this case, I fell into the trap of taking remarks of a tactical nature to be representative of what my informants actually believed.

El pacto

The second feature of Nicaraguan politics that people outside the country have heard about, is an alliance splits all powerful positions in the state between two powerful groups or two powerful individuals exists. The reality is many shifting alliances appear in Nicaraguan politics, especially between different parties. The FSLN seems to seek a political majority in parliament with whomever they can on any given issue at any point in time. One such alliance is focused upon more than any of the others. This particular alliance carries with it a negative

undertone both in the foreign press and in Nicaraguan society that other alliances do not. This alliance, known as *el pacto*, concerns at times the FSLN and the Partido Liberal Constitucionalista (PLC), and other times just their leaders Ortega Saavedra and José Arnoldo Alemán Lacayo. Alemán Lacayo and Ortega Saavedra are said to have made a pact in the late 1990s to divide all positions of state power between them, in return for the FSLN permitting Alemán Lacayo to govern more or less uninterrupted during his presidential term.

It is true that when parliament stopped working for several months after the municipal elections of November 2008, a solution was found in which certain charges of fraud were dropped against Alemán Lacayo. This most likely happened through government intervention, and the FSLN was simultaneously given control of most of parliament. *El pacto* may not have been the favored choice by the FSLN leadership in this situation. Cuadra Núñez and Fonseca Terán (2010b) point out the constitution was changed in 1995 in a way which obligated even the larger parties to seek approval of other groups in parliament in order to be able to appoint a wide range of officials. At the time, neither PLC nor FSLN held many seats in parliament, whereas the MRS did and was part of the group which approved this change. Cuadra Núñez and Fonseca Terán claim the idea behind the change was to obligate the FSLN and PLC to negotiate with smaller parties such as the MRS in connection with handing out positions.

In the case of the international press, it becomes easy to understand how *el pacto* is seen as evil: misinformation and half-information lead to strange conclusions being reached. Yet, this type of maneuvering is not all that uncommon for Nicaraguan politics. The FSLN specifically is much involved in such tactics, and it seems the result has been fantastic for them.

Therefore, I have difficulties understanding the controversy this generates for Sandinistas who are angry about el pacto. When I first found out about all the individual circumstances and understood that the foreign press was mainly just spreading anti-FSLN propaganda, I started asking more Nicaraguans about the circumstances and what made el pacto for them personally worse than other alliances. Most were not able to explain it to me or chose not to try. Some explained it like Jorge Madriz, who is active in the small party Alternativa por el Cambio (AC), which some other informants said is filled with Sandinista-spies and which ran in the 2011 national elections together with the FSLN:

It's quite straightforward. When other parties do it, it's called 'an alliance' and it's normal, but when then FSLN does the same, it's called 'el pacto' and it's terribly hurtful.

This is the same conclusion I arrive at. Yet, it gives no further information of what it is that makes such an alliance negative for a Sandinista. Carolina Icabalceta Garay said something which points in the direction of what may be the background for Sandinista sceptics of cooperation with Alemán Lacayo and his party. She explained it this way:

I have studied the history of Nicaragua and the history of many other places, and the pactos are never acceptable; it's always the ruling class pacting in order to stay in power.

If Icabalceta Garay's analysis is the opinion of the average Nicaraguan, then that would certainly not be strange, given the high importance given to history and historical examples by Nicaraguans. I never hear the historic comparison made by others. Later Icabalceta Garay specified what her issues with el pacto were:

I would like for you to write down two issues I strongly dislike about el pacto:

*The first has to do with the [law on] therapeutic abortion. This concession to the church I find embarrassing, unjust and inhumane. [...]*³⁰

The other has to do with popular participation. Before, you could create a new party with the signatures of I don't know how many people. [...]

The first of the issues Icabalceta Garay mentioned seems to be related to the cooperation with the Catholic church. It is not strictly covered by the term *el pacto* between PLC and FSLN as the media and opposition parties use it, but the conflation of *el pacto* with other questionable deals the FSLN leadership has made with other groups is not uncommon. The explanations I received from other Nicaraguans were similar. This may explain why many Sandinistas exclaim that they are strongly against *el pacto*. The second of Icabalceta Garay's issues relates to some changes made to the Constitution in the 1990s, which made it harder to form new parties than under the original constitution created during the Sandinista government of the 1980s. This may arguably be seen as part of *el pacto*. I heard this issue mentioned several times by academic Sandinistas, as one of their main criticisms of *el pacto*.

The new FSLN as part of a Socialism for the 21st Century

The term 'Socialism for the 21st Century' is used in much of Latin America due to the book *El Socialismo Del Siglo XXI* (Dieterich 2007). Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez and his followers promote this book heavily. Dieterich (2007) mentions four main principles included in the new type of socialism:

1. Equal pay for things that take the same amount of time to do.
2. Incorporation of direct, participative democracy.

³⁰ At the time of the interview, the media had not yet reported the fact that Nicaraguan hospitals continued to conduct abortions.

3. Democratic state institutions that legitimately represent citizens at a local level.
4. Self-determination and criticism by the citizens.

According to a private project file by Fonseca Terán and his wife Cuadra Núñez, “Logros de la Revolución Sandinista en su segunda etapa,” the parts on direct democracy planned and set up by the Sandinista government include Nicaraguan government’s plan to implement the project of a ‘Socialism for the 21st Century’ in Nicaragua. They claim this type of socialism is compatible with some of the policies of the Ortega Saavedra government (Cuadra Núñez and Fonseca Terán 2010a).

It is noticeable I never heard any of my Sandinista informants refer to either the book or the term. The term ‘socialism’ was only used by some Nicaraguans who identified positively with the Sandinista experience of the 1980s in the first few years after 2006. Many of the younger Sandinistas had never even heard of it. Once, in the back of a pickup filled with Sandinistas in León following other cars celebrating the Sandinista defense of the city some days earlier against a planned march by the Liberals, I was asked by teenagers, “What are you?” I answered: “I am a socialist.” They asked somewhat perplexed: “Does that mean you are right or left?”³¹

In spite of all the projects currently running in the name of Sandinismo, many of those identifying strongly with the socialist project of the 1980s doubt the revolutionary character of the current phase. Icabcaceta Garay expressed it this way:

Look, I’d like for this to be a revolution, but it just isn’t. I will not let myself be fooled by that.

31 By 2011, this had changed, and ‘socialista’ was now one of three words used to describe Sandinismo as part of the next election campaign, together with Cristiano and Solidario.

Even top FSLN officials, such as Fonseca Terán, see the current process and specifically the part of popular participation critically:

Due to a series of historic circumstances, the political culture of Nicaragua does not include the possibility for changes through nonviolent struggles nor through social struggles. The average Nicaraguan citizen can only understand changes as a product of wars or elections. This constitutes an obstacle for the establishment of direct democracy and for Citizen Power to be installed from below; in the subjective reality of Nicaragua 'taking power' is not a demand of the people; what they expect is not to exercise power themselves but that it be exercised to one's benefit. Therefore, change in the political system can at this point only be promoted from above through the formal installation of Citizen Power(Cuadra Núñez and Fonseca Terán 2010a, 4–5, Wilm translation).

When I first came across this quote, I was rather astonished, as my personal experience of Nicaragua was that there was a comparatively high amount of popular participation in political decision making, especially among the Sandinista part of the population. I will try to show how diverse and complex the process of exerting power is for the Sandinistas, and they generally lie outside the scope of what a single individual can control. I will also demonstrate that the process of exerting power for the Sandinistas is a fundamentally collective process. I believe this sets the Sandinista example apart from many other socialist movements and permits a broad-reaching identification with what Nicaraguans see as a revolutionary process.

Ways of exerting power by individuals and groups

While the alliances between Sandinistas and non-Sandinista groups takes up a lot of public discussion, the differences among and relations between Sandinistas are just as numerous and complex. With the different types of Sandinistas come different ways of trying to exert power. Just about all Sandinistas I met agreed, that the second presidency of Ortega Saavedra is the right time for them to collectively exert power, and they have a responsibility

to do that. The ways of going about this differ. Some use the party hierarchy to obtain a high level job. Others use less traditional ways. In the following, I show a number of ways I noticed Sandinistas try to exert power. I do not assume this list is complete, but it gives an insight into the range of different ways trying to accomplish a change in society.

Power through government positions

The most obvious and painless way of exerting power and trying to move society according to one's own ideals, is as an elected representative, implementing new laws and putting into effect laws forgotten about by the authorities, when this is convenient for their party. The FSLN won the elections in 2006 and 2008. A substantial part of their personal resources goes into the work connected with holding their official positions. As part of a Sandinista parliamentary group, one is generally expected to vote according to party lines, but individual elected officials can influence how or if their vote is counted. The national FSLN member of parliament from León Gladys Báez is said not to have shown up and not have sent her substitute on the day the vote of the new abortion law took place, thereby, slightly changing the outcome of the vote.

Several younger Sandinistas I spoke with would likely not reject a position as an elected representative, but different from my experience with party youths in Europe, there is generally remarkably little focus on arriving at this position in their daily discourse. That is, because, different from much of the European Left, parliamentary work is not universally seen as being the highest level of revolutionary work. An excellent example is María Antonieta Blandón Montenegro, the Executive Director of the Oficina de Ética Pública (OEP) during the current government, a position roughly equivalent to a minister. Before she started in this position, she worked in the legal system on behalf of landless farmers. This she now only

does during weekends. After explaining this to me, she immediately apologised for not working more on it. In contrast, in Europe it would be highly unusual for leftist politicians to continue to work as activists while holding parliamentary or government office. I found it even more intriguing to hear Blandón Montenegro's plans for her future after finishing her career as a politician: To create a school for cooperatives in Matagalpa and teach them how to organise themselves. "This work here [in Managua] is not really giving [...] For someone who is an activist this is not a very good job," she explained. The way of talking about their work for government officials, and to claim there is a 'real world' outside of it to which one truly belongs, is something I found to be typical among Sandinistas holding higher positions. It is such statements, which make me realise, that at least for them, their work is not the highest form of exerting political power, and other forms have to be taken into consideration when talking about Sandinista rule.

The work of Sandinista office holders is valued so little among some Sandinistas that those who do see at least some value in it seem to feel the need to explain this. The cobbler and Sandinista, Armando Martínez in the village of La Esperanza, El Rama, felt the need to say, Ortega Saavedra was necessary for Sandinismo. I did not ask him how he valued the work of those in high government offices or anything related, when he said:

I have [...] something which makes me stay with the Frente Sandinista. I am convinced for the Frente Sandinista to be able to give something, it needs to have power in its hands. It can not give anything without holding power. [...] I know the role of our leader, Daniel Ortega [Saavedra], is fundamental. [...] In the sense of being a leader. We can have a ton of people, intelligent, with all capacities, but they don't have the experience or charisma of Daniel Ortega [Saavedra]. We have seen it over time – during winter and spring of the process of our struggle.

In other countries and/or contexts, it is unlikely this statement would have been made, as it contains little beyond what is a fundamental part of government systems: one needs to have a high-ranking position within the state leadership in order to exert power or 'give something' as Martínez called it.

Power through formal organisations in civil society

Another attractive way of exerting power is working through organisations of civil society. Civil society consists mainly of a vast range of NGOs and some labor unions mostly directly connected with the FSLN. NGOs and labor unions usually try not to portray themselves as Sandinistas, yet it is not tremendously difficult to find out when talking to members individually. The clearest example for me of trying to exert power on the part of Sandinista labor unions/workers was the transport worker strike of 2008. In order to receive government help in times of a spike in petrol prices, Sandinista transport workers largely shut down all main transportation, until the government accepted a compromise.

Several of the NGOs have foreign participation and funding. In some cases, this may be a factor in why they may be reluctant to show their party affiliation openly. A large percentage have a majority or exclusively Sandinistas working for them. Depending on the degree to which the participants are honest to one-another about their true affiliation and the lack of fear of being labelled as Sandinista agents, they try to push for programs they see as being in line with the Sandinista ideology. The origin of the party-political background of many NGOs lies in the events surrounding the change of power in 1990. Many Sandinistas tried to continue their work in the NGO-sector. 'Governing from below,' in this way is not only a strategy used in the past, when Sandinistas were not in power. In organisations such as the *Fundación para la Autonomía y el Desarrollo de la Costa Atlántica de Nicaragua* (FADCANIC) or the *Servicio de*

Información Mesoamericano sobre Agricultura Sostenible (SIMAS) there are people who are in line with the party and who through it try to influence civil society according to party ideals. Very seldom do they actively present themselves as Sandinistas. Similar to my surprise about Blandón Montenegro's continued involvement with grassroots activism, I was astonished to discover, that many of those who had reached high level positions within or close to the government, decided they liked to continue influencing society through the NGO-level. Such a case is Guimar Aminta Arias, a Sandinista who moved between different high-level government offices during my time in Nicaragua. She emphasised she continued to work in the community radio station even after she took on a position in the town government.

Power through the CPCs

Another new option, which did not exist during the 16 years of Sandinistas in opposition, is the participation in *Consejos de Poder Ciudadano* (CPCs). Since its inception in 2007, the CPCs promote government programs in their local area. Official spokespeople of the FSLN, such as Fonseca Terán (2009b), claim that while inspired by the direct democracy existing in Cuba, the Nicaraguan model of democracy will always be different due to its different history. According to Cuadra Núñez and Fonseca Terán (2010a), the CPCs are meant to fall under part 2 of the project of a Socialism for the 21st Century. The creation of the CPCs was one of the most talked about issues in the first year of Ortega Saavedra's presidency.

It started with the passing of a law on citizen participation in the parliament in January 2007. This was approved by both opposition parties and the FSLN. The Liberal PLC at the time went back and forth between allying with the FSLN and the Alianza Liberal Nicaragüense (ALN), even going as far as considering the creation of a common new Liberal party (Pantoja and Marengo 2007). Everyone initially saw the idea of citizen participation as the FSLN

reaching out to other groups and parties. When the CPCs were announced a few months later, with reference to the law already passed by parliament, it was seen by leading opposition politicians as trying to merge state and party. The FSLN claims the installation of the CPCs is only one of several steps to establish direct democracy to replace the current representative democracy. Other steps include the establishment of plebiscites in matters of strategic importance, and eventually when the opposition loses the majority in parliament, making the CPCs part of the legislative branch (Cuadra Núñez and Fonseca Terán 2010a). The CPCs were started in spite of the opposition, and have ever since been accused by the parliamentary opposition as being nothing but Sandinista councils and remarkably similar in their structure to Comités de Defensa Sandinista (CDSs) of the 1980s. In the view of opposition parties, the CPCs are the same as the CDS – which they believe were only created to control citizens. Additionally, they think they are to exert power by the presidency in a way which circumvents parliament. A similar logic is apparent in the analysis made by many academics. Anderson and Dodd (2009) describe the CPCs as an instrument with which the presidency can control FSLN mayors at a local level, given that they believe the CPCs respond directly to national leaders of the FSLN. The Equipo Nítlápan-Envío (2007a, 2007b) warned that the experience with the CDSs had not been taken sufficiently into consideration when forming the CPCs and that the reestablishment of such an organisation would reestablish a model in which state and party were the same, which they believed had been proven not to work during the 1980s.

Rosario Murillo, Ortega Saavedra's wife and national coordinator of the Communication Council of the CPCs, described the CPCs in July 2007 in this way:

The Consejos de Poder Ciudadano are in reality the enlargement and putting into practice

of a policy, of a proposal, of a commitment [...] of national reconciliation and unity among Nicaraguans, who can make use of this organisational form in order to participate in and to make use of their right to decide upon the programs of the government (Sandoval 2007, translation: Wilm).

In order to prevent the opposition doing away with the CPCs by passing new laws, Ortega Saavedra ordered by presidential decree that the CPCs were to be incorporated into the Consejo Nacional de Planificación Económica y Social (CONPES), part of the executive branch (Diario Granma 2007). After some re-scheduling, the CPCs were initially planned to be confirmed on November 30th 2007, but the parliamentary opposition voted in mid November for a law that prevented the establishment of CPCs as part of the state-structure, forced the CPCs to become part of the FSLN structure, cut them off state funding, and prevented state secretaries from taking orders from the CPCs. The Sandinista delegates said the CPCs would be established, no matter what the law said “Because the public has the right to participate in government decisions in whatever way they want” (Pantoja 2007, Wilm translation). In January 2008, the Corte Suprema de Justicia (CSJ) finally ruled Ortega Saavedra did have the power to establish the CPCs and to define the limits of their power, and that parliament had no right to overrule him on that issue (La Prensa 2008).

The view of top opposition politicians is also reflected by some Liberals on a grassroots level. My experience shows that views on the nature of the CPCs go across party lines: Liberals are involved in some CPCs and some Sandinistas are against CPCs. The CPCs at a local level work cross-politically in some places. Félix Gómez Morales, a gardener originally from Chinandega who now works in downtown León, was a Sandinista fighter during the revolutionary insurrection of 1979, and is well connected to the FSLN leadership in León. Over an extended period, we discussed why many opposition Nicaraguans had not been

convinced by the government to join them, even though the main argument against the FSLN, the possible restart of the war, had been proven not to be an issue. He was quite negative about the subject and believed it must simply be in the Nicaraguan character: “The Nicaraguan is quite hard. You see, the government does all this! And still – they don’t join us!” At another time, he tried to convince me the CPCs also were open to the opposition. He explained to me how his CPC consisted of 12 people, of which five were non-Sandinistas and how the idea was to convert the opposition members to be supporters of the government bit by bit – but not through force:

See, she [pointing at name of one of the CPC members in his book] has been with party X and party Y. And we don’t say anything, but, of course, we hope that some day she realises that it is the Frente that represents her true interests.

While Gómez Morales seemed to at least in part admit that the CPCs are connected more to the FSLN than to other parties, that is not common. Gloria María Fonseca, sister-in-law of Icabalceta Garay, is general coordinator of the CPC in her neighborhood in Managua. When I met her the first time and asked her rather provocatively whether the CPCs were part of the FSLN, she explained the connection :

No, the CPCs is an organisation born out of the necessity of the people to better their living conditions. Everyone is welcome, whether coming from the party or not. We don’t ask what party they come from nor does it interest us what they do. All we are interested in, is that they want to work [within the CPC], that’s all. [...] What happens is the parties of the political right are molested by the fact that the poor people organise themselves, to express themselves and demand better conditions for their lives.

In other areas of the country, there is less non-Sandinista participation. Pedro Cerna, barber and Sandinista from El Rama explained why the political right did not want to participate:

See, they don't want to participate in anything. All they want, is to destabilise this country, [...] because what they truly are out for, is power. They already lost it, but in some municipios they still have power because they have the mayor.

Those non-Sandinistas who chose to join a CPC, do not seem to focus on their own political party, as relates to their CPC-related activities. The places with almost exclusively FSLN Sandinista dominated CPCs seem to be the majority. By 2010, the FSLN leadership accepted it as a strategic error that too many FSLN leaders had taken positions in local CPCs except for some areas where an effort had been made to avoid this (Cuadra Núñez and Fonseca Terán 2010a, p. 5).

Those Sandinistas participating in CPCs I talked to, seemed to think it necessary to have control on the part of the FSLN. In Moyogalpa, I spoke to Blanca María Nella, at the time a heavily involved Sandinista CPC member. She, like several other grassroots FSLN Sandinistas, saw the problem from the other side:

Of course, they can all come and participate and work with us... To rule, however, that's what we do. We haven't been waiting 16 years until finally winning only to let them continue to rule.

Many of those Sandinistas I spoke to who participate in the CPCs previously participated in the CDSs, yet most CPS-members deny they are the same. Pedro Cerna participated in both and gave a fairly average explanation of the difference:

The objective before [of the CDSs] was to fight the armed enemy. Today, the CPCs are about how to share work... to work, to help, to organise a piece of social work, like [when one notices] "This street here doesn't work anymore, lets write a proposal to the national assembly [to have it fixed]. Before it was different, we had to look out block by block, because the enemy was around, and he was armed. Today that's not the case. Now it's different. It's more democratic. [...] One of the things the CPCs do here now is to build

rural schools, together with the Juventud Sandinista, but as the mayor here always is Liberal, we do not have good access. That's why we want the mayor, to give it more thrust. Right now we do not have water here, just [a few] wells. That would be a project for the CPCs to take up, for the government.

It is extremely common that the explanation of difference between the two deals mainly with the historic circumstances rather than a difference in organisational structure. Many FSLN Sandinistas are not involved in the CPC of their neighborhood. Neither Carolina Fonseca Icabalzeta's nor her parents or her uncle Bayardo José Fonseca Galo participate in their local CPC meetings although they all are seriously interested in engaging in politics locally, and although none have achieved this through the party hierarchy. Fonseca Galo disagrees with members of the local CPC on political grounds. He explained, that most of those participating only did so because the FSLN was in power. One main criticism Sandinistas seem to have of the CPCs is how they function at a higher level. The local CPCs elect representatives for increasingly higher levels, until at the departmental level it becomes the departmental secretary of the FSLN who is in charge of passing on information to and from the highest level, Rosario Murillo.

I was present at a few CPC meetings in León, and many times I just came by the meeting place to hear whether anything new had happened. My initial impression was the power of the CPCs was limited to the local, and beyond that, they were just receiving orders from higher up. The CPCs members mentioned above also seemed to distinguish between participating in a CPC and exerting power as two separate processes. My understanding of the importance of the CPCs changed somewhat over time. As part of the election campaign 2008, many FSLN candidates for city council members signed a paper stating they would respect the decisions of the CPCs. Half a year later, the newly elected mayor of León, Manuel Calderón, ended up

in an open dispute with the CPCs of León, trying to retract some of the powers given to them. The conflict was eventually settled, but the CPCs showed they were independent decision making bodies. Several Sandinistas I spoke with predicted that eventually the CPCs would take over as the new representatives of civil society, the part NGOs have represented. “What we will see is a different civil society. This is the new civil society that is emerging,” Falguni Guharay explained.

The installation of the CPCs is not unproblematic as the FSLN officially recognises. According to them, two reasons are to blame. One reason is the history of Nicaragua in which this institution has never existed before. The other reason given, is the little importance that FSLN militants attribute to the establishment of the CPCs as true representations of neighborhood opinions and they are used as tools for political maneuvering (Cuadra Núñez and Fonseca Terán 2010a, p. 5). This is also what I heard from those people close to the Sandinista cause who did not form part of their CPC. Icabalceta Garay stated:

Well, see, this local CPC here is one that consists of party militants who worked with the party during the 16 years. They are people they feel they can trust.

[...] Now, I don't know if they do it for free or whether they are paid or get some substitute for their work. Of course, I know it would be only fair to receive a little.

At one time, we had a problem with the water [flow] and we started collecting signatures and the water company asked us “Are you a CPC?” and we answered “Ehm, yeah, of course. We are citizens making up a committee to gain power in that sense we are a CPC” Then they told us: “You should have the signature of so and so.” She is of the official CPC here. We went, and asked her and explained what we were doing and she gave us the OK and said: “Ah, that's good.”

These people use it for their political career. It is so they can show: “I have been working

in the CPC of so and so.”

It seems that, for Icabalceta Garay, it was not so much a problem who made up the local CPC or that she had concrete problems with those involved, as much as she was bothered that her campaign to better the flow of the drinking water in the neighborhood could help someone's political career.

Power through informal groups in civil society

Whereas the former two groups, labor unions and NGOs, offer opportunities for Sandinistas to exert power while hiding their party affiliation or at least not doing it in the name of the party, the opposite: cases exist in which the name of the party is invoked without the party officials having anything to do with the activity done in its name.

I interviewed Manuel Corea, one of the former students of the Wilhelm-Pieck cadre school in East Germany. He lives in a poor neighborhood of Managua. It is so poor, that the taxi driver who took me there did not dare to drop me off outside the door by myself. I was asked to call ahead to make sure Corea waited outside the copy shop he operates. It is clearly a dangerous area of Managua. One of the first things he explained, was, that he and the other Sandinistas in the area started an organised soccer match in order to get children off the streets who otherwise would be warring street gangs. Initially, I understood it as a program officially run by the government, but I gradually came to understand it was in fact activists who decided to put the soccer match together, and had chosen to do it in the name of 'Sandinismo' as a reflection of their ideals. Later on he changed the story and emphasised the games were also open to non-Sandinistas. It became obvious, that he wondered if he should have disclosed all these facts.

Fonseca Galo also worked in similar ways when I met him. He organised Sandinistas who

had been active during the revolutionary insurrection and who now were 'not quite with' the current government in an organisation called 'Amigos.' Ideologically, these people were still or once again are in line with the FSLN. Fonseca Galo's project specifically included some revolutionary fighters who had joined other parties. I understood that in these cases, the idea behind organising the person was that such people would come back to the party, if only there was a viable path to do so. With time, I learned that 'not being with' the party just meant they were not employed or otherwise involved in the decision making processes of the current government or the CPCs. Fonseca Galo and some friends of 'Amigos' had many plans on how to help Sandinismo along. One of them involved building a children's center. This would be done in the name of Sandinismo in order to help the party indirectly, earning credibility among the youngsters who would make use of the center.

At first I believed people simply were formed by their personal experience of the 1980s and their loyalties from those years could not change now. I discovered among those not connected to the inner circles of the FSLN, the common practice is to reinvent oneself as Sandinista rather than portraying oneself as a Liberal in favor of Sandinista programs. For many, such a shift represents a second change in their political affiliation.

William Leiva Cardoza, the neighbor of Bayardo Fonseca and one of those Fonseca Galo recruited to his project, was one of few Sandinistas I met who admitted how this reinvention happens. After he explained how he had fought on the Sandinista side in the revolutionary insurrection, he went on to talk about the time after 1990:

I ended up in 1990 with absolutely no benefits. It was particularly hard for us Sandinistas to find work in some business. [...] So then [in the 2000s] I worked for the Alianza Liberal Nicaragüense. [...] I imagine many other Sandinistas did the same. In the end it worked; we split the Liberal vote... Many of us have said it was part of a tactic. But honestly... it

was out of necessity. [...] But I have always been Sandinista. And I always will be Sandinista.

And for those Sandinistas who still had not seen a way to come back, he said:

I think Ortega [Saavedra] should call for a meeting of all those Sandinistas in the other parties and tell them: I know why you went there [to the Liberals], but now come back.

I saw several similar projects to 'Amigos' although I did not investigate them as much as this group. Most such groups are led by people intensely involved in the party previously but who are now either out of the inner circles or left the party for another group during the years when the FSLN was in parliamentary opposition. At one point in León, there was talk in the news on whether there would be armed contra groups in the mountains who were preparing to attack the government, I witnessed various groups of fighters from the revolution gather and prepare to fight with them in the name of Sandinismo. The government in the meantime tried to calm everybody and claimed the reports of rebels in the mountains were highly exaggerated. What all these groups have in common is that they are composed of people previously active in the formal parts of the Sandinista movements, and more often than not during the 1979 insurrection.

Power through organisations influencing governments

Another group of organisations consists of those strongly Sandinista (FSLN and MRS), that try to influence the policies of the government. For me, these currently come closest to representations of ideological tendencies within Sandinismo. The two most prominent examples I encountered are SIMAS and the free software movement. Although their agendas relate to two vastly different areas, in terms of personnel, they are closely linked. Denis Cáceres works for SIMAS and heads one of the Linux groups. During my time in Nicaragua,

three of the most advanced programmers in the country were hired by SIMAS. In addition, SIMAS sponsors several of the events organised by the free software movement. The free software movement's core agenda is to convert the state apparatus, private businesses and the universities to use only open source software. Just about all of those participating see themselves as Sandinistas on some level. They originally organised in a handful of smaller groups, each promoting and using one certain version of Linux, but during my time in Nicaragua they joined forces to push their common agenda in Managua. A few people work with free software in other locations – I taught classes in León. The groups in Managua did not often coordinate with these other groups.

During a day of strategy talks for this movement I attended, I only heard the Costa Rican participant suggest trying to push their agenda through use of the CPCs. Most others seemed to prefer direct connections to bureaucrats and politicians to push their agenda. In their view, one of their main enemies are those FSLN technicians who are not convinced of the advantages of free software. The members of the free software movement frequently accuse FSLN technicians of corruption or not having the necessary educational level to understand a free software solution would work better for them.

SIMAS tries to promote sustainable agriculture with little or no use of pesticides. SIMAS has its offices right next door to the presidential house in the Parque El Carmen, Managua and tries to play a central role in the country's development through the use of development funds. Head of SIMAS, Guharay, is not a member of the FSLN and is at times highly critical, but overall he is a strong supporter of the current government. Guharay explained the party internal conflict he had seen since the 1980s. One of the first things he said, was, that he set up the first agricultural information system in the late 1980s in northern Nicaragua, but that he

was then ordered to delete all the data, because the project represented the sustainable agriculture tendency which SIMAS represents today. This was and is controversial within the FSLN. Those opposed to sustainable agriculture in the FSLN, claim that it is only a trick by the United States and other industrialised countries to convince third world countries to use inefficient agricultural methods in order to keep them from ever achieving the same results as first world countries.

In the summer of 2009, the disagreement between the two tendencies manifested itself in the question of what corn processing plant Nicaragua should build. Ortega Saavedra and Rosario Murillo had allegedly already visited an industrial plant in Venezuela and Murillo was said to have exclaimed: “We need one of these in Nicaragua” as Guharay explained. SIMAS helped write an application for a grant to build a plant that would be set up without using trans-genetic corn and be environmentally sustainable.

I am not sure how many other organisations of professionals with Sandinista leaning exist. I came across the free software groups and SIMAS in other connections in where I did not expect to find them. There may only exist a few such organisations in total. One organisation which looks similar because it works in the same sector, is the Centro para la Promoción, la Investigación y el Desarrollo Rural y Social (CIPRES). Founded in 1990, this NGO is mainly comprised of Sandinista workers of the Ministry of Agriculture of the 1980s. They came up with the model of the current Sandinista government program ‘Hambre Cero’ and those working there are mostly professionals. When I asked Fonseca Icabalzeta’s father Fernando Fonseca, who works there, what he thought about the current government, he answered he looked at it favourably, and then immediately started to talk about the contribution of CIPRES:

The organisation I work for, CIPRES, is who invented ‘Hambre Cero’ – except we called it

the 'Productive Food Program'... It was a battle about the analysis of the sociological reality of society in 1991. It was after [hurricane] Mitch we figured out what was key to make sure people would not sell the things we brought to them. [...] We used to give aid to the male, as the head of the family, but they oftentimes sold what we gave them.

According to Fernando Fonseca, CIPRES in a certain sense prepared the current government with studies and field tests several years before they could take power. When he said 'we' it sometimes seemed to refer to the Sandinista movement at large and at other times to refer only to those working at CIPRES. It did not seem terribly relevant for him to make a distinction. What all these organisations are defined by is that they work directly with government bureaucratic institutions. Another feature they make use of, is their knowledge as professional to convince the government of policy in certain areas. They also operate in an environment where party affiliation with the FSLN is not directly expressed.

Power through combining parliamentary and activist work

Political affiliations are a popular theme of conversations in Nicaragua much more so than elsewhere. A lot of activities are carried out through party-related networks, but they are not openly declared as such. My observations in this area stand in contrast with those of the anthropologist Babb (2004), who claimed to have encountered a Nicaragua in the post-Sandinista years that had left party politics behind.

I first encountered this phenomenon of combining activism with parliamentary work when visiting the city of Granada in April 2008. I ran into Benjamín Garay, an older gentleman known popularly as 'professor Benji,' at the city square. When I told him of my purpose in Nicaragua, he invited me to an area outside the city recently occupied by what called itself a 'group of concerned citizens.' I went along with him to the land occupation, and was

presented to some of the organisers. One girl wore a t-shirt of Calderón Sandino. She explained the setup to me and that there were areas for former members of the military, police, women and everybody else. Garay commented:

See, these people are not grateful! The Frente does everything for them, yet when you ask what they'll vote, they'll tell you they don't know.

Another one of them said: "See, it's better this way [that it's not only open to Sandinista supporters] if we are to grow." When I formally interviewed the woman with the Calderón Sandino t-shirt and asked about their party affiliations, she said: "Oh no, we are not affiliated with any party. We are people united from all backgrounds here."

A few weeks later I wanted to interview some of the FSLN members in the Granada city council about this issue. When entering the building, I immediately ran into the second organiser from the occupied areas. He clearly worked in the city council for the FSLN group. He immediately ran over to me, and I told him what I was looking for. He explained: "Yes, there is one [city council member] here who has been working a lot on that case. He knows everything about it."

He guided me over to the office of said city council member. I waited there with some other Sandinistas, while the council member, as far as what I was being told, still was out in the occupied territory. Once he returned I made it clear to him that I wanted to interview him about that project. He answered:

What land grabbing exactly? Because there is one down south there which is illegal, and we as the FSLN are of course against that.

It was clear, that he talked about the area I had visited, and it was equally clear that although he claimed to be against it, it was organised both by him and his personal city council

workers. As it turned out through his explanations, the FSLN initially voted for a note condemning this grabbing of land. Before I turned the camera on to record his statement, I felt he wanted to make sure we had an implicit understanding that he would not be able to defend the land grabbing publicly. The FSLN strategy in the city council was to condemn the action, while simultaneously declaring there was no way to remove the land grabbers at this time and one needed to focus on the humanitarian aspects of the situation. This meant one had to understand the people who sat on the land, were in immediate need of an affordable place to live.

I witnessed another land occupation in Ciudad Sandino. It was instructive, because it showed how groups not belonging to the Sandinismo tradition are at times permitted to be part of the popular organising efforts within the overall Sandinista state. I reached the occupiers through my former student Javier Díaz. When I came by to visit him, he drove us to see them, as he believed it could interest me. I went back a few times by myself. The setup of this land-occupation seemed similar to Granada with a few activists leading the effort who were not in need of land, and the ownership of the land being in doubt with a nearby land-owner claiming that it was his and the occupiers claiming it was the property of the government.

The local political forces at play are different. Instead of Sandinistas organising the occupation, the two main organisers of the land grabbing in Ciudad Sandino, José Santos Aguirre Pérez and Aracely Guillén, were former Contras who presented themselves as connected to the Partido Resistencia Nicaragüense (PRN). The camp was initially presented to me by them as consisting of a group of former Contras who had been in need of land. The action of grabbing the land was explained to me as having been taken in connection with the promise to Contras to be given land after the peace in 1990. This promise was hitherto not

fulfilled. Over the months, I saw them frequently. During the fall of 2008, they were largely concerned about attacks from a neighbor who claimed to own the land, as well as the bureaucratic process to receive official titles in Managua.

The FSLN mayor of Ciudad Sandino in 2008 was Raymundo Flores Genet. His term ended with the elections of that same year. He had lost the position of political secretary of the FSLN in Ciudad Sandino a year earlier (Rodríguez 2007a). He expressed opposition to the land occupation when I asked him about it. He was also angry that the police defied orders to remove them. The incoming FSLN mayor, Roberto Somoza, was said by the land occupiers not to mind them. I was never able to schedule a meeting with him, and the police of Ciudad Sandino decided not to comment on why they were not acting.

For a while, it seemed to be an extraordinary favorable treatment of Contras by the higher strata of the FSLN, even though the story told to me changed after a while when Aguirre Pérez claimed that it was not only former Contras, but also former members of the military and the police who made up the camp. “We don’t go around with an ideology; we are the same,” he explained. I still wanted to know why he thought that three Liberal governments did not help them as Contras and that they now expected the Sandinistas, whom they fought against for 10 years, to give them lands:

To be honest... One has to speak of reality. The Liberals were not concerned about us. They are of money, and the poor people they don't see. To be frank and say it legitimately: I am not a Sandinista. I am [part of the] Nicaraguan Resistance, but I speak about reality: They are helping us more than our people. Our people left us behind. They forgot about us. They continue with their millions and we with poverty. And these [Sandinistas] don't remove us and so here we are. [...] It's not because I have the same ideology. I am [part of the Nicaraguan] Resistance. But one has to look for who gives you their hand.

One day, I showed up earlier than what had been agreed upon, and none of the organisers were present. I waited in the line outside the main organising tent and started to converse with some of those living on the land. This was the first time I spoke to them without any of the organisers around. Those standing there explained they were simply people with a need for land and that the organisers had offered pieces of land for a nominal fee. When I asked them about their connection with the Contras or any of the other groups mentioned, they looked at me astonished and explained that this camp had nothing to do with the Contras. Suddenly it dawned on me, that the only ones who had said they were connected to the Contras were the two main organisers. I had previously wondered why two of the land occupiers had put out red-and-black FSLN flags and no flags representing other groups were to be found anywhere, but the organisers had just brushed it off as meaning nothing. The Contra-connection of the organisers was only used to legitimise a hand out of land to poor people in general. Some studying of past newspaper articles shows that the national PRN leadership had claimed in June 2008 that the two organisers were not members of their party (E. García 2008). When I showed up at the headquarters of the PRN in Managua once and asked about the land occupation, the officials I met, at first tried to tell me these would be part of the 'resistance movement' but not of the PRN. When I insisted those I looked for were members of the party, they finally gave me the phone numbers of Aguirre Pérez. Only now did I understand this was an effort to hide the connection. In October 2008, a few weeks after he stated the positive words on the FSLN government, Aguirre Pérez figured as the president of the PRN in the municipio of Ciudad Sandino in the same newspaper which previously had described him as not belonging to the party, when he announced his support for the PLC candidate in the local elections (Álvarez 2008).

I encountered many similar situations of hidden party connections behind organising efforts – with the 8th of March women’s march in León, controlled by the MRS, protesting sugar and banana workers in Managua organised by people with background from the FSLN, various NGOs in connection with the anti-government protests controlled by the MRS, and student groups in León coming from the FSLN. Also all the organised indigenous people in León I met, turned out to be party members of either the PLC or the FSLN. Had I not had many years of experience in operating in a political conspiratorial environment among the far left of Norway, I would likely never have thought of investigating whether a group that claims it is independent and not connected to any political party is correct in its claim.

Power through infiltration

Some of the Sandinista political involvement may have been a lot more hidden than what anthropologists in Nicaragua have found between 1990 and 2007. In July 2009, I witnessed a bull race in Managua as part of the Catholic Santo Domingo celebrations. Erick Saul Rios Juarez, a 20 year old FSLN Sandinista and radio host had asked me to cooperate on filming the event. Different from similar activities in Spain, a whole series of bulls were involved, and (drunk) people tried to mount them rather than kill them. Also, the ‘bull always wins’ as Carlos Alberto Rocha Castro once put it, because only humans were seriously hurt and the bulls all went back to live in the countryside after the day was over. From the outside, this looked like many traditional celebrations in the third world. Initially, I assumed it was something the Catholic Church took from preexisting religions which it then adopted and modernised.

I was surprised, when Rios Juarez revealed to me, that all those working in the preparation of this part of the Santo Domingo celebrations were Sandinistas. I was even more surprised when I interviewed the principal person responsible for the arrangement. He revealed the

Sandinista planning behind the event even more openly:

When we lost the elections in 1990, we decided as a party we needed to infiltrate all public spaces available to us. That also included the church and the Santo Domingo celebrations. So in anticipation of the cultural import of celebrations such as Halloween from the United States, we wanted to create something altogether Nicaraguan. Cows are a traditional Nicaraguan animal, and we adopted that to the city and created the bull races.

The last part of this statement seems to be at least in part false, as already Lancaster (1988, pp. 40–42) reported on the usage of cow costumes during the Santo Domingo celebrations. However, it is appropriate in connection with this portrayal of the organisation of this bull race in the past, to reconsider the findings of Babb (2004) as it seems to have been how many foreign observers saw Nicaragua during the post-Sandinista years. According to her, the political life of the previously party controlled society had in the 1990s/early 2000s turned into a large amount of independent groups and organisations, each with their own narrowly defined agenda of identity politics coming into being. Her vision was of a Nicaragua in neoliberal ruins in which the Sandinistas had disappeared from power forever. Her projection of the future of Nicaragua was one in which there was ever more hunger and postmodern lifestyle and identity politics. This did not come true. As my former student and activist Douglas Augusto Varela Vilchez mentioned, at a time while he was working unofficially for the MRS but officially for another NGO: “Nicaraguans who claim they are not into [party] politics – they are lying!” Certainly the Nicaragua Babb describes just a few years earlier was a decidedly different Nicaragua than the one I saw in terms of political power and majorities. Of course, I can not know whether Babb (2004) correctly described what Nicaraguans thought at the time, or whether she just did not manage to penetrate the social structure of the activist groups enough to realise what structures actually mattered at the time. Who knows – maybe

the idea of infiltration was something the Sandinistas got after the fact, when the FSLN was in government again.

Use of paid protesters?

While all the other examples point to activism based on wanting to try to change society on the part of the participants, examples exist of paid or forced protests. Most Nicaraguans I spoke to about the issue assumed government workers were forced to participate in pro-government protests. While this may be the case, it is my experience when talking to such workers, that the pressure to participate is not articulated directly, so it is hard to verify whether they were actually being pressured to participate or whether they imagine they were. There is a much more clear-cut example of paid protesters being used by the government. In this case, I also wonder if the protesters could not be said to have some influence through this mean and get closer to achieve their own goals.

Between August and the municipal elections of November of 2008, in Managua the *rotondas* were physically occupied by former banana workers. Simultaneously, the banana workers protested outside parliament for more than half a year for compensation due to work related injuries and damages. At first their protest was mounted under the MRS banner. But after what they explained to me as being extensive corruption of their initial leader, a member of the MRS or at least closely connected to them, was revealed, the FSLN took over the protest and the government provided them with food.

I interviewed some of the leaders of the banana workers a little before the elections and they said they were under MRS leadership earlier, but now they were independent. I asked them what the vast number of red-and-black Sandinista flags were doing in the camp if they were independent, and they replied that “anyone is free to put up whatever party banner they

want.” I then asked why there were large government posters behind the food tent. They told me: “Well, it protects us from the rain, we found it down at the John Paul the Second plaza after [government] festivities.”

In order to prevent the MRS and PLC from marching, these banana workers stood in all the rotondas of Managua starting in the summer of 2008. For this, they allegedly received C\$100 per day per worker (around \$5 USD) to swing flags in favor of the CPCs and playing loud music. The banner they stood under, read ‘love is greater than hate’ – a quote of Rosario Murillo made in connection with the MRS protest in late spring 2008. The occupation of the rotondas lasted more than half a year, with some interruptions. At times, when the opposition was sufficiently violent, especially in the days after the elections, they were able to take control of the rotondas, at least one at a time. Arguably, those organised were used to achieve a goal rather than achieving a goal of their own. Their protest in front of the Liberally dominated parliament was in this way prolonged, as they had both a constant source of income and supply of food while camping out. In February 2011 Sandinista news media reported Ortega Saavedra had started handing out houses to these protesters (La Voz del Sandinismo 2011).

Power without organising?

Organising in itself seems to be a fundamental principle of Nicaraguan society and few Sandinistas are not organised in some group or another. The few examples of not being organised I find are those working as street vendors in León, such as María Elena Bustillo. Not much direct organising takes place among them in León other than directing who is to stand where. Their ability to affect society, therefore, seems to be the most limited. The disorganisation also means they are left out of channels of receiving help from the state. At

one point of time, I explained to Bustillo what kinds of micro-credits are available from the government. They generally involve several people getting together to apply for a loan in a group. “So if one of them just disappears, the rest have to carry that!” was her disappointed reaction. Bustillo expected the FSLN to give more power to the poor in general. As it turns out, power is only accessible to the organised citizen.

Bustillo made me take a photo of a rotten beam in her house and write a postcard to hand to Ortega Saavedra in her name the first time I came to Nicaragua. Another time, when changing municipal governments from one FSLN mayor to the next FSLN mayor, I witnessed how Bustillo and those she hangs around talked about the personal tragedy of losing a contact in the government who “always was good to [them].” For her and others in that situation, who feel an allegiance to Sandinismo and the Ortega Saavedra government, the relationship to the government seemed to be more connected to the caudillo principle, in which a relationship to a government person with access to money and power would give them certain privileges.

Political activist education

The understanding of the collective nature of political pressure and the idea that one needs to make use of all the opportunities available at any given time, is quite ingrained in Sandinista philosophy. It was well exemplified in the reaction to the municipal elections of 2008, when not only party leaders, but grassroots Sandinista followers became involved in disclaiming charges of voter fraud.

A large part of the different understandings of whether they have been cheated or not is likely

due to the difference in political education and culture of Liberals and Sandinistas. The whole setup was explained to me by Díaz: In Nicaragua at each election center, there are at least three people sitting at the table: a president, a vice-president and a secretary. These are supposed to be from different parties, and the local chapter of the Consejo Supremo Electoral (CSE), which also is made up of people from different parties and whose national leadership is appointed by parliament. In addition, each party is allowed to send one observer to witness what takes place at each electoral center. Each of those officially appointed to sit at the electoral center decide upon a number on the morning of the election. They do not announce the number to others until the electoral proceedings of the day begin. Before any ballot is given out, each of these persons needs to write their number on the ballot. The president and vice-president have to sign it. "There are six ways to make a ballot not count," Díaz explained to me. A circumstance under which one might decide to cheat could be if a personal neighbor would enter the election center, and one knew the neighbor always voted for another party than one's own, so before handing the ballot to the neighbor, one would make sure to invalidate it, so that the vote would not count. The six ways include signing with a false name, not signing at all, putting down the wrong number, etc. What all these have in common is they cannot be done unless none of the others present take notice. There seems to be quite a difference in understanding as what constitutes cheating. One young Sandinista girl from Estelí explained it to me this way:

See, you will typically have like a 57-year-old man representing the FSLN. He has participated in this many times before. The Liberals will be represented by a 17 year old who joined the day before.

Gómez Morales later on explained that same process to me:

See, I went there, but I had my son around, so that he could learn how all the procedures worked.

At the same time, I was told of several Sandinista voters who had shown friends of mine that they had indeed proof that they had voted twice. This did not seem to constitute a problem to them, as long as all the procedures had been followed. When I sat outside municipal headquarters of the FSLN León during one of the days just after the elections, one of the older activists told me:

I just don't understand how they can talk about cheating. When I see that something isn't right with a ballot, I know to put down my ID card on the table and the table is automatically closed until those from the CSE arrive and resolve the conflict.

The CSE did not receive many complaints about cheating that day, as Liberal observers had likely not known the proper procedures and had even signed off the result before naming their concerns to campaign headquarters. As this example shows, the moral behind these actions seems to be that, within the Sandinista logic, it is the responsibility of the group/party, not the individual, to ensure the individual voice gets heard by educating the individual member.

Concluding remarks

In this chapter, we saw how different Sandinista groups of different kinds work mostly autonomously with only vague ideological points connecting all the party's members. We also saw how political alliances on single issues are part of the Sandinista repertoire of politics and how this gives some limited possibilities for non-Sandinistas to take part in Sandinista processes of decision making. This does not always mean an even power sharing with the cooperating group. Thereafter we saw how wide the repertoire of politics for Sandinistas is

today, but that all of those who successfully exert power follow group-based approaches.

It is not difficult to understand, then, that such a wide range of political activity leads to a wide-ranging inclusion of individuals who all entertain a feeling of ownership, a generally high level of participation, and that it permits trying out different approaches by different groups.

The socioeconomic characteristics of individuals and groups may offer some explanation for the specific way in which they engage politically. These characteristics are seldom questioned and generally taken as a given. The explanations only go as far as explaining why the individual Sandinistas do what they do, given their position within Nicaraguan society in combination with their adherence to Sandinista ideology. In this sense, the Sandinismo of the 21st century seems to be much in line with the project of a Socialism for the 21st Century.

Simultaneously this chapter cannot explain all that is happening during the government of Ortega Saavedra in terms of the transformation of power structures. The neoliberal trade policies through the Dominican Republic–Central America Free Trade Agreement (DR-CAFTA) and the conditions the International Monetary Fund (IMF) debt levies upon the country have not changed much since 2007, in spite of all the Sandinistas who exert power in some way. These and similar conditions are often taken for granted and not considered much further, by either Nicaraguans or foreigners. Additionally, there may be an appropriation of large amounts of oil revenues by individual FSLN leaders—a claim which the right-wing press makes repetitively but so far has not been able to substantiate. This would hinder the free and independent development of Nicaragua the way it seems Sandinista ideology envisions it.

Such differences between Sandinistas can also be seen at a lower level where they do not

necessarily mean difference in access to funds, but still are quite apparent.

Chapter 11

Historic relations to Eastern Europe

The preceding chapters showed how my informants, and especially the FSLN Sandinistas among them, saw almost exclusively other Nicaraguans as central in political events that happened in the past or present. This seemed to be quite systematic. We have seen how this understanding of history, which puts Nicaraguan actors at the center stage of history, is effectively used to mobilise a diverse net of groups who all see themselves as acting in the name of Sandinismo. This net reaches far beyond President José Daniel Ortega Saavedra and a few people around him. Although a great percentage of the population may mobilise to participate in a general struggle for social change, their effect is somewhat limited. The wealth of the two oligarch families seems impossible to touch under all types of governments. So instead of judging the Sandinista government by how well it manages to redistribute wealth, Sandinistas judge their own policies by where they could lead, or could have led, if they were allowed to continue.

This chapter shows, how my informants see the historical relationship between Nicaragua and Eastern Europe, and that it influences the current understanding of history of my informants. It gives yet another cause for which the Sandinista movement can mobilise. The historical uniqueness of the Nicaraguan case means, the current tactics and strategies of the Sandinistas cannot necessarily be applied in any of Nicaragua's Latin American allies (for example: employing positive reference to memories of the Soviet Union), even though many other countries find themselves in a similar situation economically. The relationship to Eastern Europe is explained by presenting some of the personal stories of those Sandinistas who

went to a school of political leadership in the Deutsche Demokratische Republik (DDR, German Democratic Republic). The majority of these students presented their time in East Germany as having had a lasting effect on their view of politics. This chapter shows how some of them are in positions of political power whereby they are likely to shape the policies of the current government.

Nicaraguan particularities in the current global system

Besides economic issues, Nicaraguan dependency on other powers is complex terrain. Some of the cultural aspects survived from the previous phase of economic cooperation with the Soviet Union, and Sandinistas now seek to convert that into renewed economic links.

Economic links to the United States were already in place by 2006. When these led the country into a global crisis, Nicaraguan actors could only influence how the crisis was managed in Nicaragua. No-one in Nicaragua could decide upon its existence nor strength.

The global capitalist interdependence has a direct effect on Nicaraguan daily life which hardly can be influenced by any Nicaraguan government policies. The current financial crisis (2008–), which has clearly affected Nicaragua, made the Nicaraguan lack of influence clear once more. The Nicaraguan government can only decide where it will cut spending, not whether it will do so. On 22 January 2009, the presidential decree to confront the financial crisis was revealed (La Voz del Sandinismo 2009). According to it, government workers who made under C\$20,000 a year (roughly \$1000 USD) would continue to enjoy wage increases while those earning more would not, no vacant positions would be filled during the first nine months of the year, and the working day for public employees would end at 1pm, among other things. All this was part of a reaction to a lower influx of money.

Most Sandinistas believe the United States is directly responsible for the current crisis.

According to some voices in the media, the crisis is stronger in Nicaragua than anywhere else in the world (AFP 2009) yet according to many of the agriculture experts at the NGO Servicio de Información Mesoamericano sobre Agricultura Sostenible (SIMAS), in 2009 the crisis did not show in many parts of the country. Denis Cáceres explained this:

Well see, there are many areas where there is no substantial flow of money, but where there is a considerable amount of food security, simply because the people grow it themselves.

Subsistence farming has been the target for many of the government programs, such as 'Hambre Cero.' According to Cáceres and his colleagues, it may not make the country rich, but to a certain extent, it makes farmers more independent.

It is not just Nicaragua which is unable to do much about the current increase in global dependency and the trend towards privatisation going with it (Amin 2004). The socialist governments of Latin America are not all the same – the somewhat limited changes to the economy under Brazil's Lula is not as radical a change from politics as usual as Venezuela's Hugo Chavez's Project for a Socialism of the 21st Century. The socialism of Cuba is represented by an administration that is the same as during Soviet days, and the Cuban political and economic system has only changed to a limited extent since the 1980s (Wilm 2010). Nicaragua is different from other countries, in that it is the only one which experienced 10 years as a Soviet-allied country with a mixed economy during the 1980s and afterward much of the same neoliberal reforms as most other Latin American countries. It now tries to reestablish the revolution temporarily ended in 1990.

In Nicaragua people who are not Sandinistas and have more right-wing views on internal Nicaraguan issues, oftentimes see the state of world capitalism surprisingly critically. At the same time, the aid which comes from other countries to the Ortega Saavedra government,

does not only originate in countries with Leftist governments. Today Nicaragua receives help from and cooperates with Iran (Morrissey 2007), Libya (Castro 2007)³² and Russia. One main reason for the support they receive from these countries seems to be the country's strong position against the influence of the United States in Latin America. The military protection and political links offered by these countries are combined with economic aid and development projects. Even some more right-wing groups within the third world are working with the Ortega Saavedra government.

The extent to which classic or western concepts are questioned is different in Nicaragua than many other places. In some parts of the periphery, the 'colonisation of the mind,' understood as the import of concepts, ideas and moral standards from the center, is questioned. This includes the idea of western rationality – also world views such as historical materialism are questioned as being too Euro centered (Quijano 2000). This is true in several Middle Eastern countries, where religious groups, rather than socialist ones, now make up the main part of resistance against western influence. This is not the case in Nicaragua. Here, the rhetoric and concepts of socialism most closely resemble those of Eastern European socialism/communism. These concepts were largely learned during Soviet times by Nicaraguan students studying there. Nicaragua does not seem to have followed global trends in this sense. Many international radical analysts, such as Immanuel Maurice Wallerstein, thought in the 1990s that this 'old Left' was gone forever. Wallerstein stated the following in 1997:

Let us ponder the political consequences of the world economic difficulties of the period 1970–[95]. First and foremost, it has meant the serious discrediting of the Old Left, the

32 In the 2011 NATO attack against Libya, Nicaragua was one of the most openly pronounced supporters of Libya and even offered to represent the country within the United Nations. Yet it is probable that due to the war the delivery of aid by Libya was ended.

erstwhile anti-systemic movements – the national liberation movements in the ex-colonial world, the populist movements in Latin America, but also the Communist parties in Europe (east and west) and the social-democratic/labor movements in western Europe and North America. Most of them have felt that, in order to survive electorally, they needed to become even more centrist than before. Their mass appeal has, as a result, seriously diminished, and their self-confidence has declined to the same degree. In any case, they can scarcely any longer serve as guarantors of Liberal reformism for impatient and impoverished populations. They are, therefore, unable to serve as a mechanism of control (previously the principal mechanism of control) of the political reactions of such populations, many of whom have turned elsewhere – to political apathy (which, however, is always a temporary way-station), to fundamentalist movements of all kinds, and in some cases to neo-fascist movements. The point is that these populations have become volatile once again, and therefore, dangerous once again from the point of view of the privileged strata in the world-system. (Wallerstein 1997)

The level of apathy seems to be somewhat different in Nicaragua than many other places, and contrary to Wallerstein's predictions, the calls for (state based) socialism are back.

Among those stating some form of state socialism as their goal, globally there are differences as how one relates to previous experiments with socialism and specifically the Soviet Union.

In the West and much of Latin America, there has always been a certain portion of Trotskyism among the radical Left which viewed the Soviet Union as having lost its progressive mission in the 1920s (Chilcote 2009). In the case of Nicaragua, with the FSLN's regimes comparatively not all that totalitarian character during the 1980s, most radical Soviet critics traditionally supported the Sandinista regime. Today, remarkably little criticism of anything related to the Soviet Union can be found among Sandinistas.

Connections to a former center

Trade-wise, Nicaragua can be said to be more independent on the United States through the

growth of new trading partners in Latin America and Asia than it was in the years of Somoza or the first few years following electoral defeat in 1990. Given a classic Dependency Theory interpretation, in which economic links are decisive, this could explain the relative independence the country has maintained from the United States and to a lesser extent from Western Europe.

What it does not explain is, why the Sandinista ideology as worded by government officials, and a substantial part of the population, is so hostile toward the United States, and at the same time so friendly to Russia. Russia has military potency, but in terms of trade, it has relatively little impact on Nicaragua. The main event that involved Russia during my stay in Nicaragua was the war in Georgia where Nicaragua supported Russia. Although the Nicaraguan involvement in that was only an action by Ortega Saavedra, it was clear among the Sandinistas the actions taken by Ortega Saavedra were something they strongly favored. The handing of the medal to the former East German minister, who at the time held no state power, seemed not to be done in connection with any now-existing power relation. The following shows how among many former Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc trained Sandinistas at various levels, continue to have a particularly powerful influence originating in their personal experiences in the 1980s when they went to Eastern Europe to study. It is this which mainly contributes to the special understanding of Russia in Nicaragua today.

It has been argued, that the Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc never represented any kind of center of accumulation in Dependency Theory sense. In the Nicaraguan perspective of things, the fact that it had the importance it did trade-wise and its position as a center for study, could make it look like a center. That is especially evident in the influence Eastern Europe has had through education. The use of western-style education by elites of peripheral countries is by

many adherents of Dependency Theory seen as an integral part in the upkeep of the relationship between core and non-core (Quist 2001). Similarly in this sense, the relationship between Eastern Europe and the current Nicaragua has a lot to do with the education programs many Sandinista students received there in the 1980s.

Shortly after the visit of the former minister of education of the DDR to Nicaragua, a former East German student of an international school of political cadres in East Germany in the 1980s contacted me through a friend of mine in Berlin. The Nicaraguans were young Nicaraguan Sandinistas in line for taking over higher offices in the government and the party at the time of their travel. The East German student only had some false names of some of his co-students, but asked my help in finding his Nicaraguan classmates. Through the use of TV and radio, I eventually found a number of students who attended a year of study at the school.

The students

When meeting the Nicaraguans who had studied at this school in the DDR, I tried to figure out if and how their view on Eastern Europe and the country where they studied, the DDR, is still influenced by that time. In most cases, it does not seem to be a decisive factor whether they have a job or the type of job they have within the current government, when determining how they see the current government and the various political events that happen in Nicaragua. The formal interviews I made of these students were hugely different in terms of length and somewhat different in terms of contents. The amount of information they provided, and the type of information they were willing to volunteer, differed considerably. I adjusted my interview questions as I went along during each interview, to accommodate these differences. Some of these informants gave no more information than what I heard before in the streets of

León. I choose here to mention some of the students I found, as their interviews gave me the most insight.

Ossiel Mendieta was among the first students to go to East Germany in the early 1980s. At that time, the revolution in Nicaragua was not particularly developed, so all participants received code names to use while in Germany, in case of a takeover by Contra forces.

Mendieta contacted me after reading about my project of finding students from his school in the newspaper *El Nuevo Diario*. I met him within 15 minutes after he called me, as he happened to be in León at the time. Mendieta now has a restaurant in front of city parliament in Chinandega. He also makes money creating bracelets out of colored threads.

I met Mercedes Campos Montenegro in the village of Malpaisillo, just a few kilometers outside of León. A former teacher in Germany wrote down her name and city even though they were encouraged not to interchange addresses. To update the addresses, I went to the voters' registration office in León. After explaining my plans, they found the address of Campos Montenegro and that of several of her co-students. This service on their part was likely downright illegal, but there seemed to be an understanding among the Sandinista workers at the office that it was a service they provided to a fellow traveller representing the DDR. Like most, Campos Montenegro still lived in the same village she lived in during the 1980s. This facilitated finding the former students.

When I arrived in Malpaisillo on the bus, instead of trying to find the address, I asked the first policeman I spotted, to see if he could tell me where Mercedes Campos lived and he pointed me one block down a road. I knocked on the door, where Campos Montenegro sat with two young girls. I asked her, if she were the Mercedes Campos who went to study in East Germany. She did not seem to wonder how I would know that. She spoke to me as if she

found it to be the most natural thing in the world that a foreigner would come by asking her about that. Within minutes, she was ready to give me an account of how things were back then and what had changed since.

María Antonieta Blandón Montenegro is different from many of the other students in that she no longer lives in the same village as in the 1980s. I found her house in Matagalpa, in northern Nicaragua. With the new Ortega Saavedra government, she became “something like a minister,” as her sister explained to me casually. The official title is ‘Directora Ejecutiva de la Oficina de Ética Pública (OEP)’ where she is to monitor and audit the other ministries to prevent corruption. I talked to her several times later in Managua and followed her in some of her work talking to students at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Nicaragua (UNAN) in Managua on codes of ethics.

Also Guimar Aminta Arias was successful. When I first met her, she worked at customs in the city of Estelí. I hunted around town after her, and finally encountered her at a Sandinista meeting at *departamento* level. She did not have time right then to talk, and when I met her again a few weeks later, she had just taken over as president of the Instituto Nicaragüense de Fomento Municipal (INIFOM) at national level in Managua. During the 16 years out of power she survived among other things through working for the Sandinista mayor of Estelí.

She went to Germany with a group of ten students and was only 18 years old. She had been a member of the Juventud Sandinista (JS) since she was 12 years old and was one of the group’s founders. She joined because she wanted to teach as part of the literacy program. When she came back she started working with children, and anything to do with recreation. She volunteered for the army to fight the Contras. After the lost elections of 1990, she worked in the ministry of education and secured a masters degree which was crucial in obtaining her

current position. During the years of opposition, she did not stop working with the Sandinista movement, and focused on an independent youth radio station in Estelí. She returned to work in city government in 2000, after serving as campaign leader for the FSLN. During this time, she continued with her radio job in 'civil society.'

Rogelio Antonio Selva Gonzales gave me a markedly different report of the time at the school than all the others. Selva Gonzales was still a close friend of Aminta Arias, and he also lived in Estelí, but he now identified with the MRS. He worked in the ministry of interior in the 1980s and in the early 1990s in the military, when it was still controlled by the Sandinistas. Being a Sandinista made it hard for him to get a job during the 1990s. He felt the only way to get around this was to renounce his FSLN affiliation.

Francisco Blandón Robleto was a student the last year the school was held, 1989–90. He was also in Germany when the Berlin Wall came down. Until just before I met him, he was a lawyer in Matagalpa but had been named judge of the small village of Waslala, RAAN under the new Ortega Saavedra government. He saw no reason to hide his experiences in East Germany. Different from the others, he already worked at a higher level in the party apparatus. As a leading figure inside the JS in the early 1980s, he had direct contact with Egon Krenz, the leader of the Freie Deutsche Jugend (Free German Youth, FDJ, the East German partner organisation of the JS) up until 1983. On 18 October 1989, Egon Krenz was elected as head of state of East Germany, and Blandón Robleto claimed to have met him while he was in that position.

Amada Alvarado Soza had more of a personal tragedy related to her visit to East Germany. I met Alvarado Soza's family in Matagalpa, living further outside the center than Blandón Robleto. Alvarado Soza and her husband had purchased rights for a bus line which they

operate, and they previously worked as taxi drivers. In the early 1980s, Alvarado Soza was employed in a police capacity in Managua. A car accident during that time led to her being temporarily infertile. Treatment was available, but only in East Germany. So, in addition to the political training, Alvarado Soza was sent to East Germany to receive medical treatment. Tests were made, everything was prepared, and then the Berlin Wall came down. The school stopped in the middle of the year. It was offered that anyone who had the money could continue to study, but no one had the funds, and some groups like the Cubans had to leave immediately. Others, like Alvarado Soza, stayed and were sent out to harvest fruit in the country side until their scheduled trip home. Not hard to imagine, also Alvarado Soza sees East Germany very positively and West Germany as well as western-style capitalism decidedly negatively.

Víctor Ruiz is another person I found in Estelí. He studied a great deal, including History, Economics and the law. When I met him, he worked in the Instituto Nicaragüense de Seguridad Social (INSS) and taught at a university. I found him during his lunch break at home. Ruiz is still a Sandinista, and he sees enormous advances with the current government. After I was with for some seconds, he immediately started lecturing on some of the new government programs in his sector.

The importance of Eastern Europe for the Sandinista Revolution in the 1980s

Most Sandinistas I spoke to in the streets on random occasions talked about the Soviet Union and its allies as supporters of the Sandinista Revolution. The relationship between the two was mostly portrayed as being between even partners. In their view, the cooperation between Nicaraguan Sandinistas and other revolutionary groups around the world, was and is one of reciprocity without any one group having the upper hand. Among those who went and studied

in East Germany, the relationship is at least partially seen as different because of a recognition that the Eastern European states were stronger than the Nicaraguan state.

Instead of seeing the school as a place of interchange in which even partners would come together and share revolutionary ideas, the way one could imagine for it to happen if the relationship had been totally horizontal, the students recognised that the school with its study programs was created to spread a certain ideology. The most elaborate explanation I received about this was from Mendieta. When I first met him, I explained the current status of the school they attended. He made it clear, he thought it was supremely valuable for ideological education to continue in East Germany. The school buildings had been sold, altogether the party only kept a few buildings scattered around East Germany, one of which was party headquarters in Berlin. “You are, however, still educating the recruits, right?” he wanted to know. I told him that, yes, there was a party youth organisation with a study program connected to it, but that it did not use the same program as back then. He commented:

Oh, I still have the books. I'll donate them for you to make copies if that means you can use them to start the program back up.

The idea of East Germany and the East German system as a place to copy and ally oneself with, seemed to be genuine as he continued along the same line after I turned off the camera at the end of one of our meetings:

It filled me with such joy when I saw that they gave the medal to Mrs Honecker there on July 19th, for all the help they gave us back then. That was well deserved.

The statements of Mendieta are quite typical for the ex-students I talked to. In part, their comments were likely shaped by their knowledge that I was affiliated with the successor of

the party that formerly ruled East Germany. Given that, in most cases, it was they who chose to contact me, and that they did represent numerous points of criticism of aspects both of the Nicaraguan government and the East German system, I conclude, that most of their statements genuinely represented their views.

“See, these are things we learned over there at the school in East Germany,” Blandón Montenegro explained, before she listed some points of the revolutionary tactics and theory, that the Nicaraguan group she had been with brought from Germany. Again, the picture of East Germany was a positive one, in a way which would likely surprise most Germans. She turned out to have been a friend of the first East German who started me on the search, and, in connection with that, she pointed out how grateful she is that “Even though [our socialist East German class mates] have lost power, they are still trying to help us here.”

Aminta Arias said that the experience in East Germany was understood differently by different people participating without specifying further. She also said: “Altogether it was the cooperation from the Eastern bloc and East Germany that made the first phase of the revolution possible,” and the current ‘phase of the revolution’ would be very much formed by the education given back then to many of the leading cadres of the Sandinista movement. With that explanation, she is the one who seems to sum up the underlying idea of the statements of all the former students.

The degree of positive views of the Soviet Union and socialist Eastern Europe seems not that different between the former students and the general Sandinista part of the population. A noticeable difference lies in the recognition by the former students, that the socialist ideology of the time, which the Sandinistas shared with Eastern Europe, did not flow as egalitarian or

originate only in Nicaragua, the way it seems to many Sandinistas.

Comparison between Nicaragua and DDR

One of the obvious advantages in determining the relation between Nicaragua and the rest of the world, for those who have been abroad, is the ability to compare the state they went to with Nicaragua. The comparison most students made combined ideological leadership with material wealth. At one of the meetings, Mendieta realised that I and a Norwegian friend, who visited me, had never experienced East Germany. Then he explained what it had been like:

In East Germany, everybody had read that book [Das Kapital]. When you boarded a bus, the bus driver would have read it. And the guy checking the tickets. And the person sitting next to you.

A little later, he continued describing East Germany, but this time his description had turned more to the material rather than ideological sides of the country:

The Democratic Germany was a country where the people had just about everything. There was not one wish the people had that the government did not fulfil. ...East Germans had almost more than the West Germans.

Ruiz recognised that the standard of living in East Germany after 1990 was higher than that of Nicaragua. In common with most Sandinistas, both of the MRS and the FSLN, these former students such as Mendieta expressed an overall positive view of Eastern European socialism. However, different from others who have not seen any of these countries, there seems to be more of an admiration of these countries, and a recognition, that they had reached another level of development than Nicaragua, both ideologically and materially.

The difference between Nicaragua and the DDR was also explained by some of the former

students in concrete material terms related to themselves. Campos Montenegro spent considerable time explaining that after several years of unemployment during the years of neoliberalism, she obtained employment as a teacher at a Christian school for which she had to become a Christian, with a salary of \$40 USD per month. She pointed out how hard it was to obtain this employment. Then she compared her wage to the \$400 USD per month stipend she was given by the DDR government while studying there.

While most Nicaraguans seemed quite aware of the differences in wages between Western Europe/the United States and Nicaragua, I cannot recall the theme of wages coming up in connection with discussing Eastern Europe in the 1980s in the same way as with Campos Montenegro. There seems to be some recognition, that Eastern Europe had the ability to send material products and economic help to Nicaragua in a way Nicaragua was not able. From this, it can be derived, that a certain realisation of the differences between how economics is present also among those Sandinistas who did not leave Nicaragua. The difference seems to be mostly in the views of the relationship between the two in ideological terms.

Experiences with the fall of the wall and views on changes of Eastern Europe

The fall of the Berlin wall and the change away from socialism in Eastern Europe, are today seen as positive events in the history of that region of the world by most westerners, no matter what ideology they may follow. Given the positive view Sandinistas seem to have of Eastern European socialism, I thought it intriguing to ask those of the former students who had some experiences with either the fall of the Berlin wall or who had experiences with East Germany afterward, about their view of the disappearance of East Germany. The Sandinistas generally see the destruction of East Germany as a loss for the German people. From those

who had experienced the time of the system change in the DDR, I had expected to hear a somewhat different view, but this was not the case. For example, Campos Montenegro was still employed by the city under the first mayor after 1990. As part of that job she was able to go to Spain and from there on to Germany once more in 1992. She summed up her experiences at that time in just one sentence: “It was a very sad sight – all that poverty and trash that was flying around.”

While I have heard many people in East Germany—and some in West Germany—speak negatively about the changeover to capitalism in East Germany, I cannot recall having heard any assessment of the situation in the early 1990s quite as negative by any German as how Campos Montenegro sees it. The view Campos Montenegro’s expressed of East Germany in 1992, paints a picture of post-unification Germany similar to how other Nicaraguans who visited Germany during the same period presented it. It seems for them, progress in Europe is directly connected to the DDR, and western-style capitalism is equal with a breakdown of society.

Two of the former students, Alvarado Soza and Blandón Robleto, experienced the fall of the Berlin Wall directly during their time as students. The events surrounding that period, are generally described as a period of partying and happiness over the changeover among Germans. The Sandinista view of that period seems to be in line with their overall view of East Germany. This may partially be explained by the somewhat limited understanding the students had of the German language and situation, and that they received a lot of information through the educators at the school. Alvarado Soza recalled the initial reaction by the school staff to the opening of the German-German border this way:

[T]he first thing the teachers told us, was, that we should stay in the school, to prevent being attacked from neo-nazis. It was horrible. First we lost here [at national elections on 16 February 1990] and then they also lost in East Germany [at national elections 18 March 1990].

I am not in the position to say whether the possibility of attacks from neo-nazis was real or was an excuse by school staff to keep the students indoors. Had Alvarado Soza had the same access to the news and information the general German population had, her view of the situation might have been somewhat different.

A few months after the fall of the Berlin wall, and before the school year was over, the educational program at the school was suspended. The socialist East German authorities had scheduled for Alvarado Soza to be operated on using the superior East German medical equipment. Under the new, non-socialist leadership, her operation was cancelled. Instead, she and some of the other students were sent to pick fruit during the first half of 1990 until their flight back to Nicaragua in the summer. Alvarado Soza referred to the period as “When we had lost” in a way that sounded as if it was a personal loss. Many other Nicaraguans who lost much less materially than Alvarado Soza, also refer to the period in the same manner. It seems to be an identification not only with the FSLN, but with the socialist government of East Germany and the entire Soviet bloc.

Blandón Robleto seems not to have been quite as restricted in his movements during those days. According to him, after the wall came down, there was nothing physically stopping the students from going to West Germany and even to neighboring countries as some of the students did. Blandón Robleto told me how he only went to West Berlin and how he did so

only for a short trip. When the Nicaraguan students were scheduled to go back to Nicaragua, Robleto Blandón left, even though he believed he could have stayed due to the general level of chaos. “Did you not even consider staying?” I asked him. “Well no, I had things and family here in Nicaragua” he answered me as if it would have been the strangest thing in the world to suggest. The emphasis in his explanation of his activities in 1989–90, lies in the opportunity to be able to meet people with high ranks within the East German ruling party, rather than in the possibilities connected with experiencing West-German capitalism.

Another Sandinista who also studied in Eastern Europe, but at a different school, decided to take up the question of the Berlin Wall after I ask what his experience in East Germany was like:

See, we as the Frente Sandinista are extremely glad that the Berlin wall has come down, because that means that all the educated Marxists from the East can stream over into the rest of Germany and educate the working class there. So we truly hope, that we will win again in Germany as well, and that the entire Germany then will join the socialist camp.

Whenever I heard a Sandinista talk about the events surrounding the fall of the Berlin wall, it was always fundamentally different from how I have known it in the German discourse. Instead of being a positive event in which a more democratic and liberating system wins over a more dictatorial regime, in the Nicaraguan Sandinista perspective it is the DDR that always was the better system. Much like Alvarado Soza, many Sandinistas who have never been in the DDR are readily willing to identify with its government of the 1980s, even though they may not show the same level of interest in a country they had never seen.

Experiences after returning and the 16 years of neoliberalism

The former students told me of various parts of their life story after their return. Similar to many other Sandinistas and Nicaraguans in general, they did not stick to explaining their personal history, but gave a general overview of the history of the country. One particular period most Sandinistas seem to leave out of their personal life story, is the period surrounding the 1990 elections, which are often described as “then we lost the elections” or something to a similar effect. The periods left out differ from person to person. In the few cases I heard about what happened during that period, it was mostly a period of unemployment and personal depression.

Several of the students who studied in the DDR in the early 1980s spent the later 1980s in either JS or in another part of the state. Most of them seem to have been through the physically hardest time before they went to East Germany. One exception is a student who joined the military service upon return and was still too shell-shocked to be interviewed in 2009, and Blandón Montenegro who went and led the JS in the village of Rio Blanco and lost her right index finger in the confrontations with the Contras there.

The stay in the DDR was, according to how the former students described it, influential for their careers, specifically during the 16 years of neoliberalism. According to Blandón Montenegro, it was the study program in East Germany which inspired her to study law in Nicaragua during some of the earlier years of neoliberalism. She then used her education during the last years in opposition defending landless farmers in cases concerning land occupations. Many of the others had similar career paths, but admittedly this was also common for Sandinistas who did not go to East Germany.

Among these former students, the years of neoliberalism were when most left the FSLN. The one student I interviewed about this was Selva Gonzales. He explained that for the first few years after 1990, Selva Gonzales was known not for his criticism, but for his staunch support of the FSLN. It was first when he could not find work for being known as an FSLN Sandinista, that he decided to change sides. Of all the students I spoke with, Selva Gonzales is the only one with direct criticism of the processes of the 1980s. He is today not part of any political, power exerting processes. I heard of at least one other case of a former student who switched sides during this period, as she was the co-student of one of the interview partners. Although I knew both her name and her whereabouts, I was never able to schedule an interview. There may be several other cases of former students who heard about my interview project who for similar reasons chose not to answer. The stay in East Germany seems not to have prevented anyone from switching political sides after their return.

Among those former students still with the FSLN when I saw them in 2008/09 and who explained how the stay in the DDR significantly improved their career or ability to help, the stories as told may have been told different had I come in 2004/05. I first understood this when interviewing Ruiz. When Selva Gonzalez walked me to the house of Ruiz, I came unannounced and Ruiz started his self-presentation by listing an impressive number of things he had achieved, both within the state apparatus and academia. After a while, he finished the interview and left for work. Then his Nicaraguan wife explained to me, that her husband fathered a child with a German co-student while in East Germany. A few years ago, before the Sandinista takeover, he was asked to travel to Germany and get to know her, by a German TV show. "Because he had no job, he felt ashamed of not being able to give her anything," his

wife said to me. In the end, he did not go. Had the same happened at the time I came by, his wife was sure that he would have made the trip.

The extensive filtering of personal life stories by those telling them, and the fact that I hardly managed to find any former students who changed party-allegiance, means, that I do not feel I can summarise much of how the experience shaped the average former DDR student and what they did in the following years. Those who stayed being Sandinistas did and do have a noticeable impact. As mentioned, among the total of under 100 students who went to this school in the DDR, several of them obtained high positions within the new Sandinista state and for a relatively high percentage of them as Blandón Montenegro pointed out, the study in Germany inspired them to continue with further studies and get more involved in Sandinista politics upon their return.

Views on the current government

Aminta Arias focused a lot on the importance the connection to the DDR and the rest of Eastern Europe had in defining development goals for the Sandinistas that the current government still sees as valid. Her personal experience in the DDR seems to be conflated with that of the general influence the Eastern bloc had on the FSLN. In connection with that Aminta Arias mentions that she thinks, it is vital to “recover our own identity, as part of a historic struggle.” Some of the most crucial development factors for her are high literacy rates and access to credit for people to produce. She thinks that the literacy rate is an indicator of the level of development and that the level can be used to measure how valuable certain development strategies are:

When we left office, we had around 12% of illiteracy. When we returned it was at 37% –

almost 40%!³³ For us, that in itself is an indicator of development – at least people are able to read and write.

Different from the first Sandinista government, Aminta Arias believes certain hindrances during the first Sandinista government made it impossible to achieve these goals:

The first part of the revolution happened during a war. In times of war, no government can work; it's impossible to work on planning development.

That is different now, and she sees possibilities. One of the main misconceptions she listed about development during the '16 years of neoliberalism' and the times "which we are still living" was that development means reaching western society:

We are a poor country... We need a much simpler model [...] It has to be local and with a lot of emphasis on the productive sector.

For Aminta Arias, relevant indicators for development are education and access to health care (see illustration p. 150), rather than what type of cars or mobile phones people carry. Eastern Europe during the 1980s seems to be closer to where Nicaragua ultimately is to develop rather than current western society, according to what Aminta Arias told me.

The positive view on the current government also extended to some of those who have not found a job with the new Sandinista government, such as Campos Montenegro. The first thing she focused on, when I interviewed her, was that she still is a Sandinista. She felt a bit sad for not being employed in the public sector, but she said she believes in the current Ortega Saavedra government and that there now would be massive changes and employment opportunities even if these may not be available to her. She mentioned various examples of people from either party background who had found employment since Ortega Saavedra

³³ While I cannot confirm the figures she cites, the direction seems to be similar to what international organizations indicate (Nicaragua Network 2009a).

came to power again. "It's simply a lot more open now." According to her, in the previous years, it was hard to impossible to find employment for people known to have Sandinista tendencies. Now she explained, that she believed it would be a lot easier for her daughters to gain entrance to university than it had been in the past. Campos Montenegro seems to be one of those worst off of the ex-students in economic terms. Yet up until 2008, she continued to be active in the election campaign of the FSLN in Malpaisillo.

Blandón Montenegro's career path was decidedly different from that of Campos Montenegro. Blandón Montenegro's work for the government in Managua, with responsibilities equal to a minister, must have taken up most of her time. Additionally, there was her spare time activity during weekends, when she worked giving legal advice to landless farmers in Matagalpa. This seemed to be more relevant to her, and in line with her explanation that her work in Managua is not terribly attractive for someone who is used to be a political activist. It is essential to note, that she did not criticise the work of the Ortega Saavedra government; it was only herself, who she seemed to say was wrongly placed in that kind of job. Blandón Montenegro claimed that her goals as an activist were strongly formed by her stay in the DDR, and that they continued to be the reason why she chose to work as an activist.

Not all the former students have a positive view of the current government. As mentioned, the selection of interview partners is likely skewed by those who no longer wish to identify with the FSLN are also less likely to engage in talking about the period in which they were politically active with that party. The one person who does not mind expressing his views although he has switched away from the FSLN, Selva Gonzales, was not shy in describing what was wrong with the Nicaraguan government. Similarly to most Liberals and MRS Sandinistas, he thought Nicaragua was moving in the direction of a dictatorship. He told me,

that he handed out fliers against Ortega Saavedra recently, and that he believed that it was the reason he was charged on an otherwise unrelated issue. Also Selva Gonzales claimed to have acquired political ideals in East Germany and that these continued to be valuable for him. Different from the other students, these ideals led him now to oppose the Ortega Saavedra government.

Most of the former students agreed that the time in East Germany was influential in forming their ideals as political beings. Some seemed to see this personal relation mirrored the relationship between the DDR and Nicaragua as countries. Aminta Arias stated this directly.

Predictions for Germany

Together with the view of the DDR in the past, most Sandinistas have a rather unusual view of what is likely to happen in Germany's future. That is also true for the former DDR students.

Mendieta told me and my friend from Norway the following prediction about Germany's future:

I think it is simply not likely that the Germans will allow going back to capitalism again, at least for a long time after having read that book [Das Kapital].

Blandón Montenegro rounded up my first meeting with her with this:

I am sure that you guys will also win again in Germany soon, because the German people are a fighting people.

The view of the former students does not seem to be noticeably different from that of many other Sandinistas on this issue. It is one of the most significant conclusions I arrived at. Who influenced who in this case in their views is hard to discover, given that it seems to be such a prevalent view in Nicaragua, much more so than anywhere in the former DDR.

The experience in East Germany in perspective

The students I interviewed formed part of a small group of less than 100 students who went to that school. Their perspective is only saying something about a generalised Nicaraguan view to a limited extent. The number of Nicaraguans who went to Eastern Europe or Cuba for study purposes is somewhat larger. While I looked for students in León, I stopped at the FSLN departamento office, to ask whether they know anyone who went and received the following answer by the person responsible for propaganda: “Oh, about half of León has gone to Germany at some point of time.” That figure is exaggerated, but among those involved in Sandinista politics actively, it was never difficult to find someone who studied in one of the allied countries during the 1980s. On the day when I confronted the FSLN members in León in connection with the medal to the former East German minister of education Margot Honecker, they quickly found someone sitting around who had been in East Germany, to present to me as an expert on the matter. He was just a person waiting in the front room, but he was readily available to defend the former ally. He started out telling me how they went to East Germany and how they saw snow for the first time and how welcome they were, and then made the statement about the Berlin wall having been a hinder for the spread of ideology from East Germany that I mentioned above.

Blandón Montenegro and Mendieta’s idea of a possible revival of Eastern European socialism can be found among many other Sandinistas. They believe the development Nicaragua has gone through, with a loss of power of the socialist forces in 1990s and then a reversal almost two decades later can be redone many places, including Germany. They also believe it would be desirable for this to take place. In this sense, many Sandinistas seem to have a world view in which the movements in and history of Nicaragua is connected with and an essential part of the general history of the world, including that of Eastern Europe. Speaking to other

Nicaraguans, also those who never left the country, the Soviet Union is seen as beneficial to the world by those positive to the Sandinistas, and negative by those opposed to the Sandinistas. Even though Sandinismo is seen as a decidedly independent and national project, a clear connection between the ex-Soviet Union and Sandinismo seems to exist.

Where this idea about Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union originated for the general Sandinista population is hard to define. Students who went abroad and talked about their experiences likely formed one of several parts. Somehow the difference in which part in the Nicaraguan-Eastern European connection was on the receiving end of ideological education and who was spreading an ideology, seems to be less clear for many Sandinistas who received information about their allies abroad as second hand information.

Dependence on Russia?

From the above interviews and the economic analysis, it is quite clear the political and cultural/social closeness to Russia is not a direct reflection of current trade links, but rather of past economic realities and personal learning experiences. The current understanding of the world, with such a central focus on the Soviet Union/Russia, is most of all the result of power constellations as they existed 20–30 years ago. That was the time when most adults made their political affiliations. It is also a period that stood out from the periods before and after it for all political groups in Nicaragua. The Sandinistas seem to have spread among themselves an idea that there was a more or less nonhierarchical relationship between themselves and their allies abroad. The popular discontent internally within Eastern European with their regimes during the 1980s, is almost never communicated.

Although many Sandinistas see things this way, it does not automatically follow that the trials of Ortega Saavedra to ally Nicaragua with Russia again are an expression of this. We cannot

know whether Ortega Saavedra and his advisers have the same idea about the world as most Sandinistas and whether the government's politics are substantially influenced by this. Another reason could be that the current expansion in relations towards Russia is a conscious Nicaraguan trial of diversifying its relations to other countries. Ortega Saavedra could just make use of pre-existing sentiments. It is impossible to determine this as an anthropologist, if one does not have direct access to all of Ortega Saavedra's meeting. I did not have access to any of his meetings nor did I ever speak to Ortega Saavedra in person. In any case, the freedom to build relations with Russia is likely originating in the fact that the United States does not have the dominance it previously had over the region.

Concluding remarks

We have seen that there is a particular Nicaraguan interpretation of world events, also those taking place in Europe which is mirrored by those students who went to study there during the 1980s. The Soviet Union and its Eastern European allies did represent for several of the students who went there, a center of ideological diffusion they still believe has influenced much of their current doings. Several of them have gained valuable posts within the current Sandinista run government. While the Soviet Union may not have been a center in the Dependency Theory sense, as a center for the accumulation of material wealth, the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact countries had a similar effect in terms of the production of ideology and allegiance through its relations with Nicaragua during the 1980s.

This does not explain why Nicaragua objectively has different options than other peripheral countries in a similar situation, but it may give some indications as why the options available to Nicaragua are perceived as being different by Nicaraguans. It is the past relation to an ideological center that, although the center may be nonexistent today, has had a lasting effect

on Nicaraguan ideas about the world and the repertoire of possible actions Sandinistas believe are available to themselves.

Conclusion

The previous chapters dealt with understanding the perspective of my Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (FSLN) informants on Nicaragua. It was demonstrated historical agency tends to be interpreted as residing in Nicaraguan hands both in the past and currently. In many occasions, views from outside of Nicaragua would instead likely identify some historical agency which is foreign and which has influenced Nicaraguan reality. Furthermore, a marked difference between the interpretation by different groups I spoke to of symbolic-political acts has been shown. In the chapters on economics, we saw that the economical plans and realities that existed during the time of past regimes are judged in different ways, and that it seems there is flexibility permitted in what economic policies one proposes for the current situation. Whereas Sandinismo internationally may be seen as synonymous with a certain type of socialist planning and the opposition with free-market capitalism, the differences in economic preferences among those informants identifying with these different political groups is not as sharp. Indeed, the economic policies one proposes or economic class one belongs to does not seem to be directly linked with political affiliation, although the FSLN is the party that in their rhetoric most directly addresses the poorer layers of society. The difference in how governments in the past were judged by my informants is related to whether one looks at the actual existing economic reality during its time, or whether one focuses on what plans for economic development a given government had. The second view provides for the history of a certain government to be seen as positive, even though their proposed goal never materialises. This is specifically true for the FSLN government of the 1980s.

In the following chapters, we looked at the dynamics of Sandinista politics and the interaction with events happening abroad. The development of Sandinista political activities takes place

constantly. To a high degree such activities are either the response to, or of the origin of international involvement. The level of influence that actors from abroad have on Nicaragua tends to be downplayed. As part of this description of political activity, it has been shown that the repertoire of Sandinista activities is wide-ranging and generally a collective process is involved, not exclusively controlled by one entity such as the President.

We have seen that the Sandinista perspective of world politics at times is quite different from European perspectives. This can likely be explained through the unique historical past of Nicaragua and Sandinismo. It is this particular Nicaraguan history, connected with Nicaraguan understandings of global geo-politics and the dynamics of leftist groups in power, which allow Nicaragua to divert from the policies available to countries in a similar situation. There seems to have developed a particular type of understanding of freedom of historical agency within certain layers of FSLN activists and possibly Nicaragua in general, which is compatible with the overall framework of Dependency Theory, although mostly in a simplified non--academic way.

One possible interpretation of Dependency Theory leads to a world view which effectively makes any historical agency for individuals impossible. Actors within countries such as Nicaragua, which is peripheral and does not produce anything of great importance, cannot possibly influence their own situation. This is not the view most of my FSLN Sandinista informants seem to have. The understanding that these bring forward, although not formulated explicitly, seems to have been more in line with the Egyptian Dependency Theorist Samir Amin. He believes in the possibility of changing the current worldwide setup fundamentally, and he usually ends his analysis with a call for action, directed towards third world countries. Similarly to my FSLN Sandinista informants, his view of the trajectory of third

world socialists has changed somewhat in recent decades. In *Class and Nation* Amin declared autonomous capitalism in the countries of the periphery is impossible. Therefore, the national liberation movements should be seen as part of the development of socialism on a world scale rather than part of regional development of capitalism (Amin 1980, p. 131). Ten years later, in “The social movements in the periphery,” he declared the national liberation fronts’ dead with their promise of nothing beyond national independence not being enough for the masses of the south, who feel everyday exploitation by capitalism (Amin 1990, pp. 97–98). Another 14 years later, in *The Liberal Virus*, he called for renewed politicisation in the global South and the building of new Internationals and creating links with Europe to organise against the ‘neo-nazis’ in the United States government Amin (2004).

A similar development seems to have happened within the groups of FSLN Sandinista activists I looked at. In 1980, they had great hopes of achieving socialism with the help of the FSLN. By 1990, they had lost all hopes they could achieve much of anything independently at a governmental level, and involved themselves instead in various social struggles. After the turn of the millennium, however, once again the belief in leftist internationalism grew. The view of Amin (2004) does not spell out what possibilities for historical agency exist in this latest historical phase, in which the national liberation front FSLN did not disappear as predicted and instead is back in power with the backing of other third world countries rather than the Soviet Union and without having turned entirely into a system-abiding party. What limits for political changes and maneuvers exist today, seems to be something that is being discovered in everyday practice, not only by the government, but by many smaller groups of Sandinistas. There does not seem to exist the same type of theoretical framework such as that upon which Carlos Fonseca Amador and the Sandinistas before 1979 used to legitimise their

revolutionary project and argue for its viability. Even though material development indicators largely have improved since the 1980s, there seems to be a consensus among most of my Sandinista informants—possibly except for some of their intellectual leaders—that they no longer see it as viable to create an economic system markedly different from capitalism as it exists everywhere else in the immediate future. This can likely be attributed to the disappearance of the Soviet bloc and possibly as a long-term reaction to the war of the 1980s.

What this research has shown is that although Nicaraguan society is deeply divided in Sandinistas and non-Sandinistas, for many of my informants originating in different political camps, the differences are largely based upon views of the concrete actions that happened in the past and there seems to be some overlap on the idea of what possibilities are open for Nicaragua. Also Liberal informants seem to have taken up many of the Sandinista ideas that permit a greater historical agency on the part of Nicaraguans in shaping the future of Nicaragua, although to a certain degree the opposite is true, and some Sandinistas seem to be not very enthusiastic about social experiments.

What the research has also shown is, the Sandinista movement is not democratic-centralist political party as is common many places in Europe, in which an internal democratic process regulates the forming of most party-endorsed policies, nor is it a small cheerleader-group around President José Daniel Ortega Saavedra. Instead, it is a network of semi-independent groups of various sizes, with some overlap of personnel. The determination of Sandinista policy seems to happen in an ad-hoc fashion. When conflicts exist, they play out in the open in Nicaraguan daily life, and at times reach the point of physical fights. This structure seems to allow for extreme broad participation in political processes for people from very different

backgrounds, including economical class and age.

The pressure on Ortega Saavedra that exists within the FSLN does not originate from only one direction. While it is true that many of the policies of the current government were drafted by urban professionals, such as those relating to poverty reduction, other policies, such as those maneuvering around the question of therapeutic abortion, seem to be unpopular first and foremost among these same urban professionals. The totality of all government policies seems to be a compromise of the different groups that make up the Sandinista movement.

Contributions to Anthropology

Anthropologists who have studied issues related to the new Sandinismo in recent years have, as mentioned in the introduction, generally focused on very specific, individual aspects of Sandinismo and policies of the current government. While these studies often are able to give a very detailed picture of any one such aspect, something which also has helped me in gaining an initial understanding of various aspects, the contribution of this research must be seen first and foremost in the contribution to the understanding of the Sandinista totality – how views of history and economic theory tie together with political practice and identity.

Had I looked only at the literacy program or only at the therapeutic abortion issue when trying to answer the research questions posed, I would have concluded with a simple binary answer of the Sandinistas either doing almost the same as during the 1980s (which the population may or may not want) or having turned into a reactionary group of ultra-orthodox Catholics. The aspect of political alliances within Sandinismo and with groups outside of Sandinismo would have been lost. Equally, the understanding of the importance of organising within formal and informal groups at various levels connected with Sandinismo in order to obtain political influence for the individual would not have been understood. With this, I do not seek

to disqualify the validity of the studies of individual aspects of policies, but I do show they can fruitfully be augmented with studies that focus on the totality of the movement.

In comparison to the work of other anthropologists who tried to interpret Sandinismo in its entirety, such as Lancaster (1988) or Babb (2004), I come to somewhat different conclusions. I do not seek to disqualify the contributions of these, yet I believe to have shown through this thesis that aspects which did not form the prime focus for these studies are important.

Lancaster, who saw the revolutionary ideology of Sandinismo as being legitimised mainly through the tradition of popular national saints, may have under-estimated the importance the international situation had on making the Sandinista revolution possible in the first place.

Babb, who seems to have thought she was witnessing the withering away of Sandinismo prior to 2006, may have underestimated both the possibility that Sandinismo could return to a position of presidential power given material support from a new foreign source and the political activists she saw possibly were not completely open about how much they saw their activities as being part of Sandinismo. As this study has shown, foreign influences are seldom pronounced by Sandinistas when explaining their own history and at least the way many Sandinistas portray, their activities as activists during the 1990s were secretly also part of their overall plan as Sandinistas.

It is conceivable that two researchers in the same field, studying the phenomenon could study in the same country at the same time, and drawn radically different conclusions. Without having followed both of these researchers every step of their ways, watched over these already highly educated professionals, it is impossible to say which is right and which is wrong. Most likely neither is a hundred percent right nor a hundred percent wrong. The backgrounds and personalities each brings to their fieldwork cannot but help color the

conclusions they draw. It might be important whether they are male or female, and from what type of economic background they arrived at their fieldwork. This would most likely be true even if they used the same informants, because by its very nature, all social sciences have a certain subjectivity to them. No two people react the same with others. The professional researcher makes allowances for his biases as I have done; nevertheless, it is incumbent upon every researcher to evaluate who is talking straight with him and who is not. This subjective quality is even true for the natural sciences where opposing viewpoints and philosophical approaches rage for decades or longer, and are often never conclusively decided for either side. Particle theory as opposed to Wave Theory in physics would be a good example of this. Someone reading the thesis may feel the researcher was "fed a line" by some, and that he or she did not take others seriously enough, basing his judgment on experiences when he conducted his own field work in Nicaragua. This would be a grievous error, because the one constant is change. Furthermore, it would be a slight to either candidate to question their fieldwork from afar, belittling all the time and effort the researchers have invested in becoming professionals.

I am hesitant to say this research contributed to general anthropological models that can be used in other places. The Nicaraguan circumstances seem too unique to make such a claim. However, contributing to the understanding of the Sandinista movement seems to be of relevance to warrant writing this thesis. Subsequent research in other areas will have to be conducted in order to determine whether the model of the FSLN is similar to that of other parties in other countries. If one wants to see a contribution to general anthropology in this, it would have to be that this thesis comments on the general practice of only studying very small-scale aspects of social movements, parties and policies and can be used as an

argument to augment these with similar studies that try to understand the totality of being connected with a particular movement or political party.

Glossary

AC - The Alternativa por el Cambio (Alternative for Change) is a small Nicaraguan party which in the 2011 elections was one of several small parties that formed part of an alliance led by the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (FSLN).

ALBA - The Alternativa Bolivariana para los pueblos de nuestra América (Bolivarian Alternative for the people of our America) is an alternative trade- and cultural network between Nicaragua, Cuba, Venezuela, Ecuador, Bolivia, Antigua and Barbuda, the Commonwealth of Dominica and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines.

Albanisa - ALBA de Nicaragua, S.A. (ALBA of Nicaragua) is a Nicaraguan privately held company that handles the Nicaraguan side of the economic parts of the Alternativa Bolivariana para los pueblos de nuestra América (ALBA) agreement.

Government-critics claim that this is a major source of enrichment of the leadership of the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (FSLN). Pro-government commentators often claim that Albanisa has been set up to circumvent the Liberal majority in parliament and restrictions set by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) on the use of public funds.

ALN - The Alianza Liberal Nicaragüense (Liberal Nicaraguan Alliance) is a Liberal party formed in 2005 by Eduardo Montealegre Rivas and other members of the Partido Liberal Constitucionalista (PLC) who were in disagreement with the leadership of the PLC.

AMNLAE - The Asociación de Mujeres Nicaragüenes Luisa Amanda Espinoza (Association of Nicaraguan Women Luisa Amanda Espinoza) is a famous Sandinista women

organisation.

ATC - Asociación de Trabajadores del Campo (Association of Rural Workers)

BANIC - Banco Nicaragüense de Industria y Comercio (Nicaraguan Bank of Industry and Commerce)

BD - The Banca Democratica (Democratic Bench) was formed by Eduardo Montealegre Rivas after the 2008 municipal elections. Montealegre had run as a candidate for the Partido Liberal Constitucionalista (PLC) but decided to form his own fraction in the national parliament and city council of Managua after the elections.

BIS - The Bank for International Settlements is an international bank that controls loans to central banks.

BRD - The Bundesrepublik Deutschland (Federal Republic of Germany) was the official name of West Germany until 1990, since then the official name of the entire current German state.

caudillo - A caudillo (strong-man) is a term used to describe a type of political-military leader in Latin America. Caudillos are by definition authoritarian and they are often seen as a father-figure by the public.

CDSs - The Comités de Defensa Sandinista (Committee for Defense of Sandinismo) were an organisation in the 1980s which formed local committees in neighborhoods of all of Nicaragua during the 1980s which aimed to hinder Contras from sabotage. Critics claim that it at times acted like the East German Staatssicherheit (Stasi).

CEPAL - The Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean) is a United Nations Institution that is known for its

adoption of Dependency Theory in the years after the Second World War (WWII).

CIA - The Central Intelligence Agency is an agency of the US government which aims to collect foreign intelligence.

CIPRES - The Centro para la Promoción, la Investigación y el Desarrollo Rural y Social (Center for Promotion, Investigation and Rural and Social Development) is an NGO which has worked close with the current Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional government in designing several of its agriculture-related policies. CIPRES is allegedly mainly composed of Sandinistas who stopped working in the state after the 1990-elections.

CLSs - The Consejos de Liderazgo Sandinista (Sandinista Leadership Councils) make out the lowest level of leadership within the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional. CLSs can be found in neighborhoods all throughout the country.

CMEA - The Council of Mutual Economic Assistance was the economic network of the Soviet Union and its allies.

CONPES - The Consejo Nacional de Planificación Económica y Social (National Council for Economic and Social Planning) is a Nicaraguan government institution.

Contras - The Contras (Counter-revolutionary) is a term that designates all the groups who took up arms against the Sandinista-dominated government in the 1980s. Nowadays former Contras more often use the term Resistencia about themselves.

Cordoba is the official currency of Nicaragua. The exchange rate to the US Dollar has been around 20:1 in the period 2007--11.

CPCs - The Consejos de Poder Ciudadano (Councils for Citizen Power) make out an

organisation which aims to organise direct democracy in Nicaragua. It was started by President José Daniel Ortega Saavedra of the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (FSLN) in 2007.

CPoC - The Communist Party of China has been the ruling party of the People's Republic of China, the larger of the two Chinas, since 1949. It bears the name 'communist' for historic reasons. Very few radicals outside of China see it as representing a program that would lead toward communism.

CSE - The Consejo Supremo Electoral (Highest Election Council) is a Nicaraguan government institution which organises elections.

CSJ - Corte Suprema de Justicia (Highest Court of Justice)

CUUN--León - Centro Universitario de la Universidad Nacional--León (University Center of the National University, León)

DDR - The Deutsche Demokratische Republik (German Democratic Republic) was East Germany, the Soviet-allied part of Germany during the time of the Cold War (CW) up until 1990.

DR-CAFTA - The Dominican Republic--Central American Free Trade Agreement is a free trade agreement between the United States and Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Honduras Costa Rica and the Dominican Republic. Nicaragua joined the DR-CAFTA in 2006.

ENABAS - The Empresa Nicaragüense de Alimentos Básicos (Nicaraguan Company for Basic Food Items) is a state-owned company used in the 1980s to organise cheap food for poor Nicaraguans in times of crisis. It is again used by the current government.

EPZ - An Export Production Zone is an area which is regulated by special laws (unfavorable to labor unions) and with specially low tax codes. EPZs have in recent years been established in many third world countries with the aim to bring cash to the country.

FADCANIC - The Fundación para la Autonomía y el Desarrollo de la Costa Atlántica de Nicaragua (Foundation for the Autonomy and Development of the Atlantic coast of Nicaragua) is an NGO that works with development projects on the Nicaraguan Atlantic coast.

FDJ - The Freie Deutsche Jugend (Free German Youth) was the socialist youth organisation of the Deutsche Demokratische Republik (DDR)

FIDEG - The Fundación Internacional para el Desafío Económico Global (International Foundation for the Global Economic Challenges) is a Nicaraguan NGO formed in 1990. It has a self-declared goal of creating alternative economic development plans for Nicaragua that focus upon combining economic growth with diminishing economic differences and keeping in mind questions of democracy, gender and the environment. The annual study on economic development and poverty FIDEG has published in 2010 and 2011 were financed through Dutch and Swiss aid.

FLN - The Frente de Liberación Nacional (National Liberation Front) was the name of the of Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (FSLN) 1961--63.

FMLN - The Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front) is a sister-party of the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (FSLN) in El Salvador.

foco strategy - The foco strategy (focus strategy) is a strategy that originated with Ernesto

Guevara and the Cuban revolution. Its concern was how to organise for a revolution. Instead of waiting to start an insurrection until one had organised a large amount of factory workers in the cities to be able to confront the military and political leadership of the country through the mass of people involved, instead the strategy stated that one should initially attack in certain strategic points with small and mobile paramilitary guerrilla units. These attacks should then develop into the 'focus' of the movement of discontent with the regime among the general population. The way the strategy seems to have been understood a lot of places, including Nicaragua at least initially, was that attacks needed to be organised and launched from the countryside.

FSLN - The Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (Sandinista National Liberation Front) has been the main Sandinista party since 1963.

GDP - The Gross Domestic Product is the market value of all final goods and services produced within a country in a given period.

GNI - The Gross National Income is the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), plus income received from abroad, minus payments made to receivers abroad within a certain period.

ICJ - The International Court of Justice in Den Haag, Netherlands is the main judicial part of the United Nations and its decisions are in theory binding.

IDB - The Inter-American Development Bank is a bank that has given multilateral loans to countries in the Caribbean and Latin America since 1959.

IEEPA - The International Emergency Economic Powers Act is a 1977 US law which gives the US President the right to regulate commerce in the case of an emergency.

IES - The Instituto de Estudio del Sandinismo (Institute for the Study of Sandinismo) was an institute that existed in the 1980s and which had an aim of investigating and documenting everything available related to Augusto Nicolás Calderón Sandino.

IMF - The International Monetary Fund is a bank that gives multilateral loans which is known for its harsh conditions of privatisation towards indebted countries.

INIFOM - The Instituto Nicaragüense de Fomento Municipal (Nicaraguan Institute for Municipal Development) is an institute whose mission it is to aid local governments in achieving development and independence.

INSS - Instituto Nicaragüense de Seguridad Social (Nicaraguan Institute for Social Security)

ISA - The Ingenio San Antonio (San Antonio Plant) is Nicaragua's largest sugar plantation, which belongs to Nicaragua Sugar Estates Limited which in turn is part of the Grupo Pellas (GP).

latifundio - A latifundio is a large farm of over 500 hectares. It is part of a very common structure of agriculture in Latin America.

MAGFOR - The Ministerio Agropecuario y Forestal (Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry) has been the name of the ministry dealing with agriculture since 1998. It underwent many administrative changes for the past 4 decades.

MCCA - The Mercado Común Centroamericano (Common Central American Market) is a 1960 trade agreement between Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua and Costa Rica. The market was in part non-operational during the 1980s.

MICE - The Ministerio de Comercio Exterior (Ministry of Foreign Trade) was given responsibilities to control foreign trade during the 1980s.

MINED - Ministerio de Educación (Ministry of Education)

minifundio - A minifundio is a small farm of under 5 hectares. It is part of a very common structure of agriculture in Latin America.

MINSAL - Ministerio de Salud (Ministry of Health)

MpN - The Movimiento por Nicaragua (Movement for Nicaragua) is a right-wing NGO that organises protest marches under the banner 'pro-democracy' as they claim that the current government is anti-democratic.

MpRS - The Movimiento por el Rescate del Sandinismo (Movement for Rescue of Sandinismo) is a group of Sandinistas who are not happy with the control of President José Daniel Ortega Saavedra of the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (FSLN). During the years 2006--09, they formed an alliance with or were part of the Movimiento Renovador Sandinista (MRS). Different from the MRS, the members of the MpRS have a goal of taking power in the FSLN. They are seen as standing to the left of the MRS in economic questions.

MRS - The Movimiento Renovador Sandinista (Movement for Sandinista Renovation) is a political party formed in 1994 which has given up on class-war as part of its program and sees itself in a tradition with European social democratic parties. It claims to be more democratic than the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (FSLN) and to be in favor of the establishment of a right of therapeutic abortion.

NGO - Non-governmental organisation is a term usually used for organisations if they work on a nonprofit basis and do some work that under other circumstances could have been done by a government entity.

OEP - The Oficina de Ética Pública (Office of Public Ethics) is a government institution which aims to monitor corruption within the public sector.

PDVSA - Petróleos de Venezuela, S. A. (Petroleum of Venezuela) is the state-owned oil company of Venezuela.

Petrocaribe is a treaty between countries of the Caribbean, South America and Central America, all of which are accessible by water, with Venezuela to collaborate on energy issues and obtain oil at discounted prices. Petrocaribe has some different members than the Alternativa Bolivariana para los pueblos de nuestra América (ALBA) and membership seems to have less ideological implications than what membership of the ALBA means. At times, there seems to be some confusion as to which treaty is being used between countries with dual membership in ALBA and Petrocaribe. Current members of Petrocaribe are Antigua and Barbuda, Honduras, Bahamas, Jamaica, Belice, Nicaragua, Cuba, Dominican Republic, The Commonwealth of Dominica, San Cristobal and Nieves, Granada, San Vicente and the Granadinas, Guatemala, Santa Lucía, Guyana, Suriname, Haiti and Venezuela.

PLC - The Partido Liberal Constitucionalista (Liberal Constitutionalist Party) has been the main Liberal parties since the late 1990s.

PLI - The Partido Liberal Independiente (Independent Liberal Party) is a Liberal party which is mostly known for having been formed in opposition to the Somoza-regime in 1944. Eduardo Montealegre Rivas called for his supporters to join this party after the 2008 municipal elections.

PPP Int. \$ - International Dollars are not a real currency. It is a measurement used by

international organisations. The value of 1 PPP Int. \$ in any country is defined as the amount of local currencies that has the same purchasing power as USD1\$ in the United States.

PRI - The Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Institutional Revolutionary Party) is a party in Mexico which held the presidency between the 1930s and the year 2000. It is known amongst leftists as a political party which started as idealistic and radical and ended as corrupt and conservative.

PRN - The Partido Resistencia Nicaragüense (Party of the Nicaraguan Resistance) is a party which represents those who were Contras in the 1980s.

PSN - The Partido Socialista Nicaragüense (Nicaraguan Socialist Party) was up to the founding of the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (FSLN) the party of most Nicaraguan radicals. During this period, it held contact with the Soviet Union and several of the later members of the FSLN started their political career in the PSN. During the 1979 insurrection, parts of the FSLN cooperated with PSN. In 1990, the PSN formed part of the anti-Sandinista opposition group Unidad Nicaragüense Opositora (UNO).

RAAN - The Región Autónoma del Atlántico Norte (Autonomous Region of the Atlantic, North) is a region bordering the northern part of the Atlantic coast which enjoys certain rights of political autonomy from the administration in Managua. It was established in 1986, but the autonomy has not been respected at all times since.

RAAS - The Región Autónoma del Atlántico Sur (Autonomous Region of the Atlantic, South) is a region bordering the mid-southern Atlantic coast which enjoys certain rights of

political autonomy from the administration in Managua. It was established in 1986, but the autonomy has not been respected at all times since.

Resistencia (Resistance) is another term for Contras, preferred by many former Contra fighters.

revolutionary insurrection - The revolutionary insurrection is Sandinista terminology the war between Sandinistas and Somoza's forces up to the point of the triumph of the revolution. See also Sandinista revolution.

rotonda (roundabout) - The roundabouts of Managua were constructed in the 1990s and have obtained strategic importance for political groups who try to control the capital physically.

Sandinista revolution - The Sandinista revolution has in the Sandinista view gone on since the start of the Sandinista movement. The start is put somewhere after 1961 and before 1979 and a lot, but not all, Sandinistas see the revolution as still continuing. Those who do not see it as still going on, mostly believe that the revolution ended in the later 1980s or with the electoral defeat in 1990. The Sandinista understanding of this term is at times contrary to the terminology used by many foreigners, who use it only to define the actions in the year 1979 that led to the overthrow of the Somoza dictatorship and up to the point of Sandinista take-over. The point of take-over of power is in the Sandinista terminology called the triumph of the revolution. The war between Sandinistas and Somoza regime are called the revolutionary insurrection. I have chosen to stick to the terms as they are used by those Sandinistas who see the revolution as still in process.

SAP - Structural Adjustment Programs are programs by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) that are to govern the politics of indebted countries. SAPs are notorious for ordering privatisations of publicly owned goods.

SED - The Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands (Socialist Unity Party of Germany) was a party governing the Deutsche Demokratische Republik (DDR) until 1990. The SED was started by Communists and Social-democrats after the Second World War (WWII).

SIMAS - Servicio de Información Mesoamericano sobre Agricultura Sostenible (Mesoamerican Information Service about Sustainable Agriculture) is a Managua-based NGO advising about sustainable agriculture and the use of open source software to aid the agriculture sector.

StaSi - The Staatssicherheit (State Security) was the secret police of the Deutsche Demokratische Republik (DDR). The StaSi is mainly known for its policies of excessive spying on the population of the DDR, which created an overall climate of distrust.

therapeutic abortion is abortion in case only either the life of the mother or the fetus can be saved. A right for abortion under these circumstances existed for 100 years in the Nicaraguan constitution until it was removed in 2006.

triumph of the revolution - The triumph of the revolution is in Sandinista terminology the point when the Somoza regime was defeated by Sandinistas in summer 1979. See also Sandinista revolution.

UABJO - Universidad Autónoma “Benito Juárez” de Oaxaca (“Benito Juárez” Autonomous University of Oaxaca)

UCA - The Universidad Centroamericana (Central American University) is the most famous

private university of Managua. The UCA receives public funding.

UdeM León - Universidad de Managua, León (University of Managua, León campus)

UNAG - Unión Nacional de Agricultores y Ganaderos (National Union of Farmers and Ranchers)

UNAN - The Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Nicaragua (National Autonomous University of Nicaragua) is the most prestigious public university in Nicaragua.

UNAN-León - The Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Nicaragua, León (National Autonomous University of Nicaragua, León campus) is the unit of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Nicaragua in León. The UNAN--León enjoys certain institutional independence from the main university in Managua.

UNEN - The Unión Nacional de Estudiantes de Nicaragua (National Student Union of Nicaragua) is the central organisation representing all Nicaraguan students.

UNESCO - United Nations Education, Science and Culture Organisation

UNO - The Unidad Nicaragüense Opositora (United Nicaraguan Opposition) was an electoral alliance of 14 parties, mostly from the political right, who won the 1990 presidential elections.

USC - The US Congress is the parliament of the United States, consisting of the two chambers US House of Representatives (USHR) and the US Senate.

USCPI-U - The US Urban Consumer Price Index is a measure of inflation for all urban consumers in the US. Official statistics over the USPCI-U are released annually by the US Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics.

USD - The US Dollar is the official currency of the United States of America. It is extensively used in Central America. El Salvador uses the USD as official currency. In Nicaragua, professionals, as well as others with high income, oftentimes receive their wages in USD rather than the national currency Cordoba.

USD05 are USD adjusted for inflation to 2005 levels, using the US Urban Consumer Price Index (USCPI-U).

USHR - The US House of Representatives is one of two chambers of the US Congress (USC). Elections are separate from elections for President of the United States, and at times some political disagreement exists between the two.

voto duro (hard vote) - A Sandinista who votes for the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (FSLN) even when he disagrees with the politics of the leadership, is counted as someone giving a voto duro.

voto oculto (hidden vote) - A person who does not want to disclose to pollsters who he voted for at elections is seen as part of the voto oculto and Nicaraguan pollsters assume the person voted for a different party than the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (FSLN).

WB - The World Bank is a foundation which spreads western development policies.

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