RESEARCH REPORTS AND NOTES

CARLOS FONSECA AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF SANDINISMO IN NICARAGUA*

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> Ernesto "Ché" Guevara hoy, Augusto César Sandino ayer, marcan con heroismo la indispensable ruta guerrillera que habrá de conducir a los pueblos víctimas del imperialismo a la posesión absoluta de sus propios destinos.
> Carlos Fonseca
> *Sandino, guerrillero proletario*

Carlos Fonseca's unequivocal bracketing of Augusto Sandino's political project with that of Latin America's premier Marxist revolutionary would have shocked most readers when it was written in 1972. In this and other seminal essays, one of the three founders of Nicaragua's Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (FSLN) formally integrated Sandino the historical figure into the ideology of their revolu-

*I would like to thank Catherine LeGrand and Chris de Bresson for their invaluable commentary and for lending me otherwise unavailable source material. Thanks are also due to Herbert Klein, Stephen Haber, John Silver, Max Cameron, Félix Matos, and José María Ghio for their insightful assessments of earlier drafts of the manuscript and to Matthew Palmer for special editorial assistance. This work was supported in part by a doctoral fellowship from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and a Columbia University President's Fellowship.

tionary struggle. Sandino had fought a six-year guerrilla war against the U.S. forces occupying Nicaragua between 1927 and 1933. His assassination in 1934 by Anastasio Somoza's henchmen ushered in a forty-five-year dynastic dictatorship by a succession of Somozas. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, until Fonseca died in combat against the Guardia Nacional in 1976, his writings guided the FSLN's resurrecting and reconstructing of the image of Sandino in order to reshape it into the dominant symbol of a powerful revolutionary ideology.

This research note will analyze Sandinismo as constructed by Fonseca, as an ideology that attempts to provide leadership, meaning, and motivation for a nation undergoing a revolutionary process.[1] The most sophisticated studies of Sandinismo to date are those by David Nolan and Hugo Cancino Troncoso. While Nolan attributes the early formulation of this ideology to Fonseca, he ultimately dismisses Fonseca's writings as simplistic and shallow, choosing to concentrate on what he considers the more complex work of Jaime Wheelock and Humberto Ortega. Cancino Troncoso likewise points to Fonseca as the key figure in initially creating the FSLN's Sandinismo, but although he does not dismiss Fonseca's later writings as Nolan does, Troncoso makes no effort to explore these texts in detail. Instead he draws on the writings of other members of the FSLN and on those of Sandino to construct what he considers the total ideological tapestry of Sandinismo.[2]

It should be kept in mind that the leaders of the FSLN established the substance of Sandinismo over nearly two decades of self-conscious revolutionary struggle against the Somoza dictatorship. The historical and socioeconomic literature produced by the Sandinistas during those years provides an impressively complex analysis of Nicaragua and posits specific programs for postrevolutionary national development.[3] Carlos Fonseca was not an erudite or sophisticated Marxist theorist. He might best be described as a consummate "organic intellectual" in the Gramscian sense: a thinker and a militant of the subaltern class who grasped the crucial need for the revolutionary opposition to dominate the terrain of culture and ideology with a resonant "myth"—a symbol of the national popular "collective will"—if the vanguard group was to capture "the artistic imagination of those who have to be convinced, and [give] political passions a more concrete form."[4] The aim of this essay is to demonstrate that the axis of all subsequent Sandinista discourse was the analysis of Nicaraguan history developed by Carlos Fonseca through his interpretation of Sandino's "original" and "authentic" nationalist struggle and the privileged historical position held by the FSLN in relation to that struggle.

The Figure of Sandino before the FSLN

Who was Sandino—an anti-imperialist revolutionary, a petty-bourgeois caudillo, a social bandit? All these labels and more have been applied to the enigmatic man from Niquinihomo who returned from working as a migrant laborer in Mexico in 1926 to fight with the Nicaraguan Liberals against the Conservatives and the U.S. Marines and refused to abide by a cease-fire that he considered traitorous. Instead, he led a small band of men into the jungles of northwestern Nicaragua and carried on a six-year guerrilla war against the Marines and the U.S.–created Guardia Nacional. No definitive historical study has been made of Sandino, although much has been written about him.[5] But even an exhaustive study would have difficulty in finding a ready-made ideological or political category for Sandino. He was the prolific author of righteously nationalistic communiqués to Marine commanders, Nicaraguan and U.S. politicians, and even on occasion to "el pueblo del mundo." Yet what he said and wrote was often contradictory, and his collected writings do not follow any readily discernible ideological pattern except for an ardent nationalism and a complementary anti-imperialism whose political emphases and intentions were constantly being reordered. The extraordinary nature of Sandino's struggle and his undeniable charisma have made him susceptible to a wide spectrum of historical interpretations. These factors have also made Sandino's image ripe for mythological representation.

Indeed, Sandino was mythologized even within his lifetime. In the United States, where the Nicaraguan occupation became increasingly unpopular, Sandino acquired a mythical aura through the efforts of his half-brother, Socrates Sandino, a mechanic in Brooklyn who spoke at many of the antiwar rallies, and through certain newspapers sympathetic to Sandino's cause. He was extolled as a hero at major anti-imperialist conferences the world over during the late 1920s. In 1929 the victorious Kuomintang armies marched into Peking with a banner of Sandino among their array. His reputation spread around Latin America and fired the imagination of intellectuals throughout the continent.[6] In 1943 Samuel Flagg Beamis wrote in *The Latin American Policy of the United States* that the martyred Nicaraguan guerrilla had become "a mythical hero to anti-Yankee polemicists in Latin America and Europe, and even to some anti-imperialist writers in the United States."[7]

Inside Nicaragua, however, Sandino's status over the years has been somewhat more difficult to ascertain. Carlton Beals, an American journalist who interviewed Sandino and toured the Nicaraguan countryside during the guerrilla war, eloquently described Sandino's image as a popular hero of the people.[8] But Somocista censorship soon made it difficult to find any favorable accounts of Sandino within Nicaragua.

Similarly, most of Sandino's associates were systematically repressed by the Guardia Nacional immediately after his assassination, thus eliminating most who would have carried on his legend and his guerrilla mission. Ironically, one of the few available sources was a book written by Anastasio Somoza García himself denouncing Sandino as a bandit and a communist. *El calvario de las Segovias* included a good deal of Sandino's correspondence as "proof" of the charges. This material thus remained available inside Nicaragua for eventual appropriation by Somoza's opposition in resurrecting Sandino as a symbol of resistance against the dictator's tyranny.[9]

It has been claimed that by the time Fonseca chose Sandino as the FSLN's symbol, Sandino had all but disappeared from the historical consciousness of Nicaraguans (especially the younger generation).[10] At this date, it is probably impossible to discover precisely what knowledge or feelings the general Nicaraguan populace had about Sandino during the period between his death and the emergence of the FSLN as a significant political actor. Sandino was extolled as a symbol of virtuous struggle against imperialism and dictatorship by the student opposition movement of the 1940s. Their resurrection of Sandino began on the tenth anniversary of his assassination and was emphasized repeatedly in the student press.[11] This movement, which peaked during Somoza's attempt in 1944 to have himself reelected through blatant electoral fraud, was fueled by the powerful antidictatorial student movements in Guatemala and El Salvador.[12] Pedro Joaquín Chamorro and Ernesto Cardenal were student leaders at this time, and in the 1950s, both championed Sandino in their writings in exile following unsuccessful coups against Somoza by the young Conservatives.[13] Thus Sandino was already a symbol of student and armed opposition to Somocismo before the FSLN appropriated his legend. None of these other groups, however, built coherent bodies of thought around the figure of Sandino. Nor did they engage in prolonged and persistent armed struggle against the dictatorship on the basis of a structured ideology.

Fonseca Discovers a Radical Sandino

The northern city of León had been the center of the student movement of the 1940s, as it had been the center of intellectual and organizational support for Sandino's guerrilla fight nearby between 1927 and 1933.[14] Carlos Fonseca went to León in 1952 to attend the university and almost immediately became active in student politics. At this time, he first became aware of Sandino and the extent of his struggle. In 1955–56, as a young militant in the Partido Socialista Nicaragüense (PSN), Fonseca began to investigate Sandino's project. He first discovered Somoza's *El calvario de las Segovias*, then three other books

that painted Sandino in a favorable light. But it was Gregorio Selser's *Sandino, General de Hombres Libres* that influenced Fonseca most.[15] The young socialist's nascent sense of Sandino as an honest rebel leader with a radical, but amorphous, anti-imperialist program remained unchallenged by anything he read. Indeed, Selser's chronicle offered extensive quotations from Sandino's prolific correspondence and "manifestoes" set in the context of a compelling and quixotic vision of the guerrilla's persona and struggle. Somoza's negative portrait merely encouraged Fonseca's radical interpretation.[16] The only serious resistance that Fonseca met came (not surprisingly) from the PSN. In his poetic prison eulogy to Fonseca, Tomás Borge (another founder of the FSLN) later explained the development of the confrontation in the following terms:

> A guy from León who lived in Mexico . . . was sent from the Socialist Party to have discussions with us. "Sandino," Carlos said on one occasion, "is a path. It would be superficial to reduce him to a category. . . . I think it is important to study his thought." The guy from León got scared and answered more or less as follows: "A path? That's poetry! Don't forget what a suspect hero certain bourgeois ideologues have made of that guerrilla. Sandino fought against foreign occupation, not against Imperialism. He wasn't a Zapata . . . , he didn't deal with the question of the land."[17]

The PSN's resistance to incorporating uniquely national historical roots into an ideology for the Nicaraguan revolutionary opposition was a crucial factor in the FSLN's gradual movement away from the orthodox Socialist party to explore alternate leftist and authentically revolutionary paths. Sandino's original refusal to embrace Marxist orthodoxy to any significant degree had led to his being denounced by the Third International as a "petty-bourgeois caudillo," a stand echoed by the PSN official quoted by Borge. The youthful FSLN members eventually realized that they would have to renounce affiliation with the PSN in order to engage in dynamic armed struggle.[18] In his book on the ideological roots of Sandinismo, Cancino Troncoso details the context in which the FSLN broke with the stale orthodoxy of what he calls the "Third International tradition"—a breach that provided the autonomy necessary to adapt a nationalist, nonsectarian, flexible ideology and strategy to the fluctuating dynamic between the dictatorship and Nicaraguan civil society.[19]

In *Nicaragua: hora cero* (1969), Fonseca describes the early years of the FSLN in terms of this conflict: "Although a banner of anti-imperialism and the emancipation of the exploited classes was raised, [the FSLN] vacillated in presenting a clear Marxist-Leninist ideology. This vacillation was due in part to the attitude that the traditional Marxist-Leninist sector had habitually taken in the popular struggle." The PSN exhibited three major characteristics: a dogmatic commitment to foster-

ing a mass-based movement among a rigidly defined proletariat (one therefore almost nonexistent in Nicaragua) before considering any kind of armed revolutionary activity; a lack of autonomy due to its strict adherence to the "Moscow line"; and a commitment to peaceful electoral participation until a proletarian mass developed. Prior to the 1967 elections, the PSN went so far as to ally itself with the Conservative party against the Somoza-dominated Liberals. For the FSLN, this step was the final outrage. Fonseca denounced the PSN's participation in state institutions, claiming that it was being co-opted by Somoza to give the dictatorship a façade of legitimacy.[20]

The Cuban Revolution created a watershed in the history of the Left in Latin America. To many would-be revolutionaries (including Fonseca and Borge), Castro's route to power and his implementation of direct social reform exposed the sterility of traditional Marxist parties and proffered new hope to alternatives for autonomous national revolutions that could incorporate indigenous traditions and currents of rebellion. Above all, the Cuban revolutionary process inspired Fonseca and dictated the formation of the FSLN throughout the 1960s. Yet the conflict between Fonseca's vision and the "pure" Marxism of the PSN and the Third International tradition remained an important tension in creating the core of the FSLN's ideology. Sandino's political intentions and ideological stance were at best elusive; at worst (from the leftist perspective), they embodied a liberal, populist nationalism. Adopting Sandino as the political and strategic inspiration for the FSLN had powerful advantages, but his history would clearly have to be "worked on" before it could be readily integrated into a Marxist-based revolutionary ideology. It was to this task of historical reconstruction that Fonseca applied himself from 1960 until his death in 1976.

By the mid-1950s, Fonseca had developed the basic concept of Sandinismo—that Sandino's struggle represented the initiation of a popular revolutionary path. In some early writings in 1960 and 1961, Fonseca called for a continuation of this heroic struggle while criticizing the sectarianism of the PSN. Fonseca also took tentative steps toward proposing that Sandino's fight (and the entire opposition movement of this period—the "generation of '26") represented the naive stage of Nicaraguan anti-imperialist consciousness. He likewise criticized as misguided and "unscientific" the opposition to the dictatorship of the "generation of '44." Fonseca characterized his own generation as that of the Cuban Revolution (although it must be recalled that this event was still in its early stages of self-definition).[21] Already espousing armed resistance to the Somoza dictatorship, exhilarated by the success of the Cuban road to power, and reinforced by substantial training and contact with some of Sandino's former comrades-in-arms, Fonseca led the FSLN's first efforts at organizing a clandestine support structure and a rural-based guerrilla movement.[22]

This guerrilla strategy rested on the hopes that Ché Guevara's so-called *foco* model could be duplicated in Nicaragua.[23] Based on his Cuban experience, Guevara proposed that, given the right conditions of economic and political alienation among the rural populace, even a small, dynamic armed movement with ideological clarity would receive sympathy and rapidly mobilize the peasantry to take up arms. Revolution would spread like a brushfire and culminate in urban insurrection, without the need for a national mass political party based on an organized proletariat (the movement would organize accordingly as it grew). By 1967 the approach had proved to be a failure. Disastrous guerrilla campaigns in the Río Bocay in 1963 and at Pancasán in 1967 claimed many of the FSLN's best members and demonstrated its relative inability to mobilize the peasantry spontaneously. Meanwhile, Ché Guevara had been captured and executed in Bolivia. The enormous power of his mythical invincibility was shattered. Throughout Latin America, guerrilla movements were being successfully contained by armed forces newly trained in counterinsurgency techniques by the U.S. military.[24]

But in Nicaragua, the Guardia Nacional had failed to wipe out the FSLN as an organization. Moreover, renewed interest in the movement was emerging, especially among students in urban areas. Fonseca had gone underground in an attempt to elude the post-Pancasán repression and then into exile in Costa Rica, where he was jailed for a time. He was finally freed by an FSLN commando force in November 1970 and escaped to Cuba, where he remained until 1975 (except for a brief stay in Allende's Chile). During this period, Fonseca began a series of more detailed writings on Nicaraguan history, the significance of Sandino's struggle, and the role of the FSLN. These years of intense writing, which lasted until 1972, involved a reevaluation and more careful articulation of the FSLN's ideological foundation and legitimacy. From these writings emerged the coherent nucleus of the FSLN's Sandinismo: at once a settling of the possible contradictions inherent in the synthesis of Sandino's discourse, political project, and mythical legacy with a Marxist-based revolutionary ideology, a justification of the primacy and moral authority of the FSLN as the revolutionary vanguard, and a captivating and symbolic national narrative intended to provide the popular classes of Nicaragua with meaning, purpose, and an entrée into their country's historic currents of armed opposition to tyranny.[25]

Reconstructing Sandino

The sprawling and elusive quality of Sandino's writings, combined with the reality of his anti-imperialist guerrilla force drawn largely from the lower classes, helped make his history amenable to Marxist reinterpretation. Yet despite the charges of Fonseca's critics, he

never claimed that Sandino was a socialist or a Marxist. David Nolan maintains that "Fonseca chose to resolve the historical tension between Sandino's nationalism and international communism by ignoring its existence and defining Sandinismo as the true expression of the latter."[26] In my view, this interpretation is a major misreading. Fonseca not only addressed the tension, his particular interpretation of this historical tension made possible the FSLN's claim to ideological legitimacy. Fonseca's reconstruction was sensitive to the ideological problems and contradictions of Sandino's discourse and struggle. Rather than crudely portraying Sandino as a Marxist, socialist, or communist, Fonseca emphasized those details of Sandino's life that supported Fonseca's more subtle "thesis" that Sandino, although himself barely conscious of it, was the heroic initiator of a revolutionary path that would subsequently lead from this early, naive stage through an increasingly complex and polarized period into a final phase that would necessarily embody the more sophisticated principles and strategies of socialist revolution.[27]

One of the most delicate issues in Fonseca's interpretation concerns Sandino's contact with the leader of El Salvador's Communist party, Augustín Farabundo Martí, who joined Sandino's high command in the late 1920s. In regard to this issue, Fonseca made his boldest assertion about Sandino's ideological tendencies. In *El Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional*, he wrote: "In evaluating the trajectory of Sandino, one must maintain in the foreground his deep social reflections and his identification with the most advanced ideals. The brilliant guerrilla called the Salvadoran martyr and Marxist hero, Augustín Farabundo Martí, 'brother.' "[28]

But because of the split in 1931 over ideological conflicts between Sandino and Martí, even the above statement had to fall short of positing Sandino as a Marxist. Instead, Fonseca implies a general sharing of respect and social aims. The split itself appears ambiguously in Fonseca's work, rendered partially unproblematic by the orthodox Marxism (at that time in the guise of the Comintern) adhered to by Martí and rejected by Sandino and the FSLN. Still, as one of the most important figures in Latin American Marxist praxis, Martí had to be dealt with carefully. The great hopes and respect that the two men retained for each other after the split are consequently documented in Fonseca's writings.[29]

Again, it was likely Gregorio Selser's interpretation of Sandino that provided the clue to overcoming this tension. Selser documents the "socialist solutions" that Sandino occasionally adopted—his cooperative experiments in the Segovias area and his sporadic statements favoring state ownership of land.[30] But these "solutions" came from the Sandino of 1933–34, the veteran of a six-year guerrilla war that had presented him with the difficulties of forming an anti-interventionist

coalition among the middle classes and "progressive" bourgeoisie inside and outside Nicaragua and had allegedly convinced him that "only the peasants and the workers will go all the way."[31] Thus although Fonseca could agree that Sandino had begun his struggle as a young Liberal, he claimed that the political nature of the war had engendered a radical coming to consciousness in the "General de Hombres Libres" —his realization that only the popular classes could win freedom and justice for Nicaragua.

To suggest the inherently popular orientation of Sandino, Fonseca recast his roots as "a worker of peasant extraction" and characterized his tenure in Mexico in 1926 as occurring in a nation "still smelling of the gunpowder fired by the oppressed peasants led by Emiliano Zapata." In Mexico Sandino supposedly encountered and identified with anarcho-syndicalist radicalism (through contact with labor organizers at the Huasteca oil complex where he was employed). Later, he allegedly became a "proletarian guerrilla" whose writings exuded a "proletarian spirit."[32] This reinterpretation of Sandino as a protosocialist was only the first stage in the construction of Sandinista ideology. The key to Fonseca's reconstruction was his insistence on evaluating Sandino not as a static historical actor but as a "trajectory" or "path." Like all pioneering historical protagonists, Sandino could not have been expected to comprehend fully or voice his role. Only after a few more turns in the wheel of history could his real historical purpose and signifigance be understood. Moreover, only FSLN members—the Nicaraguan nucleus of the "generation of the Cuban Revolution"—with their Marxist hermeneutical skills were deemed capable of understanding and fulfilling Sandino's struggle.

Once Fonseca achieved this understanding, however, the role of the FSLN became not to continue Sandino's original struggle but to begin a new struggle that constituted a higher stage of the Sandinista vision. Fonseca drew an explicit distinction between Sandino's telos or path and his historical actuality. Although the reconstituted image of Sandino remains the symbol of Sandinismo, the historical Sandino, while valued as a hero, is nevertheless identified with his inability to fulfill the Sandinista mission due to the limitations of his historical moment. This approach distinguished Sandino from the many symbolic founding figures who are revered because of their success (Bolívar or Lenin, for example), resembling instead the Cuban revolutionaries' perception of José Martí.[33]

In 1969 Fonseca penned his first coherent embodiment of Sandinismo in *Nicaragua: hora cero*. In discussing the limitations that Sandino faced, he equated the Nicaraguan people with Marx's characterization of Spaniards: "a rebellious people, but not a revolutionary people. . . . The ideological obscurantism inherited from the colonial epoch has con-

tinued to decisively impede the people from going with a full consciousness into the fight for social change."[34] Here (and subsequently elsewhere), Fonseca alludes to the impossibility of Sandino realizing revolutionary success: "Nicaragua's popular rebellions, and particularly the colossal Sandinista rebellion, could not culminate in definitive liberation. . . . There was an absence of sufficient penetration of scientific socialist ideas into the country," he wrote in his 1971 pamphlet, *El Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional*.[35] As a result of this ideological deficiency, the death of Sandino had meant the end of the naive Sandinista struggle: "It was to the glory of the people of Nicaragua that the most humble class responded for the stained honor of the nation. At the same time, it was a tragedy because we are speaking of a peasantry without any political awareness. The result was that once Sandino was assassinated, his movement was incapable of continuity."[36]

What was needed was that the intellectuals of the FSLN make sense of the evolutionary direction of Sandino's struggle and resume it in a manner appropriate to the modern historical realities of the nation, incorporating the lessons of the anti-imperialist movements in Africa, Asia, and especially Cuba. Hence through a dialectical strategy, Sandino was simultaneously cancelled and preserved at a higher level in Nicaraguan history. As Fonseca observed, "The FSLN was born as the faithful expression of the combative will of Nicaraguans. This time, however, it was not merely a patriotic movement without contemporary ideological outlines: it took up arms under the guidance of the most advanced revolutionary ideas." Only the FSLN embodied the overcoming of the lack of focus and ideological clarity that had until then plagued the rebellious Nicaraguan vitality.[37]

Furthermore, according to Fonseca's conception, this resumption of Sandino's path undertaken by the FSLN had to incorporate a more sophisticated ideological analysis because the struggle against U.S. imperialism had reached a more complex stage than in Sandino's time. Although Sandino had been successful in his primary "naive" intent to rid Nicaragua of the U.S. Marines, he could not perceive the subtler mechanisms of domination that the imperialist power held up its sleeve: the disguised "Ultimos Marines" (the Somozas and their Guardia Nacional) and their puppet mediation of U.S. capitalism. Simple revolutionary nationalism was no longer effective. A Marxist framework was required so that "today the revolutionaries of all countries [can] prepare the battle against the imperialism of the dollar." Sandino had contented himself with removing the superficial manifestation of oppression and had subsequently been crushed through the treachery of Somoza. But the FSLN would not be content with mere removal of the dictatorship, as sectors of the bourgeoisie were promoting; the FSLN demanded a change in societal and state structures based on a

flexible Marxist analysis that Sandino, due to his historical moment (before the Cuban Revolution), could not yet grasp.[38]

To effect this modernization of Sandinismo, Fonseca repeatedly bracketed the name of Sandino with those of Ché (most frequently), Fidel, Camilo Torres, Lenin, Ho Chi Minh, and others. Indeed, the FSLN oath begins with the words, "Ante la imagen de Augusto César Sandino and Ernesto Ché Guevara. . . ." The purpose of these conjunctions was to legitimate or "naturalize" the interpretation of Sandino as initiator of a revolutionary path that transcended his own historical moment and to permit a metahistorical fusion of Sandino's trajectory with the more modern and "properly" Marxist paths of the other figures, as well as with the FSLN itself.[39] Thus Fonseca elaborated and provided cohesion for Sandinismo through the simultaneous deployment of a reinterpreted history of Sandino and a metahistory of Nicaragua that complement one another. Fonseca achieved this metahistorical system (or ideology) in a dual manner: by portraying the historical Sandino in protosocialist terms and thereby connoting a Sandinista trajectory or vision (still represented by the symbol of Sandino) that incorporates his anti-imperialist struggle, its inevitable failure, the sublated fight by the FSLN against the betrayers of Sandino, and the possibility of victory only through the FSLN's "correct" Sandinista path. Taken together, these two levels constitute the core of Sandinismo.

The point to be emphasized is that the written, verbal, and visual representations of Sandino omnipresent in Sandinista writings, speeches, and banners are not simply representations of "Sandino, glorious hero of Nicaraguan history" nor even the FSLN's interpretation of that figure. These images embody a metahistorical conception of Nicaragua that is indivisible from the ideology of the FSLN and ultimately represent not Sandino but the FSLN itself as the culmination of Sandino's path. Using the key symbol of Sandino, Carlos Fonseca succeeded in constructing a philosophy of Nicaraguan history of which the FSLN is the only legitimate inheritor. Although Fonseca did not live to see this ideology become dominant, his writings first established the cohesive intellectual foundation for the Sandinista revolution.

The Adoption of Fonseca's "Sandinismo" by the FSLN

Most observers have failed to comprehend the endless tributes paid to Fonseca's intellectual stature by FSLN leaders, perhaps underestimating them as nothing more than the obligatory cultivation of a revolutionary mythology. To begin with, Fonseca composed the FSLN official oath as well as the *Ideario sandinista,* the handbook of Sandinista thought given to new members as part of their ideological training. More significantly, texts by major intellectuals of the FSLN reveal that

they adopted the central elements and structure of Fonseca's ideology and Nicaraguan counterhistory, and a brief exploration of them may explain the magnitude of the debt they claim to owe Fonseca. For example, in 1976 Tomás Borge wrote a tribute to Fonseca from his prison cell. In describing the period following the assassination of Sandino, Borge asserted, "In the country no direction exists, neither organization nor revolutionary consciousness."[40] Here one encounters the familiar insistence that with the death of Sandino came the death of authentic resistance in Nicaragua. Like Fonseca, Borge followed a strategy of "clearing the field"—positing an empty site where the opposition to Somoza should stand and thereby discounting the legitimacy of the Socialist and Conservative parties as alternatives to Somoza.

Ricardo Morales Aviles (poet, professor at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Managua, and member of the FSLN) did a great deal to forge ideological and organizational links with progressive Christian groups. In a talk with the Movimiento Cristiano Revolucionario in 1973, he verbalized Fonseca's conception of the Sandinista vision: "Thus [the FSLN] threw itself into the pursuit of a new path, or not of a new path, but rather the retaking of a path that the popular forces in Nicaragua had already taken. Thus they tried to renew the struggle of Sandino along with the example of the Cuban Revolution that was also an inheritor of Sandino's anti-imperialist struggle."[41]

The reflections of Omar Cabezas on his life as an FSLN guerrilla in *La montaña es algo más que una inmensa estepa verde* (published in English as *Fire from the Mountain*) culminate in describing the moment when his fears about the futility of the struggle and the impossibility of victory were overcome through a meeting with an old peasant who had fought with Sandino. Cabezas suddenly realized that revolutionary commitment was indeed a "historical patrimony," a "treasure that the FSLN had to disinter," and that Fonseca's great achievement had been to "retake that history" and bequeath it imbued with "scientific content" to the new Sandinistas. Cabezas's sense on encountering the old man was one of continuity and the recovery of origins—the recovery of Sandino. He felt historically invincible, no longer simply "the child of an elaborate theory." The two men embraced and the old man approved of this historical link, thus sanctioning the legitimacy of the new Sandinistas: "I said to him: 'We'll be seeing each other soon.' And he answered: 'Yes, I'm old now, but remember, here are my *muchachos*.' "[42] Humberto Ortega's *50 años de lucha sandinista* and *Sobre la insurrección*, when taken together, can be read as the official FSLN interpretation of the historical events that led up to revolutionary victory. Jaime Wheelock, the most sophisticated Marxist theorist within the FSLN leadership, wrote two of the most complex pieces of Sandinista historical analysis. *Raíces indígenas de la lucha anti-colonialista en Nicaragua* and *Im-*

perialismo y dictadura attempt to provide hard economic analysis of the history of the Nicaraguan polity, with the latter being an implicit critique of the FSLN's romantic reliance on a disintegrating peasantry. Yet the metahistorical schema of Ortega's and Wheelock's arguments do not diverge from those of Fonseca. Both emphasize the traditional rebelliousness of the Nicaraguan people, the pivotal role of Sandino in initiating a revolutionary path whose momentary defeat was inevitable, and the absolute need to resume Sandino's struggle at a higher level, with the FSLN as the legitimate vanguard.[43]

Prior to 1974, the core of the progressive Christian and student movements, both in regular contact with the FSLN, were also familiar with the substance of Fonseca's Sandinismo, as were sympathetic intellectuals such as Ernesto Cardenal. Some of Fonseca's major essays were being published outside—and sometimes inside—Nicaragua; and the FSLN mimeographed material for distribution and achieved some consciousness-raising and political organizing in certain radical urban neighborhoods and peasant villages. But Jaime Wheelock has explained that before 1974, "for the majority of the people the Sandinista Front, or Sandinismo, were just minority ideas, diluted activities of student groups, actions of radical groups, and not the continuation of the struggle and historical traditions of the Nicaraguan people and Sandino's program."[44]

In 1974 the FSLN staged a daring and successful raid on a party for the American ambassador at the mansion of an important government official. One of the conditions for the release of the hostages was that two communiqués be published in the major newspapers and read on all major radio stations and both television networks; another condition was that the action receive an uncensored discussion in the media. The second communiqué, "Augusto César Sandino: General de Hombres Libres," is virtually a précis of Fonseca's ideological construction. Repeating the claim that traditional Nicaraguan rebellious vitality had been impeded by ideological backwardness from achieving real structural change, the communiqué outlined the resurgence of rebellious struggle in the late fifties, from Rigoberto López Pérez's assassination of the first Somoza to the ill-fated attempts of Sandino's former comrades-in-arms to revive the fight. The communiqué went on to assert that "All these guerrilla forces demonstrated the determination of the most advanced sectors to take up arms. Historically, the emergence of a homogeneous force and vanguard that synthesizes the restlessness and desires of the people has been necessary. That force is the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional . . . , [which] is today the only legitimate vanguard."[45]

Thus after December 1974, few Nicaraguans could have been ignorant of the FSLN as an efficient and daring revolutionary group that

claimed kinship with Sandino. The core of Fonseca's ideological construction had been broadcast in the mass media. The FSLN had announced and insisted upon its vanguard status at an appropriate moment, when the dictatorship had been forced, however briefly, to its knees. The FSLN repeated this feat four years later with its stunning symbolic occupation of the Palacio Nacional amidst an increasingly serious political crisis in the Somocista state.[46] By these means, the FSLN had begun to project itself into the leadership role in the struggle against Somoza, a role it would consolidate through the course of the insurrection. Fonseca's symbolic metahistory had provided the FSLN with the substance for capturing the imagination and focusing the energies of the Nicaraguan people.

"Sandinismo" and Nicaraguan Culture

Sandino was adopted as the symbol of opposition by the great majority of those who participated in the insurrection of 1977–1979. Why Sandinista symbology was so appealing and what its adoption signified for the many participants who had no formal connection with the FSLN are difficult questions to answer without extensive oral history interviews. But analyzing the cultural resonance of Sandinismo as a narrative formation may offer some preliminary explanations for the extraordinary popularity of Sandinista symbology. The raw materials of Nicaraguan history that Fonseca drew upon to construct Sandinismo are extraordinary, rooted as they are in the treachery of Anastasio Somoza's assassinating the leader who had done more than any other Nicaraguan to rid the country of its foreign occupiers. The Somoza dynasty, with its blatant subservience to U.S. interests, was also unique. Fonseca was thus able to elaborate a system of compelling dialectical opposites between the symbols of Sandino and Somoza: good versus evil, honesty versus treachery, heroism versus cowardice, nationalism versus dependency, liberty versus dictatorship, and so on.[47] Fonseca posited these opposites as having operated continuously throughout Nicaraguan history. Somoza ruled Nicaragua, repressing all that was good—all the remnants of the true expression of the people in Sandinismo. Hope began to reemerge in 1956, when the young poet Rigoberto López Pérez lost his life while avenging the murder of Sandino through the assassination of the first Somoza. But this individual act was not sufficient because Somocismo was no longer embodied in one man. His sons could maintain the consolidated dictatorship with the support of the United States. Only collective, social revolution could truly avenge Sandino.[48] It is important to note that Fonseca's work was structured around a narrative promise: that this history of Nicaragua was moving toward its "correct" ending, that the only satisfactory reso-

lution would be the resurrection of Sandino through the popular destruction of Somocismo—the utopian victory of good over evil.[49]

Sandinismo, then, embodies many of the "romantic" ingredients of popular mythology and literature.[50] It has a simple yet dramatic "plot" that is captivating and also shares wide-ranging structural similarities with other common mythologies. Fonseca gave revolutionary content to the millenarian tradition of Sandino as popular "bandit-hero." He also situated Sandino within the Latin American tradition of the Padre de la Patria, the founding father in a revolution that the FSLN conceived of in terms of national liberation—in this case, from the U.S. imperialism that had never allowed meaningful independence.

Perhaps the most influential structural correspondence lies between Sandinismo and Catholicism. The analogical possibilities of Sandino as a Christ figure were cultivated by Fonseca and the FSLN with great success. Fonseca employed the language of Christianity to characterize the FSLN's project as a whole, often using words like *redención* and *salvación*.[51] In 1972, when the productive relationship between the FSLN and radical sectors of the Catholic church was being forged, Fonseca wrote a monograph entitled *Crónica secreta: Sandino ante sus verdugos*. In it he cited some of Sandino's statements immediately prior to his assassination to show that he descended from the mountains aware that he was about to be betrayed and killed. Fonseca thus portrayed Sandino as having been a willful martyr to the cause of popular liberation.[52] Priests in the radical base communities also equated Sandino with Christ: both were betrayed and both realized that their death would end their immediate struggle but would lead to a higher communal liberation.[53] In a revolution profoundly motivated by the radical church and sanctioned by orthodox and progressive Nicaraguan Catholic authorities, the strength of this parallel should not be underestimated. Indeed, the compatibility of Sandinismo with other powerful cultural currents—from progressive Catholicism and many of the principles of liberal democracy to nationalism and popular culture—shaped social participation in the revolution and the nature of the resulting postrevolutionary state and society.[54] The final and perhaps most extraordinary chapter in the Sandinista epic of redemption was the realization of what had remained only a promise in Fonseca's work: the successful revolutionary overthrow of the Somoza dynasty by the Nicaraguan people and the FSLN, and the adoption of Sandino as the symbol of the insurrection by virtually all who participated. Precisely because the FSLN's ideology predicted and shaped this historical outcome, it has become extremely difficult for the FSLN's opposition to dispute the legitimacy and authority of its ideology and program. One might say that history has absolved the FSLN—it has certainly absolved Carlos Fonseca.[55]

Conclusion

Carlos Fonseca's project was unique in many ways. No other revolution led by a Marxist-based group has so specifically located its ideological inspiration in a single figure from past history.[56] Marxists have traditionally been averse to embracing nationalism as an ideological foundation, viewing the national question as an epiphenomenon of economic contradictions in the capitalist system and a prop of the national bourgeoisie.[57] Fonseca faced specific rejection by the orthodox Marxist Left in Nicaragua in attempting to construct a revolutionary ideology around the image of Sandino. His persistence in pursuing this path despite such a response from the established Left makes his project seem even more exceptional.

Fonseca was strong-willed and visionary enough to overcome such rigid objections because he was buoyed by the unorthodox success of Castroism in Cuba and was convinced that the figure of Sandino contained the key to the nation's revolutionary past—and future. In displacing the sterile dogma of "scientific socialist internationalism" as the founding principle for a revolutionary Marxist movement, Fonseca succeeded in articulating a romantic, nationalist, and radical ideology that would eventually become the central element in captivating and motivating to insurrection the people of Nicaragua while consolidating the exclusive legitimacy of the FSLN as author of the revolution.

NOTES

1. Correspondence may be sent to Steven Palmer, Department of History, 611 Fayerweather, Columbia University, New York, New York 10027.
2. David Nolan, *The Ideology of the Sandinistas and the Nicaraguan Revolution* (Coral Gables, Fla.: Institute of Inter-American Studies, University of Miami, 1984), 17–19, 52–55, 70–74; and Hugo Cancino Troncoso, *Las raíces históricas e ideológicas del movimiento sandinista: antecedentes de la revolución popular nicaragüense, 1927–79* (Odense: Odense University Press, 1984), especially 129–64. Nolan's detailed argument showing the adherence of FSLN leaders to many of the tenets of Marxism-Leninism unfortunately does not discuss Marxism-Leninism as a historical category, nor does Nolan ask how its adoption in the Nicaraguan context might have led to important modifications of this ideological formation. Although Cancino's sympathy with the Sandinistas occasionally impairs his analysis, his study succeeds in demonstrating how Sandinismo is situated outside of traditional currents of Marxism-Leninism and the significance of this departure.
3. See, for example, Jaime Wheelock Román, *Raíces indígenas de la lucha anti-colonialista en Nicaragua* (Mexico City: Siglo XXI, 1979); and Wheelock, *Imperialismo y dictadura: crisis de una formación social* (Mexico City: Siglo XXI, 1975). See also three works by Humberto Ortega Saavedra: *50 años de la lucha sandinista* (Mexico City: Editorial Diógenes, 1979); *El sandinismo: documentos básicos* (Managua: Editorial Nueva Nicaragua, 1983); and *El programa histórico del FSLN* (Managua: Departamento de Propaganda, 1984).
4. Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, edited and translated by Q. Hoare and G. Nowell Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971), especially 5–13 on the role of intellectuals and 125 for a discussion of myths and the popular will.

5. See especially Neill Macaulay, *The Sandino Affair* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1971); and Gregorio Selser, *Sandino: General de Hombres Libres* (n.p.: Editorial Universitaria Centroamericana, 1979), printed in Costa Rica.
6. Macaulay, *Sandino Affair*, 112–14.
7. Cited in Selser, *Sandino*. All quotations from Selser come from the English edition: Gregorio Selser, *Sandino*, translated by C. Belfrage (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1981), 221–22.
8. *Banana Gold* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1932), 276–77.
9. Macaulay, *Sandino Affair*, 256, 307.
10. Jean Ziegler, *Les Rebelles* (Paris: Editions de Seuil, 1983), 100.
11. Rafael Córdova Rivas, *Contribución a la revolución* (Managua: Centro de Publicaciones de Avanzada, 1983), 18–23.
12. Miguel Jesús Blandon, *Entre Sandino y Fonseca Amador* (Managua: Impresiones Troqueles, 1980), 19–20.
13. Pedro Joaquín Chamorro, "Estirpe sangrienta: los Somoza," and "Quieren otra vez matar a Sandino," *La patria de Pedro: el pensamiento nicaragüense de Pedro Joaquín Chamorro*, 2d ed. (Managua: La Prensa, 1981), 6 and 161 respectively; and Ernesto Cardenal, "Hora O," *Poesía y revolución* (Mexico City: Editorial Edicol, 1979), 11–26.
14. Macaulay, *Sandino Affair*, 226.
15. Tomás Borge, *Carlos, the Dawn Is No Longer beyond Our Reach*, translated by Margaret Randall (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1984), 21–22. For an account of Fonseca's movements and the books he was reading during critical moments in the development of Sandinismo, see "Cronología básica de Carlos Fonseca" in Carlos Fonseca, *Obras*, 2 vols. (Managua: Editorial Nueva Nicaragua, 1981–82), 1:431–40.
16. For a discussion of Somoza's *El calvario de las Segovias*, see Macaulay, *Sandino Affair*, 307.
17. Borge, *Carlos*, 20.
18. For accounts of the specifics of the FSLN's growing conflict with the PSN, see John A. Booth, *The End and the Beginning: The Nicaraguan Revolution* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1982), 15; Nolan, *Ideology of the Sandinistas*, 22–24; and Cancino Troncoso, *Raíces históricas*, 129–31.
19. Cancino Troncoso, *Raíces históricas*, 129–64.
20. Fonseca, *Obras* 1:83–84.
21. Fonseca, *La lucha por la transformación de Nicaragua* (1960) and *Breve análisis de la lucha popular nicaragüense contra la dictadura de Somoza* (1961), *Obras* 1:37–38, 39–51.
22. Although Sandino's movement was brutally crushed by Somoza after Sandino's assassination in 1934, some of the original participants who survived the Guardia's surprise attack on the Sandinista-held region around Wiwilí attempted to take up arms again after the assassination of the first Somoza. In the early 1960s, the young FSLN members came in conctact with former Sandinista General Santos López and others, who trained them in guerrilla warfare and guided their first incursions into Nicaragua. See Booth, *End and Beginning*, 116.
23. Nolan, *Ideology of the Sandinistas*, 22–26.
24. For a discussion of the failure of the guerrilla movements of the 1960s, see Luis E. Aguilar's introduction to *Marxism in Latin America*, edited by Luis E. Aguilar, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1978), 60–64.
25. The most important writings from this period are *Mensaje del Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional a los estudiantes revolucionarios* (1968), *Nicaragua: hora cero* (1969), the pamphlet *El Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional* (1971), *Sandino, guerrillero proletario* (1972), *Notas sobre la carta-testamento de Rigoberto López Pérez* (1972), and *Crónica secreta: Augusto César Sandino ante sus verdugos* (1972), all found in volume 1 of the *Obras*.
26. Nolan, *Ideology of the Sandinistas*, 17.
27. Many sympathetic analysts of FSLN ideology have erred in the opposite direction from Nolan in seeing the FSLN's ideological project as simply a direct continuation of Sandino's struggle. See Cancino Troncoso, *Raíces históricas*, 137, and Harry E. Vanden, "Ideology of the Sandinistas," *Nicaragua in Revolution*, edited by Thomas Walker (New York: Praeger, 1982), 41.

28. Fonseca, *Obras* 1:365.
29. See, for example, Fonseca, *Viva Sandino*, *Obras* 2:70.
30. Selser, *Sandino*, 95.
31. Letter of Augusto C. Sandino, 26 Feb. 1930, cited in Fonseca, *Viva Sandino*, *Obras* 2:69.
32. *Viva Sandino*, *Obras* 2:42–44, 50; and *Sandino: guerrillero proletario*, *Obras* 1:369, 384.
33. See Nina Tumarkin, *Lenin Lives! The Lenin Cult in Soviet Russia* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983); Germán Carrera Damas, *El culto a Bolívar* (Caracas: Ediciones de la Biblioteca, 1973); and Carlos Rafael Rodríguez, "José Martí, contemporáneo y compañero," *Siete enfoques marxistas sobre José Martí* (Havana: Editorial Politécnica, 1978).
34. *Nicaragua: hora cero*, *Obras* 1:81–82
35. *El Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional*, *Obras* 1:366.
36. *Nicaragua: hora cero*, *Obras* 1:82–83.
37. *El Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional*, *Obras* 1:366, and *Nicaragua: hora cero*, *Obras* 1:86.
38. *Nicaragua: hora cero*, *Obras* 1:95, 1:82.
39. For examples of such conjunctive representations, see *Obras* 1:66–67, 2:85. The FSLN oath is cited in *Nicaragua: hora cero*, *Obras* 1:95. Since Fonseca's death, the FSLN has added Carlos Fonseca to this symbolic trajectory, featuring his image repeatedly beside that of Sandino, (the father and son of the revolution), the connection between the two being thus "naturalized" to appear organic. See, for example, Humberto Ortega Saavedra's introduction, "Carlos, el eslabón vital de nuestra historia," in *Obras* 1:11–21.
40. Borge, *Carlos*, 14.
41. "Charla al movimiento cristiana," *Prosa política y poemas* (Managua: Editorial Nueva Nicaragua, 1981), 133.
42. *Fire from the Mountain: The Making of a Sandinista*, translated by K. Weaver (New York: Crown, 1985), 220–21. I have restored the key word *muchachos* from the original text because this term was used affectionately by sympathetic peasants to refer to both Sandino's original soldiers and the young men of the FSLN.
43. See also the intellectual tributes paid by Ortega and Wheelock in their respective introductions to volumes 1 and 2 of Fonseca's *Obras*.
44. Interview cited in Pilar Arias, *Nicaragua: revolución sandinista* (Mexico: Siglo XXI, 1980), 106–7.
45. "Mensaje no. 2," *Frente Sandinista: diciembre victorioso*, compiled by Jaime Wheelock Román (Mexico: Editorial Diógenes, 1976), 98–100.
46. Nolan, *Ideology of the Sandinistas*, 91–92.
47. Ibid., 17.
48. *Carta-testamento de Rigoberto López Pérez*, *Obras* 1:393–406.
49. Thus the ideology as constructed by Fonseca was what Mannheim would label a "utopian" projection or what Sorel would call a "socialist myth," which promises a collective liberation from a common oppressor and motivates the people to take collective action. See Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1949); and Georges Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, translated by T. E. Hulme and J. Roth (New York: Collier, 1961).
50. For an elucidation of the category of "romance" underlying many forms of popular culture from traditional mythology to mass cultural genres, see Frederic Jameson, "Magical Narratives," *The Political Unconscious* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1981), 103–50.
51. See, for example, *Mensaje del Frente Sandinista a los estudiantes revolucionarios*, *Obras* 1:67.
52. *Sandino ante sus verdugos*, *Obras* 1:412–27.
53. Philip Berryman, *The Religious Roots of Rebellion: Christians in Central American Revolutions* (New York: Orbis, 1984), 10.
54. R. R. Fagen, *The Nicaraguan Revolution: A Personal Report* (Washington: Institute for Policy Studies, 1981), 6.

55. The most significant testament to the universality and strength of the symbol of Sandino as a legitimator is the fierce struggle over the image and word *Sandino* that has raged between the FSLN and the opposition since 1979. In 1981 the FSLN made it illegal for unauthorized groups to use any representation of Sandino, thus stopping Alfonso Robelo's rightist party, the Movimiento Democrático Nicaragüense (MDN) from employing it in their political organizing. Indeed, since Robelo joined the counterrevolutionary opposition (the "contras"), they too have employed Sandino in their propaganda, claiming that if he were alive today he would be fighting against the FSLN. See Marsy Ann Ashby, "Augusto C. Sandino: The Prophet and National Symbol of Post-1979 Nicaragua," M.A. thesis, UCLA, 1983, p. 48, which cites the pamphlet by the Frente Democrático Nicaragüense (FDN), *¿Qué, quiénes, cuándo, dónde, cómo, por qué?*, p. 2.
56. Again, the closest example is the reinterpretation of José Martí by the Cuban revolutionaries. The Movimiento 26 de Julio did not articulate its ideology and strategy around Martí, however, drawing instead on an already highly developed and legitimized Martí as a symbol of Cuban liberation. Only when they ascended to power and formulated an official policy of socialist development did they engage in a major reworking of the figure of Martí. For an excellent analysis of the pantheon of myths and heroes in the Cuban Revolution, see C. Fred Judson, *Cuba and the Revolutionary Myth* (London: Westview, 1984).
57. See, for instance, Frederic Jameson's discussion of "Marxism's great historical failure": "the traditional negative hermeneutic for which the national question is a mere ideological epiphenomenon of the economic. . . . It is increasingly clear in today's world that a Left which cannot grasp the immense Utopian appeal of nationalism . . . can scarcely hope to 'reappropriate' such collective energies and must effectively doom itself to political impotence" (Jameson, *Political Unconscious*, 298).