

Université de Montréal

**Augusto César Sandino:
Hero Myth of the Nicaraguan Nation**

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Université de Montréal
Faculté des études supérieures

Ce mémoire intitulé :

Augusto César Sandino:

Hero Myth of the Nicaraguan Nation

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Résumé

Ce mémoire explore l'apparition et la survie du mythe héroïque le plus puissant de la nation nicaraguayenne, celui d'Augusto César Sandino depuis sa naissance en mai 1927 jusqu'à la défaite électorale du parti Sandiniste en février 1990. L'étude part de l'hypothèse que les héros nationaux et leurs mythes connaissent différentes phases de développement. Ces phases sont largement déterminées par les contextes socio-politiques qui affectent l'utilisation du mythe par les auteurs qui se l'ont approprié pour atteindre leurs propres buts. Les sources des mythes varient selon les moyens d'expression utilisés par les différents types d'acteurs actifs à chaque phase: politiciens, dirigeants révolutionnaires, poètes ou journalistes. En conséquence, cette étude explique l'histoire du mythe en le considérant comme une variable dépendante sensible à l'évolution socio-politique du Nicaragua, laquelle constitue l'arrière fond. Les conclusions majeures de cette recherche sont que le mythe de Sandino a survécu parce qu'il incarne une valeur durable de nature anti-impérialiste dans la conscience collective des Nicaraguayens. De plus, l'enquête démontre que la nature du récit n'a pas changé substantiellement au fil des années tandis que ses fonctions ont varié selon le contexte socio-politique et les aspirations des principaux auteurs du mythe.

Mots clés: héros, mythe, nation, nationalisme, idéologie, Nicaragua, histoire politique, révolution, dirigeants révolutionnaires, rébellion.

Abstract

This thesis explores the emergence and survival of one of the most cogent hero myths of the Nicaraguan nation, that of Augusto César Sandino, from its inception in May 1927 until the electoral defeat of the Sandinista party in February 1990. It argues that national heroes and their myths undergo various phases of development. These phases are affected by the social and political contexts that dictate the mythmakers' possibilities in diffusing their aims through the invocation of a hero myth. The mythic sources analyzed vary according to the mediums used by the prime mythmakers of each phase, i.e. politicians, revolutionary leaders, journalists or poets. As a result, this study traces the mythic history of Sandino by viewing the evolution of the socio-political background as a fundamental factor affecting its course. The major conclusion is that the hero myth has persisted because the anti-imperialist value it embodies continues to be prevalent in the collective belief-system of Nicaraguan culture. Furthermore, it concludes that the archetypal structure of the myth's narrative has not changed substantially in essence, but rather that the hero myth has varied in functions according to the socio-political context and the goals of the prime mythmakers.

Keywords: hero, myth, nation, nationalism, ideology, Nicaragua, political history, revolution, leadership, and rebellion.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>Introduction</u>	1
<u>Chapter 1:</u>	
Theoretical Framework	7
Orientation of Present Study	8
Definition of Key Concepts: Hero, Myth, Nation, Hero Myth	9
Some Functions of the Hero Myth	11
Basic Propositions and Hypotheses	14
Some Archetypal Characteristics of the Anti-Imperial Hero Myth	15
Organizational Structure	19
<u>Chapter 2:</u>	
From Hero to Hero Myth: The Emergence and Diffusion of the Sandino Hero Myth	23
The Socio-Political Context and Revolutionary Tradition of Nicaragua	25
Synopsis	33
Determining Factors in the Creation and Survival of the Hero Myth	34
I. The Heroic Act: Manifestation of a Primordial Myth of Defiance at a Forked Road	35
II. The Guerilla Nature of the War	38
III. Charismatic Leadership and the Following	40
III. Mythmakers: Latin American Anti-Imperialist Intellectuals and the Media	47
Conclusion	54
<u>Chapter 3:</u>	
The Hero Myth in Somnolence: Somoza's Institutionalization of the Anti-Heroic Sandino Myth	56
The Socio-Political Context	56
Mythmaker and Speech: Anastasio Somoza and the Anti-Hero Myth of Sandino	64
Mythmaker and Speech: The Persistence of the Sandino Hero Myth in Poetry	64
The Death of Somoza, The Birth of a Hero	65

Conclusion	66
<u>Chapter 4:</u>	
Recuperation of the Hero Myth in Times of Social Conflict	68
The Socio-Political Context	69
Mythmakers and Speech: Bayo, López, Castro, Che and Selser	74
Mythmaker and Speech: Carlos Fonseca	77
Discontented Bourgeoisie	82
The “Wily” Raid of 1974: The Sandinista Re-Awakening of the Hero Myth	84
Major Events Leading to the Revolution of 1979	86
Conclusion	98
<u>Chapter 5:</u>	
The Fate of the Hero Myth in Post-Revolutionary Era: Politization, Rupture and Recovery	90
Major Characteristics of the Sandinista Party’s Interpretation of the Hero Myth	93
The Socio-Political Context: Failures and Success of the Hero Myth	104
Phase One	105
Phase Two	107
The Failure of the Revolution on the Perception of the Hero Myth	111
Sandino in the Post-Sandinista Context	113
Conclusion	116
<u>Conclusion:</u>	118
New Questions, more Historical Paths	121
Bibliography	122

Acronyms and Abbreviations

AMNLAE	Luisa Amanda Espinosa Association of Nicaraguan Women
AMPRONAC	Association of Women Confronting the National Problem
ATC	Sandinista Children's Association
CDS	Sandinista Defense Committee
CEB	Christian Base Community
COSEP	Superior Council of Private Enterprise
DN	National Directorate
GPP	Prolonged Popular War
FARN	Nicaragua Revolutionary Armed Forces
FDN	Nicaraguan Democratic Forces
FLSN	Sandinista Front of National Liberation
JS-19	19 th of July Sandinista Youth
IES	Instituto de Estudio del Sandinismo
OAS	Organization of American States
PLI	Independent Liberal party
PSD	Social Democratic party
TP	Proletarian Tendency
UNAG	National Union of (Small) Farmers and Cattlemen
UNESCO	United Nation's Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNO	National Opposition Union

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INTRODUCTION

“The hero may or appear to suffer defeat, but “history” will always vindicate him.”¹

Time enfolds revolutionary leaders in layers of myth, rendering the historian’s quest for understanding ever more challenging. Today, Augusto César Sandino is the emblematic father of all Nicaraguans. His image hangs judiciously in the classrooms of Nicaragua’s youngest sons and daughters; the same picture is printed on t-shirts sold in tourist shops alongside stamps bearing the ineffable expression of what has come to symbolize a Nicaraguan brand of heroism. His mythic presence is pervasive, ubiquitous, and the memory of his deeds is deeply ingrained in the collective consciousness of his people.

Ironically, the majority of Segovian society greeted his assassination, seventy years earlier, with much relief: “Without a single known exception, all of the leading families of Nueva Segovia, Liberal and Conservative alike, were stridently anti-Sandinista from the beginning to the end of the Rebellion.”² What is more, the Marine-Guardia, who fought against Sandino for over five years, was mostly made up of the lower class Nicaraguans that Sandino was fighting for in his rebellion. Further compounding the irony, these soldiers were led and trained by the very same U.S. imperialists that Sandino sought to oust from Nicaragua.³

The guerrilla leader’s heroic distinction only began to ensue with success of the Cuban revolution in 1959, as a new generation of Nicaraguan anti-imperialists recognized the inspirational quality of cultural myths for the promotion of mass insurgency against the dictatorial regime of Anastasio Somoza. Since the victorious revolution of 1979, the memory of Sandino has become an

¹ Sidney Hook, *The Hero in History: A Study in Limitation and Possibility*, New York, The John Day Company, 1943, p. 77.

² Michael Jay Schroeder, *To Defend our Nation’s Honor: Toward a Social and Cultural History of the Sandino Rebellion in Nicaragua, 1927-1934*, Diss. University of Michigan-Flint, 1993, Ann Arbor, UMI, 1995, p. 237.

³ Schroeder explains that regular pay, improved equipment and medical care combined to make conditions for the army’s enlisted men much better than for the average Nicaraguan.

ongoing site of contention in the grand master political arena of Nicaragua's power struggles, with debates over his true nature continuously stimulating political controversy as well as invigorating historical analysis. In fact, up until the eighties, most writers depicted Sandino in a hagiographic light concordant to their anti-imperialist aspirations. The good was magnified and all else left out for a faultless version of the leader's past.⁴ Such glaring embellishment, along with Sandino's newfound range of popularity in post-revolutionary Nicaragua, played a determining role in triggering the latest historical tendency: to disrobe the historical figure of his myths in hopes of unraveling the fundamental core of his individuality.

Yet the insistence in uncovering the truest essence of Sandino's drive possesses its advantages as well as its pitfalls. One almost inescapable conundrum related more generally to the study of national heroes is based on the fact that "History and myth may both look like heavily constructed narratives"⁵; demarcating historical facts from mythic data can be challenging since they often resemble each other in form. As a result, many historians of hero myths, consciously or subconsciously, have ended their judicious studies on a venerating tone, praising the historical figure and forcing the reader to wonder whether the author in question fell under the hypnotic spell of the myth. In other words, remnants of hagiographic tones are often found in well thought-out historical studies of modern time national heroes.

On a positive note, studies seeking to strip heroically perceived figures from any sort of fictitious construction often provide the subject with a thorough

⁴ Some of the major hagiographic works are Ramón de Belaustiguigoitia, *Con Sandino en Nicaragua*, Madrid, Espana-Calpe, 1934; Gustavo Alemán Bolaños, *Sandino, Estudio Completo del Héroe de las Segovias*, Mexico, D.R.: Impresa La República, 1932; Carleton Beals, *Banana Gold*, Philadelphia and London, J.B. Lippincott Company, 1932, and Sofonia Salvatierra, *Sandino o la Tragedia de un Pueblo, Managua*, Talleres Litograficos Maltez, 1934. These works will be discussed in detail in chapter two, "The Emergence of the Hero Myth".

⁵ Natalie Zemon Davis and Randolph Starn, Introduction to the special issue on "Memory and Counter-Memory" in *Representations* 16 (2), (Spring 1989), p. 1-7, p. 2.

expansion on specific aspects of their personalities. This in turn enlarges the scope of historical contemplation, especially when such works are studied in relation to one another. For instance, Marco Aurelio Navarro-Génie's interpretation of Sandino's actions according to millenarian theory, in *Augusto "César" Sandino Messiah of Light and Truth* (2002), sheds a convincing new light on the religious proclivities of the figure.⁶ Another compelling construal comes from Donald C Hodges' *Intellectual Foundations of the Nicaraguan Revolution* (1988) for its exhaustive elaboration on the political and religious ideas that framed his thinking. Anarcho-syndicalism, Zoroastrianism, Freemasonry and Theosophy are discussed in great detail to explain the formation of Sandino's political ideas. Unlike Navarro, he does not perceive him as a full-fledged millenarian but rather, sees him as a skilled ideologue whose masterful manipulation of multifarious moral and political positions enabled him to attract the most followers as possible, i.e. "the more ideologies, the better".⁷ Although neither work is capable of offering the absolute truth regarding his ultimate drive, useful insight may be drawn from the harmonious balance struck between history and theory for aptly clarifying certain facets of his persona.

On a less positive note, arguably, historical research depends upon which analytical approach is chosen. In the words of Roland Barthes: "The historian is not so much a collector of facts as a collector and relater of signifiers; he organizes them with the purpose of establishing positive meaning and filling the vacuum of pure and meaningless series."⁸ In consequence, some approaches, i.e. like psychological ones, may be debunked more easily than others due to the

⁶ Navarro bases his analysis of Sandino's behavior on the millenarian theories of Vittorio Lanternari, *The Religions of the Oppressed. A Study of Modern Cults*. trans. by Lisa Sergio. New York, Knopf, 1963, and Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical Anarchists of the Middle Ages*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1957.

⁷ Donald C. Hodge, *Intellectual Foundations of the Nicaraguan Revolution*, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1986, p. 73.

⁸ Roland Barthes, "The Discourse of History", trans. by Stephen Bann, *Comparative Criticism*, 3 (1981), p. 7-20, p. 8.

impossibility of applying psychological analysis to historical figures. For instance, Alejandro Bolaños Geyer's *El Iluminado* (2001) explains that his mother's abandonment of the young Sandino triggered a mental disorder that rendered him deranged for the rest of his life. Whereas Pierre Vayssière's application of Freudian theory, in *Augusto César Sandino: L'Envers ou le Mythe* (1986), deduces that the leader's decision to sign the Peace Accords (1933) stemmed primarily from his wife's calling to his paternal responsibilities through letters invoking the upcoming birth of their unborn child. The imposition of theories inapplicable to historical data strain Bolaños and Vayssière's works to paradoxically undermine their demystifying endeavor and in turn, imbue their interpretation of the past with new coatings of myth-like explanations.

Finally, one needs not be a social scientist to understand the indubitably erratic and elusive nature of personality. Reducing findings to a hypothesis (i.e. he was a millenarian, Machiavellian leader or even a deranged man), or by applying useful or doubtful theories, denies Sandino his humanity by magnifying one aspect of his character at the expense of others. In other words, when focusing too closely on the specific, historians are prone to lose sight of what is general in the unique.

Today, the myth of Sandino is more remembered than the history of Sandino: "Les être qui ont impressionné les foules furent des héros légendaires, et non des héros réels."⁹ As there may well be no solution to the inefficaciousness of myth in historical writing, this thesis examines the myth itself to better comprehend how the memory of Sandino has trekked through time from ignominious death by assassination to glorious vindication of mythical proportions. The answer to this question resides in the understanding of a second set of questions: What is a hero myth? Where, when and why does it originate, what functions does the hero myth serve and finally, do these functions change

⁹Gustave Le Bon, *Psychology des Foules*, Paris, Quadrige, p. 24.

with time, if so, according to what? Yet, before delving into the theoretical approach, a brief biographical account of Sandino's early years is crucial for the setting of the analytical stage.

Birth of the Hero: Sandino the Man

Augusto Nicolás Calderón was born on May 9th, 1895 in a small village thirty miles west of Managua by the name of Niquinihomo. Until the age of nine, his single mother, Margarita Calderón, who worked as a peasant laborer in one of Sandino's father's farms, raised him in dire poverty. At the age of 9, Margarita left the village with her lover to live in Granada. Augusto went on to reside with his grandmother and later on, moved in with his father's family. As one of the richest men of the village as well as a prominent supporter of the Liberal party, Gregorio Sandino played an important role in the political education of his son.

In 1920, Augusto was forced to leave Nicaragua because of shooting of Dagoberto Rivas, a native of Niquinihomo, during a dispute. He first fled to the Pacific Coast of Nicaragua and gradually made his way to La Ceiba Honduras, Guatemala and to Cierra Azul, a port town near Tampico, Mexico by working as a mechanic. As a breeding ground of political ideas, post-revolutionary Mexico endowed Sandino with revolutionary theories to spread to Nicaragua. He assimilated current trends in freemasonry, anarchism, socialism, communism and theosophy and developed his own eclectic blend of revolutionary ideology.¹⁰

By May 1926, Nicaraguan Liberals were revolting against the American-backed Conservative government. The statute of limitation concerning Sandino's charges for attempted murder had expired and so, he made his way back to his homeland and eventually found work as a clerk at the San Albino mines. There, he began to agitate the miners with revolutionary ideas, gaining their support and

¹⁰ Sandino's experience in Mexico is discussed in chapter two

developing “rabble-rousing” abilities.¹¹ Although the Liberal Commander Moncada denied Sandino’s request for weapons, he managed with the help of some prostitutes to gather some guns from a fleeing group of Liberal soldiers.

Sandino led his guerrilla troops under the Liberal banner until the following May. After a year of civil war, Moncada and American Representative Stimson signed a peace treaty instantly perceived as yet another testimony of Nicaragua’s subservience to the United States’ economic interest.¹² Despite orders from his Commander to let down his arms, Sandino refused to sign the pact, fled to the mountains with a group of twenty-nine men and persisted to fight against the United States’ presence as well as any Nicaraguan (Liberal or Conservative) who did not back his cause.

His fight led to the most long-lasting anti-imperialist guerilla war in Central America up until that time. Rumors of his defiance trickled through the isthmus granted the anti-imperialist mood with a shining example of Latin American revolutionary heroism. Finally, Sandino’s heroic status was further reinforced on February 23rd 1934— one year following the U.S. withdrawal of their forces and the signing of a peace treaty between Sandino and Liberal president Sacasa. Guardia soldiers under the orders of the army’s general Anastasio Somoza captured Sandino while leaving from a dinner at the National Palace and executed him along with two of his generals.

¹¹ Neill Macauley, *The Sandino Affair*, Durham, N.C. Duke University Press, 1967, was one of the first historical books to speak about his charismatic personality. See p. 54.

CHAPTER ONE:

Theoretical Framework: Myth, Hero, and Hero Myth

A breakdown of key concepts shall now be imparted to render the theoretical background and bibliography supporting the orientation of the following approach. Given that the term “myth” encapsulates a broad spectrum of stories, tales and legends of various significance spanning well before recorded history, it is crucial to define the present phenomenon according to its suited categories. Types are plenty and subject matters—though crosscutting peoples and times—widely range in array and scope. There exists primitive myths of yesteryear and primitive myths of today, secular myths with religious connotations, religious one’s with political connotations and even myths purely fabricated by masterful ideologists for the suiting their political agendas.¹³ To dispel needless confusion and draw concomitant inferences, the myth of Augusto César Sandino is heroic and political in type and contemporary in time. Finally, it is in light of its intoxicating presence in the sphere of the nation that “myth” pertains to this study.

Though national myths represent a transnational phenomenon, no two heroes have undergone the same historical course. A Gandhi would unlikely have emerged in Iraq, no more than a Castro could have headway in the United States for without a doubt, the fate of a hero and his/her heroic myth is dependant on the social and political context that helped produce him/her. As particularities arise from the uniqueness of their historical experience and general theories contribute to the deriving of specifics, the findings of this study are largely supported by

¹³ A case illustrating the latter type of myth is the Host-Wessel legend in Germany: A talented propagandist invented a hero out of a disenchanting pimp by putting him through a program of glorification that led to Wessel’s transformation into a national youth hero of the Nazi movement. This story is cited from Eugene

theories of myth, hero, ideology, leadership and revolution. These theories, in relation to historical data, shall serve to explore the emergence and survival of the hero myth of Sandino by helping to delineate the fundamental prepositions determining the essence and functions of its mythic course.

Orientation of Present Study

The analysis of myth may be undertaken in a wide range of approaches; each one determined by a specific theory aimed at providing the correct methodology for understanding its precise nature. Harris and Platzter have discerned that most approaches fall under the following two categories: “external theories” which claim that myths arise from “a reaction to physical nature” and so, serve to explain natural phenomenon as well as the birth of civic and religious institutions. On the other hand, “internal theories” perceive myth as a spontaneous manifestation of the psyche or a group dream symptomatic of archetypal urges from which one can decipher the relationship between myth and subconscious wants of human beings.¹⁴ As the aim is to understand how the hero myth has traveled throughout the century, and that political myths of modern times do not arise from an untraceable and mysterious past but by distinguishable mythmakers, the present study understands the hero myth from an “externalist” perspective. Furthermore, it looks closely at the “official” makers of the hero myth, i.e. revolutionary leaders, politicians and well-known anti-imperial intellectuals, rather than how it is understood or re-appropriated by marginalized or peripheral collective groups.¹⁵

Weiner and Anita Weiner, *The Martyr's Conviction: A Sociological Analysis*, Atlanta, Scholars Press, 1990, p. 115, to explicate the nefarious usage of myth for the construction of national heroes.

¹⁴See chapter 2 “Ways of Interpreting Myth” by Stephen, L. Harris and Gloria Platzner’s *Classical Mythology, Images and Insights*. 3rd ed. Sacramento, Mayfield Publishing Company, 2001. Some of the major externalist theoreticians have been Max Müller (1823-1900), Sir James Frazer (1854-1941) and Bronislaw Malinowski (1884-1942) whereas Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), Carl Jung (1875-1961), Joseph Campbell, Claude Lévi-Strauss and Mircea Eliade are considered leading figures of the internalist/psychological approach to myth.

¹⁵ It is important to note that the masses can play an active role in their reception of national myths, re-appropriating it or challenging it to form their own version of it. For example, see Samuel Brunk, “Remembering Emiliano Zapata: Three Moments in the Posthumous Career of the Martyr of Chinameca”, *Hispanic American Historical Review* 79 (3) 1998, p. 457-490, for an interesting analysis of the appropriation of the hero myth by marginalized groups.

Consequently, the approach taken in this study is evolutionary and structural; evolutionary in the sense that it believes that the hero myth of Sandino has undergone different phases of development, and structural in the sense that it considers the influence of regime as well as the impact of the United States' foreign policies toward Nicaragua as two major factors dictating the mythmakers' possibilities in diffusing his/her goals through the invocation of mythic speech. As a result, to better grasp the essence and functions of the myth, it is necessary to analyze the interplay between mythmakers and their mythic speech beneath the backdrop of the socio-political context in which the latter is uttered.

Definition of Key Concepts: Myth, Nation, Hero and Hero Myth

Myth is understood as “a traditional narrative usually involving supernatural or imaginary imagery and often embodying popular ideas on natural or social phenomenon”¹⁶. Its validity, as a popularly held idea, derives not from historical accuracy but from its successful representation of a value concomitant to the value system of a society. George Sorel writes: “Myth cannot be refuted since it is, at the base, identical with the convictions of a group, being the expression in the language of the movement.”¹⁷ Its truth resides along moral rather than historical lines. “A myth is something that never was but always is”, it is believed as true, and that is what matters for the present purpose.¹⁸

The **nation** is defined by Benedict Anderson as “an imagined political community and imagined as both inherently and limited and sovereign”.¹⁹ From the fact that the nation is imagined, it is possible to infer that the nation contains a mythical rather than a historical rendition of a specific society. Anderson,

¹⁶ Judy Pearsall and Bill Tumble, *The Oxford English Reference Dictionary*, 2nd ed., New York, 1996, p. 957.

¹⁷ Cited in Irving Louis Horowitz, *Radicalism and the Revolt Against Reason, The Social Theories of George Sorel with the Translation of his Essay on the Decomposition of Marxism*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, p.22.

¹⁸ Lee C. MacDonald, “Myth, Politics and Political Science”, *Western Political Quarterly*, 22 (March 1969), p. 141-150, p. 141.

borrowing Walter Benjamin's theory of the Superstructure, reinforces this point by demonstrating how the nation is conceived in narrative form through the influence of the printed word.²⁰ Novel and newspaper forge a sense of community founded on the region's vernacular to incite a growing number of people to think about themselves in new ways; imagination and history intermingle to create an idealized rendition of the past implicitly perceived (consciously or unconsciously) as history. This argument is well supported by the observations of other researchers: "Le merveilleux et le légendaire sont, en réalité, les vrais supports d' une civilisation. Dans l'histoire l'apparence a toujours joué un rôle beaucoup plus important que la réalité."²¹ In other words, the nation's "official" narrative aims to depict "myth as history" (as opposed to "history as fact") for elevation and definition of a people demarcated by the national boundaries.

It is imperative to decipher the nuances between **hero** and **hero myth** for they represent two intermingling yet distinct phases in the evolution of the phenomenon. The title of **hero** is granted *at* a crucial moment in time i.e., when a society's deprivations predisposes a need for a savior, *to* an individual whose supposed feats are perceived as heroic by collective standards.²² It relates to the historical figure that materialized (or is perceived to have materialized) a heroic value whereas **hero myth** relates to the linguistic embellishment enveloping the historical figure in mythical language. And so, to understand the emergence of this hero myth, it is necessary to examine the historical figure within his social and

¹⁹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, New York, Verso, p.7.

²⁰ Walter Benjamin's discernment of capitalist superstructure i.e., the "age of mechanical reproduction", to demonstrate the influence of the printed word in the conceptualization of national consciousness. See chapter three, 'The Origins of National Consciousness' for an exhaustive rendition. Or, Walter Benjamin's *Illuminations*, London, Fontana, 1973.

²¹ Gustave Le Bon, *Psychologie des Foules*, Paris, Quadrige, 1963, p.35. For more studies discussing the interrelation between history and myth in the construction of a national narrative, see David Lowenthal's *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History*, Cambridge, The Cambridge University Press, 1997; Anthony D. Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1999; Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780, Programme, Myth, Reality*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1990.

²² These two overlapping stages are the subject of the following chapter.

political context. Moreover, to grasp the person's transformation into a hero myth, it is necessary to analyze the linguistic glorification that incurred from the key spokespersons after the heroic deed was performed.

Some Functions of the Hero Myth: a Story of Origin, an Ideological Component of National Discourse and a Mobilizing Tool for Revolt

This section attempts to elaborate on some of the fundamental functions related to modern day politically oriented myths. The works of Mircea Eliade, *Sacred and Profane* (1959) and *Myth and Reality* (1963), Roland Barthes' *Mythologies* (1957) and George Sorel's *Réflexions sur la Violence* (1972) are summoned and elaborated upon according to their relevance to the related function. It is important to note that this thesis does not adhere exclusively to one of the following theoreticians, but rather applies their studies in view of the light that they shed on the functional evolution of the Sandino hero myth. What is more, as the hero myth can possess more than one function at once, the fundamental principles of these theories sometimes overlap.

Myth as a Story of Origin

Mircea Eliade's *Sacred and the Profane* (1959) and *Myth and Reality's* (1963) explanations on the contemporaneity of myth in the modern political context provide insight on one of its basic functions in the sphere of the nation. Since myth is bound to ontology, its continued existence is materialized beneath the veil of our prevailing framework; stories of origins in primordial times are contemporaneous to political myths concerning the birth of a nation.

Myth narrates a sacred History, it relates an event that took place in Primordial Time, the fabled time of "beginning". In other words, myth tells how through the deeds of Supernatural Beings, a reality comes into existence— an island, a species of plant, a particular kind of human behavior.²³

²³ Mircea Eliade, *Myth and Reality*, trans. by Willard R. Trask, New York, Harper and Row, 1963, p. 7. It is important to note that Eliade's fundamental point may be categorized as "internal". He believes that myths are constructed to elevate man from the drudgeries of everyday life, and provide explanations about the unknown.

Concomitantly, the origins of the nation are partly owing to the social perception of a figure, historical or made-up, whose heroic deeds have transformed him/her, through heroic language, into a hero myth. Anthony D. Smith further explains that myth serve “to recreate the heroic spirit and (heroes) that animated our “ancestors” in some golden age; and descent is traced, not through family pedigree but through the persistence of some kind of virtue or other distinctive cultural qualities”.²⁴ Accordingly, the story of national heroes often follows novel-like sequence of trials and tribulations. To name a few, return from exile, supernatural traits and tragic deaths, are some familiar traits found in hero myths throughout the centuries.²⁵

Myth as an Ideological Component of National Discourse

The hero myth must also be understood as an essential component working within the ideological discourse of nationalism.²⁶ David Apter explains that myth is past-oriented to illumine the present by revitalizing the past whereas ideology is future-oriented to explain the future through a rational projection of events.²⁷ Ben Halperin’s enlightening explanation of myth and ideology in modern times further explains:

Myth derives from (“expresses”) the will to action and functions as a spur to action. Ideology embodies myth through grasping it intellectually, and hence restrains and stimulates action in two ways: by its own intellectual force and by the force of the myth still alive in it.²⁸

²⁴ Anthony D. Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 9. Smith further explains the heroic memories are not immutable. Though they hearken back to a golden age, the age may change in type i.e., a religious, artistic, a military, etc, therefore engendering a different set of heroes i.e., poets, saints, soldiers.

²⁵ See Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, New York, Meridian Books, 1956, for a thorough rendition of the standard traits in the sequence of actions detected in hero myths throughout times and peoples.

²⁶ Cited in Ben Halperin, “Myth” and “Ideology” in Modern Usage’, *History and Theory*, 1 (2) 1961, p. 129-149, p. 147.

²⁷ See McDonald, p. 149.

²⁸ Halperin, p. 39. In Marx’s terms, “ideology” means the “whole system of religion, morality, and law, whereby a ruling class “justifies” and upholds the social system dictated by its interests”. (148)

Myth's ability to "will to action" is deployed for the ideological intentions of forging—in Althusser's terms—"a representation of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence"²⁹. Ideology rationalizes myths to fit the moral basis of the prime porters of the myth, i.e. usually political figures seeking to legitimize their power. Therefore, the prime ideologues of a nation can be perceived as mythmakers, using mythic versions of the past to forge a system of values and norms suiting their political agenda.

Roland Barthes semiological understanding of myth explains how it seeps into the collective consciousness of a society "transforming history into nature" by revealing the duplicity of myth's signifier.³⁰

Myth is a value, truth is no guarantee for it; nothing prevents it from being a perpetual alibi. It is enough that its signifier has two sides for it, always to have an "elsewhere" at its disposal. The meaning is always there to present the form and the form is always there to outdistance the meaning. And there is never any contradiction, conflict, or split between meaning and the form. They are never at the same place.³¹

The surreptitious juxtaposition of two meanings—a literal (meaning) and *metahistoric* (form)—renders the myth historically viable. On the one side, myth means exactly what it says, i.e. "Sandino is the hero of Nicaragua" whereas on the other, the same speech is used to say something else, something related to the political intentions of the speaker. Barthes explains that myth does not efface history but distorts it to say something else, all at once using "History's" linguistic garb as an alibi. Like the preceding authors, Barthes believes that myth stands for something beyond its literal implications, an ideology that uses myth to forge a

²⁹ Louis Althusser, *Essays on Ideology*. London, Verso, 1984, p. 36.

³⁰ Here I have paraphrased Barthes explanation: "Myth hides nothing and flaunts nothing; it distorts; myth is neither a lie nor a confession: it is an inflection." (11). Semiology refers to the general study of signs. The sign refers to the inseparable union between signifier (the speech sounds or written marks composing the sign) and the signified (the conceptual meaning of the sign). See M. H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 6th ed. Ithaca, Cornell University, 1993, p. 104 and 275.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

moral basis for society— one that serves to reinforce the status quo by implementing memories based on myths rather than history.³²

Myth as a Mobilizing Tool against the State or Regime

Conversely, George Sorel's *Réflexions sur La Violence* deduces that the essential function of myth is to mobilize the masses into violent revolt against the state. Myth's objective is to promote universal strikes against the capitalist system through the uprising of the worker: "Socialist man" must tap into his primitive drive, where courage and action lie dormant in order to change the world order."³³ For Sorel, the dominating bourgeois framework of reason drained the virility out of the mass, rendering the people passive and paralyzed against their living conditions and paving the way to the degeneration of modern man. He glorified myth's regenerative force for triggering violent (albeit moral) behavior against the social injustices produced by the capitalist system.³⁴

A final function underlying the previous ones relates to social perception. Whether it is for ideological purposes or revolutionary revolts, one of myth's key functions is to legitimize the cause and image of the person who invokes it. In relation to the hero myth of Sandino, the utterance of his heroism is always related to the goals of the speaker, who seeks to legitimize his/her political, intellectual or even spiritual aims or predilection through a heroic version of the past.

Basic Propositions and Hypotheses

The fundamental propositions wielded from the precedent definitions and functional theories of myth are the following:

³² See Ilene O'Malley. *The Myth of the Revolution: Hero Cults and the Institutionalization of the Mexican State, 1920-1940*. New York: Greenwood Press, 1986, for a Barthesian approach to revolutionary Mexican hero myths. Her work demonstrates how the government's constant invocation of heroes serves to divert the attention of the people away from the regime's shortcomings by perniciously aligning politicians to revolutionary ideals— ironically legitimizing the regime despite its neglect to put forth programs of reform.

³³ See George Sorel, *Réflexions sur la Violence*, Paris, Marcel Rivière, 1972 As militant anarcho-syndicalist, Sorel was inspired by the general strike of Mexico on July 31st, 1916.

³⁴ In contrast, Barthes' analysis suggests that myth has shed its mobilizing power to become an intergrat element of the dominant ideology. Although both Sorel and Barthes aimed at contesting the hegemony of the dominant class, their perspectives largely differed due to the political structure determining the potential for change.

- 1) Myth is a value (in the form of speech).³⁵
- 2) Primordial myths of origin are contemporaneous to myths concerning the origins of the nation.
- 3) Myths are an integral component of a nation's ideology.
- 4) The nation, as an imagined community, possesses a heroic quality personified by hero myths.
- 5) Political myths have various functions, most notably as a narrative of origin, an ideological component of national discourse and as an ideological component of mobilizing discourses against oppressive political systems.

From an understanding of these prepositions, this thesis hypothesized that the historical figure Augusto César Sandino gradually became perceived as a hero and subsequently as a hero myth of the Nicaraguan nation.

Secondly, from the previous definition of myth as a value cloaked in speech, it supposes that the hero myth of Sandino has not changed in form, i.e. some archetypal elements remain the same through time.³⁶ Concurrently, an anti-heroic myth might take center stage to promote the needs of mythmakers' who deem the heroic one menacing to their motives, consequently muting it for a specific period in time. This type of myth is to be perceived as a separate living entity, not to be entwined with the heroic one but understood in coexistence to its counterpart: one's popularity is at the expense of the other's notoriety.

Finally, from a structural and evolutionary approach to the history of Sandino hero myth, this thesis hypothesizes that although the hero myth has not changed in essence, it has changed in function according to the social and political structure.³⁷

Some Archetypal Characteristics of an Anti-Imperial Hero Myth

Although it is impossible to do justice to the multiplicity of themes embodied in a hero myth, a useful starting point is to decipher the value at the heart of the

³⁵ This concept is borrowed from Roland Barthes' *Mythologies*, trans. by Annette Lavers, New York, Hill and Wang, 1984, p. 1. "Speech" in Barthes' terminology, entails all types of a message and is therefore not confined to oral speech. This term is used to describe mythic material throughout the thesis.

³⁶ This hypothesis also agrees an observation made by Schroeder regarding his interviews with ex-Sandinistas during the highly politicized years of the early 1980's; he discovered that the contemporary versions Sandino's life and feats did not differ radically from those propagated during Sandino's lifetime.

³⁷ "Essence" and "form" are the two terms used throughout this thesis to describe the archetypal characteristics of the hero myth that remain unaltered.

narrative and consequently, deduce its major characteristics. As a nationalist who fought for the independence of his people against U.S. domination, the value personified by the Sandino hero myth is essentially anti-imperialistic in nature. The following attributes are considered perennially ingrained in the narrative of the myth.

I. David versus Goliath

A most recurrent trait shared by hero myths of the anti-imperialist type stem from the continuing plight of the oppressed. As long as social injustices persist, inducing the armed confrontation of the weak against the powerful, oppressive realities are likely to be overturned in the mythic discourse of revolutionary heroism. In Wellner's words, "the greater the risk, the more extraordinary becomes the feat in the perception of the hero's followers".³⁸ Throughout the decades, Sandino is continuously alluded to as Nicaragua's version of David fighting Goliath: "In Nicaragua señores/The mouse catches the cat".³⁹ He tells his people: "No dudo que somos muy pequeños para vencer a los piratas y felones yankees, pero tampoco podrán negar estos asesinos que nuestra decisión está basada en el sagrado principio de defender nuestra soberanía."⁴⁰ Although weaker in material, he is morally superior for his cause has a nobler end. The balance of power transcends for a moment in time and an eternity in fiction for the fight against a greater power— full knowingly to fail— renders the act heroic.

II. The Hero as the Epitome of Cleverness

The anti-imperialist hero also classifies as a "clever hero": "A person who bests his rivals by wit, unexpected tricks, or hoaxes is likely to become a great favorite with his people. The clever hero requires an opponent of much superior

³⁸ Ann Ruth Wellner, *The Spellbinders, Charismatic Political Leadership*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1984, p. 61.

³⁹ This famous trope is well known in Nicaragua today. It is cited from Gregorio Selser, Sandino: *General of the Free*, trans. Cedric Belfrage, New York, Monthly Review Press, p. 88.

⁴⁰ *Pensamiento Vivo*, 2nd edition, ed. Sergio Ramírez, two Volumes, Managua, Editorial Nueva Nicaragua, 1984. p. 67.

size.”⁴¹ In relevance to Sandino, his own witty remarks reflect this attribute: “Lástima que sean tan grandes los piratas, porque sus uniformes no les sirven a nuestra gente.”⁴² Moreover, the nature of guerilla warfare i.e., based on hit-and-run tactics, further reinforces the leader as a persona of cunning intelligence. The marines’ failure to capture him prompted tacit sensationalism in the headlines of *The New York Times*. He is “ever elusive”, “wily,” and a “maddening problem for the marines”: “The attempt to capture Sandino is like chasing a fox... He and his men know the county thoroughly, while it is totally unknown to the marines.”⁴³ Although their tricks fail in the long run, their actions render them heroic in the perception of their admirers.

III. The Hero as the Deliverer of Oppression and Redeemer of the Poor

The wily hero overlaps with “the delivering and avenging hero” of the poor. He is loved by the oppressed and considered a vile enemy by the oppressors. Sandino can be categorized as a textbook case of social banditry and millenarianism that flourishes in remote regions amongst oppressed peoples—in this case the Indian population of the Segovias.⁴⁴ Hobsbawn describes the basic characteristic of this type leader:

The point about social bandits is that they are peasant outlaws who the lord and state regard as criminals who remain within peasant society, and are considered by their people as heroes, as champions, avengers, fighters for justice, perhaps even leaders of liberation, and in any case as men to be admired, helped and supported.⁴⁵

Sandino’s enemies perceived him as “nothing but a common outlaw”, a ruthless bandit to be exterminated for the good of Nicaragua. Conversely, his cohorts overturned the notion of banditry to grant a more honorable meaning: “Bandido era Abdul el-Krim para los españoles; bandidos los drusos que se sacrifican por la

⁴¹ See Orrin E. Klapp, “The Creation of Popular Heroes”, *The American Journal of Sociology*, 54 (2) 1948. p. 135-141. The author defines five possible roles of mythical and popular heroes (1) the conquering hero, (2) the Cinderella, (3) the clever hero, (4) the benefactor, and (5) the martyr, p. 135.

⁴² *Pensamiento Vivo*, p. 54.

⁴³ *New York Times*, March 22nd, 1928.

⁴⁴ The social and cultural realities of the Segovias will be elaborated upon in the next chapter.

libertad de la patria. Bandidos han sido y son y serán para losw opresores todos los que luchan por la libertad.”⁴⁶ In an interview with Sandino, Carleton Beals recounts: “You are as much a bandit as Mr. Coolidge is a bolshevik. Tell your people, he returned, there are many bandits in Nicaragua, but they are not necessarily Nicaraguans.”⁴⁷ His self-sacrifice overturns his deviant label thereby strengthening the convictions of a group as well as his heroic image as redeemer and savior of the downtrodden.

IV. The Hero as Martyr

Finally, a chief characteristic of the Nicaraguan hero myth corresponding with the “wily” and “avenging deliverer of the poor” in their fight against a greater power is his/her willingness to die for the cause at hand. Anita and Eugene Weiner explain how martyrdom functions to reinforce a group’s convictions: “Martyrdom sets standards for praiseworthy acts that become standards for continued group membership.”⁴⁸ The martyr’s actions taps into what Turner calls a “root paradigm”, the powerfully felt and deeply imbued cultural sentiments of a society.⁴⁹ In relevance to Sandino, the liberation of the poor from imperialism in the name of universal principles of freedom and sovereignty transforms Sandino’s deviant act into honorable memories for the nation to call to mind when the soil is fertile. Furthermore, as promoter of his own image, Sandino diligently stated his willingness to die throughout his entire career: “I am going to Managua, I am going to die. I am the trunk and you are the branches, and these branches will someday shed their vines and grow strong and true, and they are you.”⁵⁰ Martyrdom functions as a double -edged sword, legitimizing and strengthening the value and the person that died in the name of it. As a result, the historical figure is

⁴⁵ Eric J. Hobsbawn, *Bandits*, New York, Delacorte Press, 1969, p. 13.

⁴⁶ *El Repertorio Americano*, September 17th, 1928.

⁴⁷ *The Nation*, February 22nd, 1928.

⁴⁸ Eugene Weiner and Anita Weiner, *The Martyr’s Conviction: A Sociological Analysis*, Atlanta, Scholars Press, 1990, p. 86.

⁴⁹ Ralph H. Turner, *Collective Behavior*, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, Prentice-Hall, 1957, p. 474.

elevated, transformed into a myth and his aura is re-invoked by future generations seeking similar objectives.

In other words, death frees the hero from the stains entailed in the act of living. In the eyes of ever-scrutinizing critics, living takes away the possibility of holding in memory what is useful. Man's fallible nature spoils the social perception of the heroic persona—eternalized and idealized as the prime example of all that is good. The examples of living Nicaraguan heroes reinforce this point: Daniel Ortega had to fight charges of child abuse against his stepdaughter whereas Omar Cabeza was sued for swindling money from his brother.⁵¹ To enter the national genealogy of heroes, it is better to die like Carlos Fonseca, Joaquín Chamorro and Sandino, i.e. in the hands of the traitor and in the midst of the struggle. The death of the hero inspires rather than dispels the illusion of a utopian tomorrow.

Organizational Structure and Sources

The chapters have been divided according to the major phases in the nation-building development of Nicaragua, from the beginning of the myth's proliferation (May 1927) to the electoral loss of the Sandinistas (November 1990). Each one opens with a rendition of the social context and ensues with an analysis of the myth. The primary sources most frequently used are the printed press and the political writings of the prime ideologists. It is important to note that this thesis seeks to understand the construction and appropriation of the hero myth through the perception of the most influential mythmakers. In the Sorelian sense, this means those seeking to topple the regime by violent means, whereas in the Barthesian sense, it relates to those seeking to legitimize their power. Therefore,

⁵⁰ IES 044-2-2:4, cited from Schroeder p. 16.

⁵¹ See *La Prensa*, June 5th, 1998, for sexual abuse charges against Ortega by his adoptive daughter Zoilamérica Narvaez.

mythmakers vary in type, i.e. politicians, revolutionary leaders, intellectuals and poets, according to the political and social phase of the nation.

Chapter Two: “From Hero to Hero Myth: Exploring the Emergence of Diffusion of the Sandino Hero Myth” delves into the social context preceding Sandino’s defiant act. External and internal problems, respectively U.S. imperialism and chronic factional wars, are elaborated upon to better grasp the preconditions favoring the positive reception of the hero or, in other words, the “root paradigm” developed throughout the last two centuries. John A. Booth’s astute rendition of Nicaraguan history imparts crucial insight bringing forth the relevance of theories of deprivation in times of crisis situations. William J. Schroeder’s detailed dissertation of the Segovias clarifies the nature of the rebellion by underlining the unique social and political realities of this distinctively complex and isolated region.

This section largely relies on Sydney Hook’s theoretical study *The Hero in History: A Study in Limitations Possibility* (1943) as well as notions on leadership, charisma and mass behavior in times of threatening or crisis situations to delineate him from other guerrilla leaders fighting for the same cause. The prime mythmakers are the hero himself and anti-imperialists intellectuals such as Gabriel Mistral, Froylán Turcios and José Vasconcelos. *The New York Times* and *El Repertorio Americano* (Costa Rica), along with the useful compilation of excerpts in *Documentos Básicos*—of articles written in *Ariel* and *Amauta*— and *El Pensamiento Vivo*’s assemblage of Sandino letters, testimonies and manifestos, serve as main sources in the propagation of the myth. Schroeder states that most of the myths were created during the first nine months: “Memories, stories, symbols, songs, legends coalesced around a rapid-fire series of events occurring in

the first nice months of the struggle”, suggesting that much of the myth’s reassessment may be concentrated to this period.⁵²

Chapter Three: “The Hero Myth’s Descent into Somnolence” discusses the muting of the myth triggered by Nicaragua’s entrance into the dark dictatorial period of the Somoza regime. Richard Millet’s judicious study of the Guardia Nacional, Somoza’s private army, explains how military and ideological control of the nation molded Nicaragua into Anastasio’s “personal fiefdom”.⁵³ Somoza’s monograph on the Rebellion, entitled *El Verdadero Sandino o el Calvario de las Segovias* (1936), is the main source analysed in this section.⁵⁴

Chapter Four: “The Recuperation of the Hero Myth in Times of Social Conflict” opens with an analysis of the political conjunctures that favored revolutionary movements worldwide. More specifically, the national liberation movement in Latin America, the success of the Cuban Revolution (1959) and the declining legitimacy of Somoza regime stimulated the Nicaraguan revolution and consequently, the hero myth’s proliferation on a wider scale. Given that numerous studies have aptly discussed the Cuban revolution’s catalytic role in Nicaragua revolutionary developments, as well as the Sandinistas’ appropriation of the hero myth, the aim is to synopsise their major points to grant an unbroken picture of the legend’s historical travels.⁵⁵ Gregorio Selser’s *Sandino: General of the Free* (1959) and some of Carlos Fonseca’s works, namely *Viva Sandino, Hora Cero*

⁵² Micheal J. Schroeder, p. 256.

⁵³ Richard Millet, *Guardians of the Dynasty: A History of the U.S. Created Guardia Nacional de Nicaragua and the Somoza Family*, New York, Maryknoll, 1977, p. 7.

⁵⁴ Schroeder explains that his book was a culmination of the unrest already articulated in all the major newspapers of León, Managua and Granada.

⁵⁵ The major works referred to in this thesis are Mathilde Zimmermann’s *Carlos Fonseca and the Nicaraguan Revolution*, Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2000; Steven Palmer’s “Carlos Fonseca and the Construction of Sandinismo in Nicaragua”, *Latin American Research Review*, 23 (1) (1988) p. 91-109; Donald C. Hodges’ *Intellectual Foundations of the Nicaraguan Revolution*, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1986; and finally, Fred Judson’s “Sandinista Revolutionary Morale”, *Latin American Perspective* 14 (1) (Winter 1987), p. 19-42.

Programa Histórico, are analyzed to reinforce the changing functions and unchanging themes of the hero myth.

Chapter five: “The Fate of the Hero Myth in the Post-Revolutionary Era: Politicization, Rupture, Recovery” discusses the hero myth’s travels throughout the tumultuous eighties up until the loss of the Sandinistas in the 1990 elections. The Sandinista newspaper *La Barricada* (pro-Sandinista) and *La Prensa* (Conservative) serve as prime mediums in the proliferation of the hero myth. Political speeches, iconography and finally, the latest addition of historical paintings of Sandino are discussed to present the latest trend in Sandino’s mythical career.

In conclusion, the first nine months of his career and the post-revolutionary Nicaragua (1979-1990) are analyzed more elaborately since the recuperation of the myth from the sixties onto the seventies has been aptly discussed by contemporaries. In the case of the somnolent period, the hero myth was eclipsed for an anti-heroic one, considerably diminishing the amount of heroic speeches available for analysis.

CHAPTER TWO:

From Hero to Myth: Exploring the Emergence and Diffusion of the Sandino Hero Myth

Sidney Hook's analysis in *the Hero in History* serves as a fruitful starting point for its judicious combination of two major trends in the study of the hero: the hero as a "maker of history" and the hero as a "product of history". The "Great Man" theory established in the 19th century by Thomas Carlyle's *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* (1841) epitomized the popular notion of man as the main architect of historical outcomes— "who sometimes seems to exert an almost superhuman control over the fate of their generation."¹ On the other end of the spectrum is the more current truism of social deterministic propensity; in Herbert Spencer's summary phrase: "Before he [the great man] can re-make his society, his society must make him."² The hero is a product of impersonal forces, his specific blend of humanity, of no significant importance. Hook brings both theories together: "Event-making man finds a fork in the historical road but also, so to speak creates it, whereas eventful man is there at the perfect moment."³ A hero is a product of dual developments, the socio-political conjuncture (forked road) and the leadership genius of a specific type of person (event-making man). In other words, leaders of heroic status must be studied from a structural as well as behavioral standpoint.

Although the aim is not to criticize Hook's work but to justify the use of complementary studies, his own limitations must be brought to fore. The author regretfully stops at mentioning the hero's necessary "extraordinary talents" for "mastering the machine" without delving deeper into the behavioral traits of his

¹ Carl Gustavson, *A Preface to History*, Toronto, McGraw-Hill, 1955, p. 123.

² Herbert Spencer, *The Study of Sociology*, New York, Appleton, 1874, p. 35, cited in *Hero Myths, A Reader*, ed. by Robert A. Segal, Malden, Blackwell Publishers, 2000, p. 3.

selected heroes.⁴ To understand the emergence of Sandino, it is important to specify his significance as a guerrilla leader of charismatic nature.⁵ Ann Ruth Wellner's study on charisma exemplifies this point with the case of late 1920s Germany; after Hitler was prohibited from public speaking, the party fell back on Josef Goebbels and Gregor Strasse to give speeches propagating Nazi doctrines. Although they managed to convert some to their cause, neither generated the same type of fanatical response, as did Hitler's speeches.⁶ Hook further contends that even if it was impossible to prevent World War II, it was not inevitable that Hitler would be successful as Chancellor: "He was victorious not merely because of the widespread economic misery produced by the crisis. His political skill in unifying the right, ranging for Junker to industrialist to the frightening middle class, together with Hindenburg's support, played an important part."⁷ From a behavioral perspective, charisma plays a determining role in the emergence of a heroically perceived revolutionary leader and consequently, in the construction of his/her consequent heroic myth.

Moreover, Hook's study deals with Hitler, Lenin and Napoleon—event-makers who "made" history on a larger scale. In the case of Sandino, an analysis of his most influential propagandists suggests that his heroic image partly emerged from a crafty exploitation of the media by anti-imperialist intellectual writers. In addition to the forked road and the relation forged between leader and supporters through Sandino's charismatic leadership, the printed word played a fundamental

³ Sidney Hook, *The Hero in History, a Study of Limitation and Possibility*, New York, John Day Company, 1943, p. 157.

⁴ Hook does note that the hero must have conviction and an uncanny perception of his/her society.

⁵ Sandino's reputation as a charismatic leader is an established fact. Journalists were astounded by the level of obedience pervading his camp, the saintly qualities projected upon him by his followers, and concurrently, their blind type of faith. See Ramón de Belaustiguitia, *Con Sandino en Nicaragua*, Madrid, Espana-Calpe, 1934; Gustavo Alemán Bolaños, *Sandino, Estudio Completo del Héroe de las Segovias*, Mexico, D.R.: Impresa La República, 1932; Carleton Beals, *Banana Gold*, Philadelphia and London, J.B. Lippincott Company, 1932, and Sofonia Salvatierra, *Sandino o la Tragedia de un Pueblo, Managua*, Talleres Litograficos Maltez, 1934. Neill Macauley, *The Sandino Affair*, Durham, N.C. Duke University Press, 1985, was one of the first historical books to reveal his 'rabble-rousing' talents. See p. 54. These works will be discussed in detail in chapter two.

⁶ Ann Ruth Wellner, *The Spellbinders, Charismatic Political Leadership*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1984, p. 58.

role in the making of the hero's epic image. All three factors will now be analyzed to illuminate the origins of the hero and his myth.

The Socio-Political Context and the Revolutionary Tradition of Nicaragua

The tradition of all dead generations weighs like an incubus upon the brain of the living. (Karl Marx)

La guerra de expulsión del filibustero nos dejó también la herencia de heroísmo y de virtudes cívicas en que florecieron, para arrojar al intruso, los mismos irreconciliables partidos que habían hecho posible su presencia en nuestra tierra.⁸

For a revolutionary hero to emerge there is likely a need for him/her. This need is likely to be preceded by a threatening situation that foments a collective sense of anxiety and deprivation, consequently calling the need for a savior. Eric Hoffer writes:

There has to be an eagerness to follow and obey and an intense dissatisfaction with things as they are before [the mass] movement and leader can make an appearance. When conditions are not ripe, the potential leader, no matter how gifted, and his holy cause, no matter how potent, remain without a following.⁹

Correspondingly, it is highly improbable that a revolutionary leader surfaces in a society where stability and contentment reign. There is usually a conflict over critical issues, one that the leader takes upon himself/herself to rationalize according to a new set of values: "to create a new paradigm, a new social identity expressed in the critical decisions that embrace both traditional elements and modern elements".¹⁰ In countries whose sovereignty is dictated by a stronger power, Hoffer contends, violence may be justified in the name of new paradigms

⁷ Hook, p. 18.

⁸ Sofonias Salvatierra, *Sandino o la Tragedia de un Pueblo*, Managua, Talleres Litograficos Maltez, 1934, p. 10

⁹ Eric Hoffer, *The True Believer, Thought on the Nature of Mass Movements*, New York, Harper, 1951, cited in Andrew S. McFarland's *Power and Leadership in Pluralist Systems*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1969, p. 168.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 169.

embracing marginalized social and/or ethnic groups; these paradigms are often embodied in discourses of nationalism.¹¹

In other words, justification for violence stemming from collective deprivation must be politicized to induce violence: “Discontent arising from the perception of relative deprivation is the basic instigating condition for participants in collective violence.”¹² The leader’s role, as an apt ideologist, provides the group with a better understanding of the causes of their deprivation and/or, identifies utopia objectives to be attained by revolt. It is by instilling political awareness and providing an alternative to the plight of the oppressed that violent measures are likely to be rendered justifiable. David Apter, a leading scholar of ideology in times of distress explains that “ideology helps to make more explicit the moral basis of action.”¹³ The leader as ideologist thus mobilizes the masses (in the Sorelian sense) by imbuing violent actions with moral justifications. Implicitly, he /she uses mythic language to render his/her point more convincing

Though collective deprivation is necessary, it is not sufficient: “Depending on people’s perspectives on violence and politics, relative deprivation induced discontent may be either focused or deflected by the political system.”¹⁴ For example, when a political regime is dictatorial, and the government’s repressive apparatus succeeds in curtailing rebellions, rebellious leaders (and their movements) may be easily repressed.¹⁵ In other words, for the road to be forked,

¹¹ Latin American discourses on nationalism have been noted to function as political strategies serving to divert attention away from unresolved domestic problems and incomplete social integration. See Anthony D. Smith, p.143-150; Peter Alter *Nationalism*, trans. by Stuart McKinnon-Evans, London, New York, E. Arnold, 1989, for a thorough rendition of nationalism’s transformation from a tool of emancipation to one of diversion; Benedict Anderson, chapter 9, “The Angel of History” which emphasizes the importance of leaders in the construction of contemporary national identities: “As we have seen, “official nationalism” was from the start a conscious, self-protective policy, intimately linked to the preservation of imperial-dynastic interests.” (159)

¹² Ted Gurr, *Why Men Rebel*, New Haven, University of Princeton Press, 1970, p. 10.

¹³ Apter, p. 133.

¹⁴ Gurr, p. 159.

¹⁵ Or, in contemporary liberal states such as the United States, the nature of the government gives society the illusion of change through social programs that overall, do not affect the system. See Harold D. Lasswell, *Power and Personality*, New York, W.W. Norton and Company, 1948: “A great many joint activities that are called political and that evoke programs for changing the social system, in fact perform a catharsis function, since little comes of the program save some reduction of tension among the participants.” (129)

successfully politicized deprivation and a political system unable to deflect violent insurgencies are crucial elements for the cultivation of revolutionary leaders and thus, hero-making soil.

From colonial times until the changeover of power into the hands of Anastasio Somoza (1936), this was the case of Nicaragua. Chronic and excessive violence was a prime characteristic of the nation's history: "Even in a region proverbial for internal anarchy and foreign intermissions, Nicaragua stands out as an extreme case."¹⁶ After the wars of independence, full-scale war from 1822 to 1857 continued on whilst sporadic rebellions persisted well into the 20th century. The perennial absence of security caused by the inadequate control of the state over political factionalism generated severe deprivation on a collective scale, serving to ripen the soil for civil war, rebellion and revolution. The consequences, Booth writes, kept "Nicaragua economically stagnant and institutionally weak until the late 19th century".¹⁷

It was only after 1870 that coffee production and liberal development initiatives stimulated growth and modernization, increasing Nicaragua's involvement with the world system. However, this coincided with "dollar diplomacy" era; when Nicaragua (along with other Latin American and Caribbean countries like Puerto Rico, Haiti, Cuba and the Dominican Republic) were perceived by the United States' government "as medleys of compliant financial protectorates beholden to U.S. capital".¹⁸ Moreover, the potential for constructing a waterway, first proposed by the Spanish centuries earlier, became another source of difficulty as Britain and the U.S failed to negotiate a canal treaty.¹⁹ In 1903,

¹⁶ Knut Walter, *The Regime of Anastasio Somoza Garcia and State Formation in Nicaragua, 1936-1956*, unpublished Ph.D dissertation, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 1987, p. 18, cited in Schroeder, p. 40.

¹⁷ John A. Booth, *The End and the Beginning of the Nicaraguan Revolution*, 2nd edition, Boulder Colorado, Westview Press, 1985, p. 25.

¹⁸ Lester D. Langley and Thomas Schoonover, *The Banana Men, American Mercenaries and Entrepreneurs In Central America, 1880-1930*, Lexington, Kentucky University, 1995, p. 43.

¹⁹ Britain's interest in Nicaragua spanned from the early 19th century. Their commercial interests were defended by their steadily growing naval power. For more information on imperialist expansion in Nicaragua,

president Zelaya's refusal to grant the United States canal-building rights, incited the latter to turn to Panama for the orchestration of its "independence" from Columbia (1903) and ultimately, led the signing of a treaty conceding the rights for the building of a canal in Panama.

It is important to relate the above developments to the mountainous frontier zone in which the rebellion exclusively took place, the department of Las Segovias. Here, the indigenous *campesinos* represented eighty to ninety percent of the area's population. The wealthy, one or two percent, owned properties and lived in the city whereas the farming and ranching sector comprised approximately ten percent. Life was precarious and violence endemic due to a blending of factors. Schroeder writes: "Political space was fragmented and fractured; power was exercised from multiple centers; authority and law were endlessly contested by different groups of actors. The state was too weak to effectively survey, regulate, and dominate the populace."²⁰

With the beginning of coffee exportations, indigenous groups were further oppressed to facilitate coffee expansion. From 1877, laws were passed to stimulate coffee production, privatize Indian lands, and exercise greater control over the rural labor force.²¹ Indigenous uprisings transpired as early as 1881. Between one to two thousand Indians were killed while more fled into the mountains; the internal unity of the Matagalpa *comunidad* consequently underwent a rapid process of disintegration bringing with it, the ethnic dissolution of the Indian community.²² In 1895, liberal dictator and staunch nationalist José Santos Zelaya's reforms worked to coerce Indians to labor on plantations by transforming the

see Héctor Pérez Brignoli, *Breve Historia de Centroamérica*, Madrid, Alianza Editorial, 1999; John A. Booth and Thomas Walker, *Understanding Central America*, 3rd edition, Boulder Colorado, Westview Press, 1985.

²⁰ See Schroeder chapter 3: "The Segovias: Historical Geography, Demography, and Political Economy in a Mountainous Frontier Zone" for a more detailed explanation of the Segovias region.

²¹ See Jeffrey L. Gould, *To Die in This Way: Nicaraguan Indians and the Myth of the Mestizaje*, Durham and London, Duke University Press, 1998, for an excellent anthropological approach to the highland indigenous communities and their forced assimilation since the 19th century.

²² Schroeder, p. 101.

capitanes de cañada into agents of the state— further intensifying their economic and political breakdown.²³ This time, a native millenarian revolt erupted but was swiftly crushed by local authorities. By 1906, the Indian communities were abolished, distributing one-half of their land among Indians and ordering the sale of the remainder to Ladinos of European descent. The extreme social, economic, and political upheavals throughout the region, most deeply detrimental to the rural poor, furnished “many reasons for harboring deep felt animus against the state and its local agents, landowners, and the dominant class in general”.²⁴ According to Jeffrey Gould, coffee and the Liberal revolution weakened the Indian communities’ economic base and irreversibly divided them.²⁵

Despite his repressive policies toward the indigenous communities, Zelaya’s defiance toward U.S. imperialism inherited him a place in Nicaragua’s revolutionary tradition.²⁶ After Nicaragua’s loss of the canal project to Panama, the president openly disregarded the U.S. by seeking out foreign funds from Japan and Germany to compete with the U.S. waterway. Two American mercenaries, whose service in foreign wars undermined their rights for protection, were executed under Nicaraguan laws. In return, the U.S.-supported Conservative Party toppled Zelaya’s government and subsequently supervised the collection of Nicaragua’s taxes, controlled the National Railway Company and the National bank. This culminated with the signing of the Chamorro Pact (1914) which ceded all rights to the United States to build or block a canal at the cost of three million dollars—“all of which passed directly to the U.S banks that held Nicaragua’s debts”.²⁷ It is interesting to

²³ Gould notes that a treaty between the Liberal government and the Indians leaders contained a key proviso “that although the *capitanes* would be elected by Indians and would be responsible for defending Indian communities, the state reserved the power to ratify their election and to exert authority over them.” (40)

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

²⁵ Gould, p. 42-43.

²⁶ José Santos Zelaya was president of Nicaragua from 1894 to 1909. He fomented revolutions in neighboring countries and tried to reestablish the Central American Federation with himself as head. This led to his reputation as a disturber of the peace. U.S. cruisers eventually overthrew him. See Thomas W. Walker, Nicaragua, chapter 2, “Early History” in *Nicaragua, Living in the Shadow of the Eagle*, 4th edition, Boulder, Westview Press, 2003, for more details on Zelaya’s dictatorship.

²⁷ See Booth for more information on the principal effects of the Chamorro Pact on Nicaragua, p. 34-41.

note that Sandino's father, a staunch and politically active liberal, was jailed for protesting against the pact, suggesting that Gregorio Sandino's confinement, along with his political propensities may have played a role in his son's future vocation.

According to historians, this period has traditionally been interpreted as one of Nicaragua's most humiliating hours.²⁸ Sergio Ramírez has described it quite vividly as a time when "Government among cousins and relatives who docilely continued turning the nation over to foreign interests, acquiring usurious debts, and giving more goods and resources as collateral".²⁹ It is matched only by the war against filibuster William Walker (1856) who not only plundered Granada, established a puppet Liberal regime, declared himself president and restored slavery, but decreed English be made the official language of Nicaragua.³⁰

When a group of dissenting conservatives along with Liberal insurgents rebelled against the puppet regime of Adolfo Díaz in 1912, a young Zelayista, Benjamín Zeledón took up the anti-imperial torch. Although his efforts succeeded in seizing León and neighboring cities, the U.S Marines ultimately (and easily) crushed the revolt, the protection of American lives as their justification for brute force. Later that year, Zeledón was murdered and dragged through the streets of Sandino's hometown Niquinihomo— where the latter claimed to have watched the sacrilegious parading of his hero. The U.S-backed Conservative government trudged on despotically until, unable to appease liberal opposition, civil war broke out in 1926.

Intensifying opposition toward the Conservative's despotic regime led to the withdrawal of American forces—who felt the party no longer needed their material support—triggered the rise of insurgent liberals months after the first

²⁸Marco Aurelio Navarro, *Augusto "César" Sandino. Messiah of Light and Truth*, New York, Syracuse University Press, 2002, p. XX.

²⁹Sergio Ramírez, *El Pensamiento Vivo de Sandino*, cited in Booth, p. 28.

³⁰ Walker was eventually forced to surrender in 1857; he returned to Central America on another filibuster mission in 1860. He was captured by the British and handed over to the Hondurans, who killed him before a firing squad.

batch of soldiers left for North America.³¹ After Emiliano Chamorro's coup of October 1925 ousted President Solórzano, vice president Sacasa pursued military action in Bluefields from his place of exile in Mexico. By December 1st, Sacasa landed in Puerto Cabeza and proclaimed himself president. Three weeks later, the Marines came along and managed to dissipate the revolt, giving the latter four days to evacuate. It was then, Schroeder explains, that Liberal bands began to spring up across western Nicaragua.³² The Liberal army was highly decentralized, with between thirty and fifty (perhaps even more) generals fighting rather independently for each other: "General, it seems, was a title appropriated by any man who could raise, arm and command an "army" or fifty or more men."³³ Following his return from Mexico, Sandino eventually became one of these generals.

As noted in the brief biography, Sandino first found employment as a clerk in the San Albino mines, located in a northern department of las Segovias. There, he tested his rhetorical abilities and gathered his first cohorts, and ultimately the crux of his guerilla army.

I began to work on the disposition (ánimo) of those workers, explaining to them the system of cooperatives of other countries, and how sadly we were exploited, and that we should find a government that would truly be interested in the people so that they did not get basely exploited by the capitalists and the great foreign companies, for the people of the Nation, and that we should demand, as in all the civilized countries in the world, that all the companies operating in Nicaragua have to provide to their workers medical attention, schools, laws, and organizations such as union of workers, and that we had none of all that. I explained to them that I was not communist, but socialist.³⁴

Isolated in a region dominated by Conservatives, the lowest class of workers suffered widespread injustices at the hands of foreign-owned mining firms. Liberal reforms enabled foreigners to gobble up the land at the expense of mineworkers

³¹ There is no general history on the Constitutionalist War. See Schroeder p. 127-128, for a brief rendition.

³² *Ibid.*, p.129 More specifically, the Liberal groups gained power over the Conservatives in the departments of León, Chinandega, Estelí, and Nueva Segovia. After attacking, these groups would usually return to the populace or flee to Honduras.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 125

³⁴ José Roman, *Maldito País*, Managua, de El Pez y la Serpiente, 1979, p.49, cited in Navarro, p. 22.

and their families, worsening their living conditions evermore. By the time Sandino arrived, many residents had not only lost some or all of their lands in the mining expansion of the previous decades, but were also unemployed or underemployed.³⁵

What is more, Nicaraguans and Americans alike perceived the Segoviano *campesino* as racially inferior: “El indio al que se refiere Sandino es el menos “hispanizado”. El pobre, el que es tratado con desdén por la gente de la ciudad, y visto como una bestia de carga, ignorante y estúpida por los marines.”³⁶ According to theories of revolt and the historical data, it seems that the deep-felt discontent harboured by the labouring poor, combined to a political system unable to deflect violence, made the area ideal for the reception a talented ideologue— seeking to politicize their discontent.

Much contention revolving the true intentions of his return to Nicaragua reflects the tensions between myth and reality. In his own retrospective version, Sandino recounts a summoning to the *patria* resembling the archetypal hero myth sequence of the return to the homeland.³⁷ Sitting with a group of friends in Mexico, faced with Nicaragua’s state of affairs, he decides to return to his country.

In those days, I used to get together with a group of Spiritualist friends, and we commented daily on the submission of our Latin American peoples to the hypocritical or forceful advances of the murderous *yanki* empire. On one occasion I told my friends that if there were in Nicaragua a hundred men who loved their country as much as I, our nation would recover its sovereignty, threatened as it was by that selfsame *yanki* empire.³⁸

His renditions align with Joseph Campbell’s heroic cycles of departure and return; Sandino is dispelled from his homeland and thrust into the unknown to journey the world and suffer trials and tribulations. In a letter written to his father, he tells him of the dangers of debauchery as most workers spend their daily earnings at night,

³⁵ Schroeder, p. 133.

³⁶ Michelle Dospital, *Siempre Más Allá: El Movimiento Sandinista en Nicaragua, 1927-1934*, Managua, Instituto de Historia de Nicaragua, 1996, p. 146.

³⁷ See Joseph Campbell, ‘The Crossing of the Return Threshold’, p. 217.

on women and booze: “Ese vida no es para un hombre que desea distinguirse en algo.”³⁹ Self-controlled and ambitious, Sandino surrounded himself with wise men to acquire spiritual enlightenment until he was reckoned back to his homeland for his ultimate quest, the redemption of his people.

From the perspective of historians Marco Navarro and Pierre Vayssière, Sandino’s homecoming was more likely due to the end of the statute of limitations regarding charges against him for attempted murder.⁴⁰ Conversely, Schroeder contends that Sandino’s choice of employment in the mines of San Albino could not have been better suited for the amassing of soldiers, as it was where deeply felt resentment toward the U.S. was acutely marked, thus rendering his self-alleged calling to the land plausible. Perhaps, a grain of truth may reside in the both hypotheses; the end of the statute of limitations coincided with his desire to fight for his homeland.

Synopsis

This brief overview has brought forth the major converging traits of Nicaraguan political history. Highly decentralized and plagued by factional wars, two levels of powers violently coexisted. At one end (the cities), there was the government and its elite, while on the other (the countryside), powerful families and caudillos. Add to the muddle persistent foreign intervention and a ruggedly dense geographical setting and the outcome is a country whose justification for violence as a means to achieve ends was very likely. Chronic fighting between factions, resistance to foreign intervention and the inability of the government to deflect violence proved conducive to the emergence of revolutionary leaders and with them, a revolutionary tradition replete with heroes (and anti-heroes), namely,

³⁸ Eduardo Crawley, *Dictators Never Die, A Portrait of Nicaragua and the Somoza Dynasty*, New York, St-Martin’s, 1979, p. 47.

³⁹ *Pensamiento Vivo*, p. 73-74.

⁴⁰ In letters from his father, he is urged to return to Nicaragua.

Dirianguen, Zelaya, Zeledón, Sandino, Rigoberto López, Carlos Fonseca and Joaquín Chamorro.⁴¹ As a result, three of these major anti-imperialists leaders entered the genealogical chain of national heroism by the first half of the twentieth century, Sandino crossing the threshold last.

The guerilla chief was not the first Nicaraguan to defy imperial interests and nor would he be the last. Nevertheless, he was the final one to achieve heroic status in the decentralized stage of Nicaragua's political development i.e., the last to reverberate throughout the isthmus for the following four decades and also, the first to lead the most successful anti-imperial revolt in Central America up until that time. The hero myth's potency may partly be allotted to these two congregating positions

Determining Factors in the Creation and Survival of the Hero Myth

Since the justification for violence along with the weakness of the state provided favorable conditions for revolt, how did Sandino emerge as prime leader amongst the swarms of liberal pouches fighting against the same enemy? This section analyses Sandino's historicity to uncover the major factors propelling his surfacing as heroic leader and the consequent diffusion of his heroic myth. By positioning him within the context of the Constitutionalist War (1926), an explanation of his catalytic impact on the political strife at hand shall establish him as event-maker (rather than eventful man) on a national level as well as his heroic aura on a transnational and international level.

In short, the determining factors that paved way to his heroic image are the following: Sandino's primordial act of defiance, the nature of Rebellion, the conjunction between his charismatic personality and the *pequeño ejército loco's*

⁴¹ Dirianguen was a chieftain leader in the 16th century. He decimated the forces of Spanish explorer Gil González De Avila, forcing him to retreat to Panama. Rigoberto López Pérez, a young poet from León, shot Anastasio Somoza in 1956 and was killed in action. Joaquín Chamorro, owner of *La Prensa*, used his newspaper to protest against Somoza; he was shot in the streets of Managua in 1978. According to historians, the impact of his death helped trigger the revolution of the following year.

five and a half years dedication and finally, the proliferation of his heroism in the realm of the media that helped transcend his heroic image beyond the boundaries of the mountains of Las Segovias.

I. The Heroic Act: Manifestation of a Primordial Myth of Defiance at a Forked Road.

Sandino's initial act of defiance served as one of the key factor in the creation of the hero myth by divorcing him from the "common people" and progressively transforming him into a supernatural, heroically perceived being. The momentous act occurred on May 4th 1927, after American representative Stimson and eager to be promoted president of Nicaragua, Liberal general Moncada, put forth the infamous Espino Negro Accords—entailing a North American imposed end to the war. A close analysis of the pact shows that the U.S. carefully crafted an agreement that changed nothing in the political affairs of Nicaragua. Whether the leading party was Conservative or Liberal did not affect their interests for "they controlled his regime from a number of points: the Embassy; the Marines...the Guardia Nacional, with its United States Army Officers; the High Commissioner of Customs; the Director of the Railway; and the national bank".⁴² Contrary to popular support, Conservative leader Díaz was ordered to remain president until the next elections while Liberal insurgents were instructed to exchange their arms for a ten-dollar compensation. Most controversially, it was agreed upon that the Yankees would supervise the elections of the following year. While eleven generals unanimously accepted the accord, the twelfth, Augusto Nicolas (later changed to César), rejected it vehemently. As it has been explained in the introduction, Sandino opted for the mountains with a group

⁴² Ralph Lee Woodward, Jr., *Central America: A Nation Divided*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1976, p. 76.

of twenty-nine followers and consequently led a five and a half year long war in the name of National Liberation.

Like Zelaya and Zeledón, Sandino refused to put up with U.S. politicians and Nicaraguan cronies, and similar to the Bryan-Chamorro, the Espino Negro Accord elicited a wave of dissent throughout Latin America. Schroeder's unearthing of a few articles proves this point:

[The Espino Negro Accords] constitutes an affront to the dignity of our homeland and violates our national sovereignty... We prefer to live in the most extreme poverty, as we have always lived, rather than surrender our national sovereignty.

Today in Nicaragua sounds the voice of protest of Hispano-America... Foreign Intervention deals a mortal wound to National Sovereignty and is destructive of the most beautiful ideals.⁴³

Although neither quote may be accredited to Sandino, both reflect the transnational dissension triggered by the accord as well as the common anti-imperialist language used by the opposition. Where Sandino seems to have differed from his counterparts was in the alignment of his anti-imperialist rhetoric to his actions. The leader's willingness to act against the system, forfeiting self-preservation in the name of national honor— at a forked road in history— granted him the sacred title of impending martyr.⁴⁴

Moreover, Sandino contributed to the development of this image as hero martyr by signing "*Patria or Muerte*" at the end of his letters and Manifestos and enveloping his rhetoric in moral overtones. Unlike Moncada and Díaz, Sandino continuously stated that he did not seek personal advancement and developed a self-sacrificing portrait; as one who demanded nothing less than the complete retreat of American forces life for the good of the people: "No ambiciono nada,

⁴³ The first quote comes from the Comité Ejecutivo de la Federación Obrera Nicaraguense to President Coolidge, 3 June 1927, 817.00/4934; the second quote comes from a motion passed by the Salvadoran National Assembly, 19 May 1927, Caffery to Knox, 23 May 1927, 187.00/4893. Both quotes are cited from Schroeder, p.58.

⁴⁴ Sandino's motto, *Patria or Muerte*, may have been appropriated from Emiliano Zapata's struggle a decade earlier, *Tierra o Muerte*.

sólo la redención de la clase obrera.”⁴⁵ These moral implications distinguished his group from the other factions whose armed violence was associated to the political ambitions of either party.⁴⁶

This delineation became a central theme in the linguistic construction of his mythic symbol as he gradually came to represent Latin America’s aspirations in human shape. On March 4th, 1928, *El Repertorio Americano* wrote: “Pero Sandino era más. Era la consciencia de su pueblo, el emblema de la libertad de América.”⁴⁷ Two months later, it restated: “Augusto Sandino tiene la plena seguridad de que él representa la conciencia de la América española.”⁴⁸ Sandino is constantly referred to as the “only one”, the “exception”, producing a unique individuality loaded with supernatural allusions: “En la hora suprema, vencido los unos por el engaño y seducidos los otros por halagaderas promesas sólo Augusto Sandino no quiso doblegarse y se dispuso a luchar por su patria.”⁴⁹ Or, “En Nicaragua todos se han puesto de acuerdo, excepto el irreconcilable Sandino.”⁵⁰ Sandino was divorced from the common people through the linguistic embellishment of anti-imperialist writers (including himself), establishing his heroic status as event-maker on a transnational level.

Paradoxically, Sandino had to struggle incessantly to maintain his image as the ultimate leader of the Rebellion. Within the boundaries of the Segovian region, the factions’ had difficulties communicating due to the presence of the Marine-Guardia and the mountainous quality of the land. This in turn gave his army a semi-autonomous quality characteristic of guerrilla warfare in general. Schroeder explains that soldiers preferred their designated general-caudillo to the supposed “hero”. Some generals even challenged Sandino’s headship by declaring

⁴⁵ *Pensamiento Vivo*, p. 52.

⁴⁶ See following section of this chapter for an explanation of the basic nature of his tenets.

⁴⁷ *Repertorio Americano*, June 2nd, 1928.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, March 4th, 1928.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, February 18th, 1928.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, January 5th, 1928.

themselves as the prime leaders of the anti-imperialist cause.⁵¹ For example, when Sandino left for Mexico, Miguel Angel Orteiz issued a proclamation on New Year's day alluding to the Defending Army as his own and praised Sandino with "no indication that he considered him subordinate to his chieftain".⁵²

Also, clashes between Sandino and his most popular general Pedrón, further reinforce this point. Ex-Sandinistas Luisa Cano Arauz recounts: "Pedrón was not a very good friend of Sandino, they always walked separately, at a distance... he devised his own official seal bearing the inscription, "Pedro Altamirano, General Libertador de la Patria".⁵³ Conversely, the mythical rendition of Sandino and Pedrón's relationship invokes a sense of unwavering loyalty, omitting any trace of tension between generals whereas historical data shows otherwise. Since many generals of "his" army self-proclaimed exclusive authority, it may be quite plausible that the momentum produced by his initial heroic act helped preserve his status as the leading hero of Nicaragua.

In short, Sandino's politicization of the San Albino miners deprivations, combined to his act of defiance, i.e. its timing and embodiment of Latin America's root paradigm, distinguished his version of the war. These factors delineated him from the rest of the Liberal leaders and elevated him, in the perception of Latin America anti-imperialists, as the personification of Hispanic American's revolutionary aspirations, thus bringing forth the emergence of the Sandino hero myth.

II. The Guerilla Nature of the War

Another fundamental reason why Sandino evolved into a hero myth stems from the duration of the struggle. If his army had been crushed within a week or a

⁵¹ See Schroeder's chapter 8, "Mapping War: An Anatomy of Rebellion, 1927-1934".

⁵² For more instances of Sandino's suppression of other ambitious *caudillos*, see Macauley, p. 161 and Schroeder, p. 368-375

⁵³ Schroeder, p. 368-369, IES 037:3. Pedrón Altamirano had the reputation of being the most ruthless bandit as well as the most dedicated to the cause.

few months, the remembrance of this act may not have been as effective as to take center stage in the national narrative of Nicaragua's history. The army's survival was primarily due to the guerilla nature of the war; it rendered the complete breakdown of either side problematical. In turn, the consequences of guerrilla warfare enabled Sandino's side to endure for nearly six years— even though statistics demonstrate that Sandino's *ejército* won approximately one out of ten battles.⁵⁴

The military superiority of the Marine-Guardia fomented a series of consequences that worked at once for and against their army. The United States' superior technological advances, namely aircraft and machine guns, prevented the spread of the Rebellion by curtailing the formation of large guerrilla groupings. Given its better stocks of material, it also developed a network of allies and spies. The Marine-Guardia's infiltration into the towns and villages of Segovias rendered the moral intentions of Sandino's Rebellion insignificant to the people directly affected by the violence. To fight for or against Sandino meant persecution from the opposite side. Consequently, the guerrilla war gradually weakened in power as well as popularity due to the technological and economical advantages gained by the opposing party. The rebels were often weaponless and starving, barely scrapping enough to survive and consistently lacking in artillery. For these reasons, armed support for Sandino never exceeded the boundaries of the dispossessed and illiterate class of the Segovias.⁵⁵

On the other hand, the presence of American airplanes looming over the land intensified many Nicaraguan's hatred for the foreigners and caused the decentralization of Sandino's army. Rebels dispersed after every ambush, returned to civilian lives or retreating into the mountains. Consequently, Sandino managed

⁵⁴ See Schroeder's compilations of 350 contacts between Sandino and the Marine-Guardia. Statistics show that Sandino won one out of ten battles against the Marine-Guardia, p. 330-335.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 237.

to survive and cause substantial problems to his adversaries, forcing the American government to invest time and money into training the Marine-Guardia for the safeguarding of their economic interests. By 1933, the American government, having created a supposedly non-partisan constabulary, extricated themselves from the Rebellion due to growing criticism over their intervention— their goal of wiping out the guerrilla dissent unaccomplished.

III. Charismatic Leadership and the Following

Along with the consequences of the guerrilla warfare tactics, the conjunction between the charismatic leader and his subsequent followers was another triggering factors leading to the creation of a hero myth. Max Weber defines charisma as:

A certain quality of an individual personality by virtue which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least, specifically exceptional powers and qualities. These are such as not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of them the individual concerned is treated as a leader.⁵⁶

Sandino's charismatic legacy was transmitted through the writings of three journalists that visited his camp. Belaustigogutia wrote:

Naturalmente, no estoy dispuesto a creer nada de esto; pero traigo a colación para dar a entender sencillamente que la reverencia de sus soldados era campo dispuesto para dar un carácter fantástico y sobrenatural a sus general. Es decir, que ha llegado a inspirar una especie de fanatismo ciego a sus soldados.⁵⁷

Carleton Beals, the first and only American journalist, described a “blind loyalty” and “fierce affection” for their leader: “Certainly Sandino's domination over his men did not come through his physical appearance; yet the lift of his finger was law with men knowing only lawlessness.”⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1947, p. 358-359.

⁵⁷ Belaustigogutia, p. 93.

⁵⁸ Carleton Beals, *Banana Gold*, Philadelphia and London, J.B. Lippincott Company, 1932, p.272.

From Beals' interview, it is possible to infer that Sandino's charismatic aura was principally diffused through rumors and then, little by little, through journalistic writings such as in the *Nation*⁵⁹:

The simple folk with whom we talked here were all agoy over Sandino. He had become ubiquitous. He had been seen here; he had been seen there. At night he had gone stalking along a ridge, God of the universe. Later I found the same mythology was believed everywhere I went in Nicaragua.... He had fired the imagination of the humble people of Nicaragua. In every town, Sandino had his Homer. He was of the constellation of Abdel Krim. Robin Hood, Villa, the untamed outlaws who knew only daring and great deeds, imbued ever with the tireless persistence to overcome insurmountable odds and confront successfully overwhelming power. His epos will grow- in Nicaragua, in Latin America, the wide world over. For heroes grow ever more heroic with time.⁶⁰

His charisma worked on two levels. On one, it amassed followers whom without warfare could not have occurred; on the other, the recordings of his charisma, by the mentioned authors, leaked out into the presses, further inspiring a worldwide perception of his heroic aura.

This last quote indicates the principal factors leading to a charismatic perception, mentioned by Wellner, which are 1) the assimilation of a leader to one of more of the dominant myths of his society and culture, 2) The performance of what appears to be an extraordinary feat, 3) The projection of the possession of qualities with an uncanny or powerful aura and finally, 4) an outstanding rhetorical ability, which will now be discussed.

Sandino's Rhetoric

To be perceived as a charismatic leader, a necessary factor, as it has been already noted in the first section of this chapter, is to possess a convincing, almost hypnotic rhetoric. Although it is impossible to detect the exact traits that render one's discourse charismatic, it is nonetheless recognizable by the high amount of attraction it receives. Wellner further explains that this type of discourse originates from the combination of specific personality traits and the content of the message

⁵⁹ Beals wrote four articles for the *Nation* that appeared on weekly basis from February 22nd until March 28th.

⁶⁰ Beals, *Banana Gold*, p. 276-277.

and thus, how the message itself is transmitted through the living medium. In fact, the author explains that the source of charisma stems primarily the individual in question. However, since studies on the physical attributes of charismatic leaders remain debatable, it is necessary to rely on the journalistic writings that have established his charismatic leadership. Beals described: “His utterance is remarkably fluid, precise, evenly modulated; his enunciation is absolutely clear, his voice rarely changes pitch, even when he is visibly intent upon the subject matter.”⁶¹ And as a consequence, concentrate on the message itself, how and why it affected Sandino’s followers.⁶²

It has been well recognized that the leader’s years in exile played a crucial role in the development of his political doctrines.⁶³ “Bendiga la hora que emigré a un país donde apagué mi sed de enseñayos, bebiendo en nuevas ideas, templé mi espíritu acrisolándolo en el sentimiento de amor patriota.”⁶⁴ As a breeding ground for avant-garde ideas, post-revolutionary Mexico endowed Sandino with revolutionary theories and philosophical concepts to spread back to Nicaragua. “Le meneur a d’abord été hypnotisé par l’idée dont il est ensuite devenu l’apôtre.”⁶⁵ From his first stay (1923), he acquired an interest in anarcho-syndicalism- a variant of anarchism based on organized labor and the belief in a general strike that would paralyse the state and replace it with a government of syndicates and trade unions. Hodge states: “Sandino thought the “Constitutionalist Army” were

⁶¹Carleton Beals, *The Nation*, March 28th, 1928.

⁶²This theory stands in opposition to the psychological explanation of charisma. For the latter, the prime precipitant of political charisma is the people who, in severe deprivation, endow the leader with supernatural powers. See Irvine Schiffer, *Charisma: A Psychoanalytic Look at Mass Society*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1973, for more information. Conversely, Wellner defends her point by exposing the absence of severe crisis’ in Cuba and India, where respectively, Castro and Ghandi emerged as charismatic leaders; relative deprivation is conducive but not necessary. Although this paper aligns with Wellner, severe deprivation was in fact rampant in the case of Sandino, thus settling the theoretical dilemma for now.

⁶³ See Donald C. Hodge’s *Intellectual Foundations of the Nicaraguan Revolution*, University of Texas Press, Austin, 1986 for a thorough and judicious explanation of Sandino’s experience in Mexico.

⁶⁴ *Pensamiento Vivo*, p. 20.

⁶⁵ Le Bon, p. 67.

about to make a revolution like the Mexicans that would be anti-oligarchic and anti-imperialist.”⁶⁶

The strong anti-clerical mood of the period also enticed a rejection of faith in a personal God. As a substitute, Sandino believed in a predetermined destiny chosen for each person by a supposedly conscious force behind all natural and human history. Zoroaster’s teachings, Freemasonry and Joaquín Trincado’s Magnetic-Spiritual school greatly influenced his religious and ideological thinking.⁶⁷ Hodge notes that these beliefs, although strange in our times, were aligned with other leaders such as Emiliano Zapata and Pancho Villa: “The absence of historical conditions for developing a theology of liberation within the established church induced a religious substitute side it.”⁶⁸ Jeffrey Klaiber’s study *The Church, Dictatorship’s and Democracy in Latin America* (1998) further explains this led to the rising of *caudillos* as spokespersons for the popular classes. “Zapata, Haya de la Torre and Eva Perrón all used religious symbols to legitimize themselves in the eyes of their followers.”⁶⁹ Likewise, all through the rebellion Sandino’s letters and manifestos were couched in a mystical rhetoric, serving to discredit the prevailing political institution and provide much needed faith in the hearts of the dispossessed: “Tengamos fe, Dios nos protege, porque hasta la fecha, mi Ejército jamás ha sufrido una derrota, así sostengalo Ud. ante el mundo civilizado. Fortalecido por mi creencia en el ser Supremo.”⁷⁰ A multifarious array of belief systems commingled, namely Christianity and Theosophy, to elevate and sanctify his political struggle.

⁶⁶ Hodge, p. 7.

⁶⁷ Trincado’s *Los Cinco Amores* argued that the recent discoveries associated with electricity laid bare all the mysteries of the natural world; his objective was to promote the pursuit of a spiritual life based on the brotherhood of man and a Hispanic world purified of sin. As a member of the Magnetic-Spiritual School of the Universal Commune, the 49th cathedra was established in Nicaragua by Sandino. See Hodge p. 42.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

⁶⁹ Jeffrey Klaiber, *The Church, Dictatorships and Democracy in Latin America*, New York, Orbis Books, 1998, p. 5.

⁷⁰ *Pensamiento Vivo*, p. 66. Religious allusions pervade nearly every page of Sandino’s writings, the themes of redemption and self-sacrifice looming most large. See Navarro’s millenarian work on Sandino for a deeper analysis of religious themes in Sandino’s speeches and manifestos.

Jeffrey Gould notes that Sandino enlaced himself in the prominent rhetoric of *indohispanismo*, a discourse of mestizaje that became widely accepted in Latin American shortly after it had become the official ideology of post-revolutionary Mexico. By September 1928, Sandino fully entrenched himself in his hybrid identity, uniting Nicaragua's ethnic groups against the U.S.: "Soy nicaragüense y me siento orgulloso de que en mis venas circula más que todo, la sangre india que por atavismo encierra el misterio de ser patriota, leal y sincero."⁷¹ This language, Gould contends, was elastic enough to include Spaniards and Indians: "It was so by necessity, and any questioning of the primordial value of *mestizaje* threatened the racial unity in the face of Anglo-Saxon imperialism."⁷² It elevated him from his counterparts, granting him the right to fight against the enemy: "el vínculo de nacionalidad me da el derecho de asumir la responsabilidad de mis actos, sin importarme que los pesimistas y los cobardes me den el título que a sus calidad eunucos más les acomode"⁷³.

It is imperative to note that one of the most useful devices for the construction and legitimization of a heroic perception is the metaphorical usage of past heroes. Sandino writes: "Los hombres dignos de la América Latina... debemos imitar a Bolívar, Hidalgo, San Martín, y a los niños mexicanos que el 13 de septiembre de 1847 cayeron acribillados por las balas."⁷⁴ The leader as ideologist used the past to promote his aims by juxtaposing heroically perceived cultural myths to his image and cause. In *El Plan de Realización del Supremo Sueño de Bolívar* (1929), Sandino carries on the dream of *Hispanoamerica unida* by blatantly aligning himself with the latter as "hijo de Bolívar"⁷⁵. The universality of this device is substantiated by its persistence in regards to Sandino heroic trajectory as well as other hero myths observed throughout this present study.

⁷¹ *El Repertorio Americano*, February 18th, 1928.

⁷² Gould p. 157.

⁷³ *Pensamiento Vivo*, p. 42.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 165.

Another general tactic for the creation of a following is the creation of a viable enemy: "Hatred of a common enemy is the most powerful known agency for producing group unity."⁷⁶ In relevance to Sandino, there is no doubt that a deep felt detestation toward American intervention was well-established before Sandino's involvement. Only, his presence served to accentuate this hatred by agglomerating all of Nicaragua's troubles under one source of evil. From a first reading of *El Pensamiento Vivo*, Sandino's hatred for U.S. imperialism stands out beyond all other matters. "La foule n'étant impressionnée que par des sentiments excessifs, l'orateur qui veut la séduire doit abuser des affirmations violentes. Exagérer, affirmer, répéter, et ne jamais tenter de rien démontrer par un raisonnement."⁷⁷ They are "*parasitos nocivos*", "*coloso bárbaro del norte*", "*piratas*", "*cobardes*", "*gallos*", "*fellones*" and perhaps the most wittily acrimonious "*bestias rubias*". These words permeate every pages of Sergio Ramírez's compilations, rendering the creation of the enemy perhaps the most forceful rhetorical tool as well as the most ubiquitous in Sandino's writings.

This hatred is only equaled by his extreme loathing for the quintessential *vende-patrias* Moncada and Diaz: "Parece que el movimiento constitucionalista, encabezado por Moncada, ha quedado despachado, habiendo quedado el pueblo víctima de la imposición yankee y de la irresolución de sus principales cabezas."⁷⁸ In fact, at the early stage of Sandino's campaign, his desire to defy the Espino Negro Accord stemmed partly from a personal grudge toward Moncada. During the Constitutional War, the latter had noticed that Sandino's men wore "black and red banners with crossed bones and a skull" and ordered him to get rid of them, for fear that Americans would perceive this as a display of Bolshevism. Although Sandino refused Moncada's direct order, he was forced to acquiesce. This

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 157. First published in *El Repertorio Americano* in June, 1928.

⁷⁶ Lyford P. Edward, *The Natural History of Revolution*, Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1927, p. 55, cited in Gurr, p. 206.

⁷⁷ Le Bon, p. 23.

humiliation fueled a passionate rivalry affecting the political course of Nicaragua's history. Somoza notes that Sandino broke down in tears of rage.⁷⁹ In fact, Augusto César's first Manifesto in 1927, read more like a public defiance toward Moncada: "Aparte de esto, desafío al propio Moncada a que concrete otros cargos: no estoy bajo las órdenes de ningún jefe extranjero ni mucho menos militan conmigo personas de extraña nacionalidad. Ud. no puede decir lo mismo".⁸⁰ The latter's name is invoked ten times within the two page-long Manifesto.

Where Sandino distinguished himself from his anti-imperialist counterparts was in his gradual development into a millenarian figure. According to millenarian theory, deflation serves to reinforce the leader's sense of divinity. Navarro traces Sandino's development from guerrilla leader to spiritual redeemer of Nicaragua by focusing on his responses toward defeat, stemming primarily for his first humiliation by Moncada and culminating with his maltreatment during his second visit to Mexico. He traveled there clandestinely in the hopes of receiving funds from the Mexican government to pursue his Rebellion but instead, Sandino was forced into internal exile at Mérida and accused by the Communists of stealing money.⁸¹ During his hapless sojourn, he entrenched himself deeply in theosophy and began to believe that missionary spirits under the leadership of Adam and Eve were directing his army. His struggle for national liberation gradually transformed into a spiritual fight for the redemption of Nicaragua.⁸² The religious appeal of his doctrines represents an important reason enticing soldiers to volunteer in his army.

⁷⁸ *Pensamiento Vivo*, p. 32.

⁷⁹ Anastasio G. Somoza's *El Verdadero Sandino o el Calvario de las Segovias*, Managua, Tipografía Robelo, 1936, cited in Marco Navarro, p. 29.

⁸⁰ *Pensamiento Vivo*, p. 47, Manifesto to Nicaragua Compatriots, circa July 14, 1927.

⁸¹ In millenarian theory, deflation serves to reinforce the leader's divine calling. Moncada's humiliating treatment of Sandino, which cause the latter to fall down and cry in tears of frustrations, represents the first of Sandino's many deflationary experiences that paved way to his development into a full-fledged millenarian. Until 1928, Moncada was consistently denounced in the majority of his writings.

⁸² Wellner, p. 61.

The Following

Schroeder's interviews with ex-Sandinistas of the Rebellion explain that Sandino's followers appropriated their leader's words to mean something relating to their regional conditions rather than his philosophical values:

Exploitation? Oh you mean theft, working so hard and getting paid so little. Homeland? Oh, you mean our land, here, around us. The riches of Nicaragua? Oh, you mean the tons of rock we dig daily out of that hill over there. The nation? Oh, you mean us, here, the people—"the people are the nation", as Sandino recalled himself saying.⁸³

Eudiviges Herrera Siles stated: "No, no, I didn't know what la patria meant at the time", whereas Sabas Rodríguez Cantarero recalled: "I remember many words at that time I barely understood, as I was a young man then, with little culture."⁸⁴

Gurr's research supports Schroeder's discovery by explaining that participants usually do not fully understand their leader's ideological thinking: "Subtleties of justification articulated by revolutionary leaders penetrate to many of their followers in a congeries of phrases, vague ideas, and symbols."⁸⁵ And so, though meagre and mangled, overpowered and constantly overpowered by the marines, the conjunction between the charismatic leader and his consequent following played an important role in the validation and propagation of the hero's cause. What is more, it indirectly assisted in prompting the myth's re-emergence and regeneration for a pressing purpose of similar nature.

IV. Mythmakers: Latin American Anti-imperialist Intellectuals and the Media

It is now necessary to move outside of the realms of Sandino's sphere of followers as well as the rest of the country's weariness toward his cause to delve into an analysis of his supranational aura. As a product of his age, Sandino's political views and philosophical beliefs were clearly inscribed in a wider semantic

⁸³ Schroeder, p. 140.

⁸⁴ Instituto de Estudio del Sandinismo (1986), p. 26, cited in Schroeder, p. 141.

⁸⁵ Gurr, p. 195.

field produced by the social and political events throughout Latin America. The hero myth's proliferation throughout the region confirms Barthes' elucidating point: "A myth ripens because it spreads. It has a history—the lines, which limit the social region where it is spoken."⁸⁶ Language along with geography thus plays a determining role in the spread of heroic memories. Both factors granted Sandino's myth a place in the larger genealogical chain of heroism encompassing Spanish Latin America as a whole—even leading to the positive reception of his heroic endeavors worldwide.⁸⁷

Neill Macaulay explains: "While Chinese communist guerillas were winning their first victories over the troops of Chiang Kai-Shek, Sandino was demonstrating that a "people's army" could successfully resist the military forces of a modern state power."⁸⁸ Macauley further explains that anti-imperialist troops of the Kuoming-tong marched into Peking carrying a huge portrait of Sandino and even named of their units after him. In New York, anti-imperialist rallies collected medical supplies to send to Sandino's army. The 6th World Congress of the Comintern, in Moscow, sent fraternal greetings to the workers and peasants of Nicaragua, and the heroic army of national emancipation of General Sandino.⁸⁹ In other words, his writings and deeds aligned with the anti-imperial intellectuals of the time even more than with his own following—as the latter appropriated his words to mean something else.

Interestingly, historical time and mythical time do not necessarily coincide for Sandino's act did not reverberate throughout the isthmus instantaneously nor did it travel consistently at the same intensity. Although Schroeder notes that most

⁸⁶ Barthes, p. 20. This point is held by numerous social scientists, namely in the works of Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, New York, Verso, 1991; Anthony D. Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1999, and David Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1997.

⁸⁷ This is not to say that the myth solely proliferated within the boundaries of Hispanic America. As we have already seen in chapter one, his hero image prospered in the United States, Europe and Asia as well.

⁸⁸ Macauley p. 267.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 115.

of the myths were created within the first nine months, it is clear from this study's newspaper analysis that the media did not foresee the impact of his nationalistic crusade right away.⁹⁰ Legends and rumors only became known eight months into the Rebellion—almost a year later (1928). In fact, during the year of his heroic act (1927), *El Repertorio Americano* dedicated one article to his cause whereas approximately twelve were devoted to his revolutionary efforts in the following year.⁹¹ By the end of 1928, the United States demanded Central American governments to censor all pro-Sandinista materials from being published.⁹² Also, Sandino's most important propagandist Honduran Froylán Turcios broke with him in early January 1929. This split further impaired the guerilla leader's cause by ending the publication of Turcios' anti-imperial editorial *Ariel*.⁹³ Sandino's popularity only resurged after his assassination in February 1934. In short, the hero myth took popular flight in the early months of 1928, gradually faded out of the media by the end early 1929 and then, shortly resurfaced after his death.

Richard Salisbury explains that Costa Rica's newspaper *El Repertorio Americano* was the only Latin American newspaper unhampered by official censorship, rendering it the prime source for the present analysis along with the *New York Times* and *the Nation*. Regarding *The New York Times*, the progression of terms used to describe Sandino suggested the ever-growing influence of Sandino's leadership on United States's interpretation of the Rebellion. Sandino

⁹⁰ Schroeder, p. 256. The major battles of this period still reside in the popular memory of Nicaragua's collective consciousness: From May 1927 to January 1928, Sandino minted coins, seized control of the worn El Jicaró and renamed it Sandino City. In early July, he attacked the Town of Ocotal and suffered heavy casualties. The imaginary hidden fortress "El Chipote" was consequently created as a protective base. Finally, the most sacred myth stems from Moncada's betrayal at Tipitapa: the signing of the Espino Negro Accord.

⁹¹ After 1928, the number of articles on Sandino in *El Repertorio* gradually diminished to approximately one or two per year from 1930 to 1933.

⁹² See Richard V. Salisbury, *Anti-Imperialism and International Competition in Central America, 1920-1929*, Wilmington Delaware, A Scholarly Resources Imprint, 1989. Anti-imperialist criticism was articulated primarily at the "private and unofficial level" because most Latin American governments refused to go on record against U.S. policies, p. 99.

⁹³ After Moncada was elected president in 1928, Sandino decided to continue his struggle by preparing a new junta strategy to topple the Liberal government. He also proposed that Turcios be the junta's representative. The latter did not agree with Sandino's plans and so, after some attempts to negotiate with the caudillo, Turcios offered his resignation as the chief's representative by the end of December 1928. See Marco Navarro for more details, p. 52-57.

first entered the journalistic scene on May 14th, 1927 under the anonymous title of “chief dissident” in the heading: “Stimson Reports to the State Department that the Liberals Accepted Term. *Only One Chief Dissident*. Dispatch Says Moncada and Eleven Generals Agree to Surrender Arms”.⁹⁴ His defiance was mentioned but disregarded until July of the same year—after Sandino seized and pillaged an American Mine. This time, he was associated with Mexican “bandit” Pancho Villa and perceived as “nothing but a common outlaw”.

Even so, the *New York Times* aptly documented anti-imperial dissent to provide diverse assessments of his struggle and took note of his rising popularity. For example, one article reported the signing of a letter praising Sandino and his followers for their bravery by 500 Guatemalan women: “General Sandino! Victorious or defeated, you are great, you are a hero!... If you die tomorrow you will be the symbol of the honor of Nicaragua, its solemn silence will teach future generations to defend national integrity.”⁹⁵ In 1928, mentions of his abstemious behavior made headway: “Sandino himself did not attend [the celebration] because he does not drink according to the owner of a coffee plantation” and the marines’ failure to capture or defeat him provoked tacit sensationalism.⁹⁶ He was gradually depicted as “ever elusive”, “a maddening problem for the marines”.⁹⁷

The stigma of bandity was gradually shed: “General Augusto César Sandino, the Nicaraguan who is troubling Marines, has been termed rebel, bandit, patriot, but the Marine Corps have officially dubbed him guerilla.”⁹⁸ He was increasingly depicted as an insurgent chief—sometimes winning battles and other times losing them. On the whole, the *New York Times*’ representation offered the most objective rendition of Sandino—one that (like all the other writings about his leadership and cause) set him apart as a challenging problem to be reckoned with.

⁹⁴ *New York Times*, May 14th, 1927.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, February 14th, 1928.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, February 22nd, 1928.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, March 22nd, 1928.

On the other hand, *Repertorio Americano* feigned no allusion to journalistic objectivity for its fundamental aspiration was to promote and diffuse the intellectual tradition of Latin America as well as educate the concepts of prominent philosophers and writers throughout the hemisphere. Maria Salvadora Ortiz writes that the paper offered “especia de encuentro que trasciende las distancias y nos permite reconocer, dentro de cualquier grado de diversidad, los rasgos de un conjunto compartidos de problemas... para construir una conciencia historia latinoamericana”.⁹⁹ Clearly the historical conscience promoted in *El Repertorio* corresponded to the moral and intellectual objectives of its editors. The paper constructed a utopian version of Spanish America’s cultural past by glorifying all its heroes and abnegating its villains.

Froylán Turcios and José Mariátégui editorials, respectively *Ariel* and *Amauta*, essentially performed the same political act of glorification. As Sandino’s first propagandist, Turcios’s ardent distaste of American imperialism led his penmanship to Sandino’s cause. Marco Navarro states: “His propagandizing work was so effective that Sandino became famous around the world and many wished to be associated with his name.”¹⁰⁰ He was named “Sandino’s official representative of Latin America” for the diligent propaganda he propelled throughout Latin America, the United States and Europe through *Ariel* and consistently portrayed the latter as “el héroe de la raza”:

La hazaña de Sandino es básica, substancial y trascendete, de significación generosa, de resultados eficaces y constructivos. Es una formidable pureza de viril perseverancia y de abnegado sacrificio por su patria y por su raza, sin ningún fin de vanidad utilitaria; un estímulo fecundo, un esfuerzo sobrehumano que abrirá nuevas rutas al espíritu en su continua ascensión hacia los ideales eternos.¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, March 3rd, 1928.

⁹⁹ Maria Salvadora Ortiz, *La Utopia en El Repertorio Americano*, San José, C.R., Ediciones Guayacán, 1995, p. 6.

¹⁰⁰ Navarro, p. 53.

¹⁰¹ *Ariel*, May 1928, cited from *El Sandinismo, Documentos Básicos*. Managua, Editorial Nueva Nicaragua, 1984, p. 220.

Again, Sandino is distinguished from the ordinary; he is the ideal man, purged of the any reprehensible traits of vanity and egocentricity.

Consequently, mythmaking propagandists passed on similar messages, namely Haya de la Torre, Gabriela Mistral, José Vasconcelos, Max Grillo and Henri Barbusse. In essence, each of these individuals possessed the same political convictions as Sandino. Like Turcios, their writings incorporated the basic topical elements already established: assimilation to past figures, delineation from rivals through specific wordings, protestation against imperialism and glorification of the indohispanic race.

Sandino! Bolívar! Cuauntemoc
Grita mi grita,
Com mis dos manos infinitas
como un clarín en la garganta de mi vida

Tu vida es la piedra de David, tu honda tiene el calor de veinte patrias,
Pero Goliath es fuerte,
Capitán,
Entretiene dólares, el hombre de la muerte¹⁰²

In the same vein, Gabriela Mistral wrote: “Sin esperanza alguna de que él venza, por un destino de David hondero, que ya no aparece, con la esperanza unicamente de que alargue lo más posible la resistencia y postergue la entrega del territorio rebelde, a fin de que se vea hasta dónde llega la crueldad norteamericana, hija de la lujuria de poseer.”¹⁰³ The Christian myth of David, recurring throughout the decades, envelops forthcoming heroes in similar mythic narration.¹⁰⁴

Sandino’s death by assassination served as one of the most influential factors in the survival and proliferation of the hero myth. *The New York Times* referred to him as “leader of lost causes”. Vasconcelos wrote: “Sin duda el mayor

¹⁰² *El Repertorio Americano*, September 17th, 1929. The poem was written by Alberto Guillén.

¹⁰³ Gabriela Mistral, *Escritos Políticos, Selección, Prólogo y notas de Jaime Quezada, México*, Tierra Firme, 1994, p. 231. This excerpt stems from an article first published in *Ariel*, March, 1928.

¹⁰⁴ Christian symbolism becomes more pronounced with the advent of Christian Liberation movement, see chapter four of this these for a detailed analysis.

héroe de los tiempo que corren!”¹⁰⁵ Farabundo Martí’s last words, before his own assassination, were reprinted to discharge Sandino of false allegations:

Doy testimonio ahora de la entereza moral, de la pureza absoluta del general Sandino. Me consta que en México recibió ofertas repetidas de considerables sumas de dinero, con tal que abandonase la lucha en las Segovias, y que las ofertas fueron rechazadas por el general con la más noble indignación.. Tengo interés en que se aclaren estos puntos para establecer la verdad histórica. Y ya para morir, a dos pasos de la ejecución, declaro solemnemente que el general Sandino es el primer gran patriota del mundo.¹⁰⁶

Death by assassination cleared him of any lingering accusations. This point is further reinforced by the contrast between two articles by Juan del Camino, respectively published in February 1933 and 1934. After Sandino signed the peace treaty, Camino wrote in *El Repertorio*: “Nadie pensó que quien proclamada con tanto varonilidad el amor y libertad tenia muy cercano el término de su capacidad para empresa de tanta magnitud” whereas two years later, he depicted Sandino as “la esencia misma de América Latina”.¹⁰⁷ His death rendered his image as a hero more believable, not to mention less threatening, and provided future generations with the inspiration needed for the continuation of the anti-imperialist struggle.

It is clear that Sandino’s supporters wrote in an anti-imperialist mindset, neglecting the bad at the expense of historical precision for the promotion of author’s political aims and ideals. The veil of objectivity was transparent if not invisible and the portrait of Sandino, unabashedly saintly. Their renditions revolved around the diametrical opposition between Sandino’s righteousness and the American’s downright wickedness; the latter are portrayed as “baby killers” whereas his Sandino’s army is pure and blameless. Belausteguigotia even drew parallels between Nicaragua’s Indians and Spain’s Basques to promote the revolutionary efforts within his own homeland.

¹⁰⁵ *El Repertorio Americano*, February 23rd, 1934.

¹⁰⁶ Sandino and Martí spit during their sojourn in Mexico. Most historians believe the rift stemmed from their differing political views. As a staunch communist, the latter found Sandino’s shifting ideological stances, not to mention his mystical propensities, unacceptable and left the cause in 1929.

¹⁰⁷ See, Juan del Camino’s article in *El Repertorio*, respectively, February 1933 and February 1935. Interestingly, the former was the only found featuring Sandino that year.

What is more, Sandino's faults are touched upon in passing. Salvatierra mentioned his unswayable stubborn nature but quickly defended it with allusions to his supreme wisdom. Journalist Ramôn de Belaustiguita referred to his eclectic blend of spiritualism with a subtle tinge of mockery yet overrode it with endless pages of heroic glorification. Beals admitted to Sandino's tendency to exaggerate his successes but in spite of that, insisted on propagating an impeccable image of the hero: "He is a man utterly without vices, with an unequivocal sense of justice, or keen eye for the welfare of the humblest soldier."¹⁰⁸ These spotless renditions were carried over into the second generation of anti-imperialist writers as anecdotes from the mentioned authors resurfaced throughout the times.¹⁰⁹ They will be examined in the next chapters to reinforce the unchanging nature of the hero myth's essential trait. Also, they will be set beneath the background of the changing socio-political context to better understand the people's changing perception of the myth as well as the myth's shifting functions.

Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to explain the interrelation of the major determining factors that led to the emergence of Sandino as a hero and consequently, the dissemination of the hero myth that ensued. Despite the fact that Sandino had to cling to his title as leader, that his soldiers lost most of their battles, and that deserters were ample due to the human and material losses the war brought about, Sandino's initial deed touched a cord in Latin America's revolutionary and anti-imperialist consciousness. In turn, the historical figure was gradually transformed into a hero myth for indeed having made manifest a heroic

¹⁰⁸ Beals, p. 265. The American journalist was the only American journalist to reach Sandino. *The Nation* sent him; four consecutive articles were published on a weekly basis, each one defending Sandino's cause and condemning U.S. foreign policies.

¹⁰⁹ For instance, his temperance, even noted in *The New York Times* i.e., he does not drink but pray, while the peasants celebrate the latest victory by the guerrilla army, persists throughout following works. Another distinguishable re-occurring rumor repeated throughout Sandino's biographical works is Sandino's unyielding mercilessness for rapists. Any man convicted, despite his revolutionary sacrifices, was sentenced to death

act at a crucial moment in time. An analysis of the mythic data exposes general characteristics and linguistic forms associated with the creation of a hero: the insistence of his uniqueness, his supernatural qualities as well as the metaphoric usage of past heroes helped construct a heroic image. These linguistic devices, like the central themes of the hero myth, reoccur in the succeeding renditions of the hero myth.

CHAPTER 3:

The Hero Myth in Somnolence: Somoza's Institutionalization of the Anti-hero Sandino Myth

If the travels of Sandino's hero myth were studied within the first decade following his assassination, social scientists would have emphasized the contrast between its wide –albeit waning— popularity outside of Nicaragua versus its all but total silencing from within the nation. Changes in the social and political conjuncture, particularly in relation to the United States' shift in foreign policy, considerably affected Nicaragua's political regime. More specifically, the Good Neighbor policy, based on non-intervention and consultation with Latin American countries, paved the way to Anastasio Somoza's 19 year- long dictatorship. This chapter analyses the political conjunctures that made possible Somoza's dictatorial ascent and as a result, his ideological influence on the construction of the nation's popular memory— one that depicted Sandino in diametrical opposition to the hero myth presented in the previous chapter.

Social and Political Context

The Marines' failure to defeat Sandino's forces, beneath the backdrop of the deteriorating world situation and the Great Depression, provoked increasing criticism in the United States, which the State department and the Roosevelt Administration had trouble explaining and justifying. Gordon Connell-Smith affirms that "Nicaragua was, in fact, a turning point in the history of inter-American relations, for it brought the first attempts by the United States to rethink the intervention issue."¹ Millet notes that the Americans' original concept of creating a supposedly non-partisan army that would dissuade political violence and

¹ Gordon Connell-Smith, *The Inter-American System*, London, New York, Oxford University Press, 1966, p. 76.

thus ensure stability within the area failed to take into account Nicaragua's social and political temperament: "Any attempt to create an honest, nonpolitical military force without changing the nation's basic social and economic situation was probably impossible. Nicaragua suffered from economic underdevelopment, concentration of wealth, mass illiteracy, strong regionalism, and weak nationalism."² As the war against Sandino lagged on without avail, the United States attempted to rectify its mistakes by calling for an end to U.S. interference in the internal affairs of nations through a more cooperative approach to the Monroe Doctrine. Consequently, the U.S pulled out their soldiers by January 1933, leaving the government in the hands of Juan Sacasa and the latter, at the mercy of the supposedly non-partisan National Guardia and its ruthless General Anastasio Debayle Somoza.

Although this tactic quenched anti-American sentiment in some Latin American countries, it served to satiate Somoza's desire for power by preventing U.S. involvement at a time when Nicaraguans might well have welcomed it. Once the presence of the Guardia overlapped with the Good Neighbor policy, it functioned to channel already concentrated wealth into the hands of one man's family. As the general of the most powerful and well-equipped army the nation had ever known, Somoza used his authority to transform the supposedly non-partisan armed forces into his personal army, toppling Sacasa's government and remaining in power for 19 years.

Somoza's successful takeover of power stemmed primarily from three main strategies well explained by historian Thomas Walker as "to maintain the support of the Guardia, cultivate the Americans and co-opt important power contenders".³ In relation to his soldiers, Somoza reinforced the army's collaboration by granting them the long hoped for order to kill Sandino. Although

² Millet, p. 183.

he knew this command would tarnish his image in the outside world, it won him the respect of soldiers that harbored intense hatred toward the guerilla leader. This was followed by a mop-up operation that slaughtered over 300 of Sandino's followers—women and children included—at a camp in Wiwili. Furthermore, Somoza transformed the Guardia into his personal army by isolating them from civilian population, encouraging exploitation and corruption and guaranteeing them total immunity. One of his tactics to keep opponents off the street was to stage a riot in a town or city, then move in with the Guardia under the pretext of establishing peace and order, placing the local government under military control.⁴ Walker notes that “citizens soon learned that in order to engage in any of a variety of activities—legal or not— it was necessary to pay bribes or kickbacks to guard offices or soldiers”.⁵ By 1938, Somoza increased their salary from 50% for privates to 30% for higher officers.⁶

To stave off political contenders, the president generally bought off Conservative nominees. When his term came to an end in 1944, he ratified the Constitution to be able to run again. When this second term came to its close, he reluctantly allowed Liberals to nominate his rival, Dr. Leonardo Argüello, only to conduct a coup against him after he was elected president. Eventually, the latter took refuge in Mexico and the puppet Congress accused Argüello of attempting to rule as dictator by endeavoring to dissolve the Guardia. A provisional president took Argüello's place until Somoza replaced him with none other than himself.⁷

In the realms of foreign affairs, the General's rule of thumb was to ingratiate himself to the United States by consistently backing all of its foreign policies, be it toward the Axis powers or communism. In fact, the United States built military

³ Walker, p. 26.

⁴ See Eduardo Crawley, *Dictators Never Die: A Portrait of Nicaragua and the Somoza Dynasty*, New York, St-Martin's Press, 1979, for more details on Somoza's military strategies.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

⁶ Millet, p. 192.

bases in Nicaragua during the Second World War and used the country as a training area for the CIA-organized counterrevolution in Guatemala, against Jacobo Arbenz in 1954. Despite accusations toward consciously permitting the surfacing of oppressive regimes, namely in Nicaragua, Cuba and the Dominican Republic, the Good Neighbor policy benefitted from Somoza's unremitting support of U.S. efforts of building up security in the isthmus. In other words, the political and social changes induced another fork in Nicaragua's road, this time conducive to the successful emergence of a dictator and on a mythical level, the embodiment of the nation's anti-hero.

Somoza's control of the oppressive and ideological apparatus brought forth the centralization of the political regime, deflecting violence and consequently, stomping out the initial attempts of the hero myth's re-emergence as a symbol of dissent. A few cases illustrate this point: In 1937, Pedrón continued his rebellious activities by ransacking a coffee plantation and briefly seizing the small town of Palpunta on the Coco River. The Guardia managed to have him killed by tricking him into spending the night with a prostitute, an informant of the army. Millet explains that the elimination of Pedrón meant that there was virtually no active fighting in the nation.⁸ After the Argüello fiasco, opposition parties refusing to cooperate with Somoza led to a plot by Emiliano Chamorro to overthrow the government. The plans were discovered; Chamorro left for Mexico under the protection of the American Embassy and hundreds of other leaders were arrested "in an impressive show of Somoza's strength".⁹ Another event occurred in the summer of 1944 when, owing to the momentum built up by the fall of the dictatorships in El Salvador and Guatemala, students and opposition groups

⁷ Once in power, the newly elected president tried to curb Somoza's power by trying to force him to resign as General of the Guardia.

⁸ Millet, p. 191.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 211

peacefully demonstrated in the streets of Managua against Somoza's regime.¹⁰ To suppress the movement, the President closed down the National University and tried in vain to enlist American support by announcing a parade in honor the United States to be staged on the 4th of July. A few days later, Somoza's opponents attempted to launch a general strike but were countered by an order "announcing that any establishment that closed its doors would be seized, have its goods sold, and be denied the right again to engage in business".¹¹

Of more direct relevance to the present study, the demonstration coincided with the re-emergence of the myth as a symbol of dissent, or in Sorel's terms, as a forceful activator of beliefs serving to mobilize the masse against the ruling class. Enrique Navarro explains: "A exactos diez años y medio del asesinato del General Sandino, correspondió a esto movimiento estudiantil revindicar la figura del héroe de las Segovias publicando en su órgano de prensa *El Universitario* y por primera vez, sus fotografías hasta entonces."¹² Growing dissent toward the regime triggered the revitalization of the past for ideological (future-oriented) goals. From the forties onward, prominent Nicaraguan figures such as Pedro Joaquín Chamorro and poet Ernesto Cardenal popularized Sandino's history by means of their penmanship, respectively through the newspaper *La Prensa* and a collection of poems entitled *Hora Cero*.¹³ At this stage of the myth's history, its pressing yet feeble resurfacing reflected the impact of the Guardia's ability to crush dissent as well as the persistent quality of the hero myth's nature

Mythmaker and Speech: Anastasio Somoza and the Anti-Hero Myth of Sandino

From 1937 until 1959, the major and almost undisputed ideologue of the nation was none other than Somoza himself. As the one who ordered Sandino's

¹⁰ Also, the *Partido Liberal Independiente* was formed to protest the dictator's imminent re-election

¹¹ Millet, p. 201. Also any foreigner caught striking would be subject to deportation.

¹² Navarro, p. 63

death, it is quite obvious that he had no use of the hero myth. As a matter of fact, he quickly overturned the tale on the year of his coup (1937) by publishing his own rendition of the Rebellion in a 500 page work entitled *El Verdadero Sandino o El Calvario de las Segovias*. Here, the storyline is reversed; Americans and the Guardias are portrayed as righteous defenders of Nicaragua whereas the Sandinistas are depicted as the embodiment of all that is evil. To name just one example, Sandino's well-known proclamation "No ambiciono nada, sólo la redención de la clase obrera" was countered by incorporating a newspaper excerpt from *La Noticia*:

Se está haciendo mucho bombo, interesado o desinteresado al "desinterés" de Augusto Sandino. Se dice y se repite que NO PIDE NADA PARA EL, sino para LA PATRIA. Así debiera ser. Pero no es así. Y la idea falsa, diseminada, coloca al Gobierno en una posición falsa. Si el Gobierno tuviera verdaderos elementos que velasen por él, ya se habrían apresurado a exponer la verdad para que el público no se extraviara. La verdad es que, SI SANDINO NO PIDE NADA PAR EL en concepto de dinero idea rechaza en cambio sí, hay de su parte otras exigencias, por medio de las cuales, el Gobierno de Nicaragua pagará la paz con Sandino, al precio de compromisos, con carácter de imposición.¹⁴

Somoza's book sought to expose Sandino as a ruthless leader, concealing his ambitious motives of becoming president by means of his self-righteous rhetoric.

The monograph conveyed a sense of authenticity through a manipulation of historical data and forcefully repetitive style of writing. Schroeder explains: "The book is essentially a compendium of carefully selected and often deceptively edited captured Sandinista correspondence, interspersed with a text which paints Sandino and his followers unambiguously as crazed killers, rapists, thieves and cutthroats."¹⁵ This fallacious sense of accuracy is communicated through the insertion of countless pictures of Sandino's alleged victims taken during funeral

¹³ See *La Patria de Pedro: El Pensamiento nicaragüense de Pedro Joaquín Chamorro*, 2nd ed.. Managua, 1981 and Ernesto Cardenal, *La Hora 0*, Montevideo, Aquí Poesía, 1966.

¹⁴ Anastasio García Somoza, *El Verdadero Sandino o el Calvario de las Segovias*. Managua, Tipografía Robelo, 1936, p. 435. This excerpt dates from January 27th, 1933, during the peace talks between the Sacasa's government and Sandino.

¹⁵ Schroeder, p. 499.

processions. Every photo is accompanied by a short elegiac biography such as the following:

Presentamos al lector la fotografía del joven Hernán Espinosa, honrado y apreciable ciudadano quien en momentos en que se hablaba de paz era decapitado por un grupo de Sandinistas, en las cercanías del pueblo Esquipulas, Departamento de Matagalpa, terminando con la existencia de un hombre, que apenas contaba con 23 años.¹⁶

Photostats of Sandino's correspondences, most including the signature of the Defending Army's official stamp, i.e. a Sandinista about to slash off the head of his enemy with a machete, are combined with photographs of supposed victims serve to remind the reader of the work's historical authenticity.

Interestingly, Schroeder's research of IES testimonies and records of the Marine-Guardia aptly prove that much of Somoza's anti-heroic myth was indeed based on facts. Since the National liberation rebellion emerged out of regional and national strife, it was also inherently a civil war. Therefore, both groups resorted to tactics of war characteristic of local traditional violence.¹⁷ At one side, the Sandinistas demanded people to contribute to their cause, on the other, the Guardia insisted that no food be provided. Since Sandino's army was weaker in size, it needed the support of the Segovian populace in order to survive and consequently, legitimated its demands under the banner of a "Free Nicaragua". If someone refused to comply with the Sandinista orders, severe punishment incurred, as Pedro Altamirano's standard letter to property owners exemplifies:

If you do not help the cause which we defend, you will be obliged to abandon your property as you will be declared an enemy of the Army, in which case you will lose all guarantees for yourself and your family and will be subjected to whatever punishment from us that you merit as a traitor to your country... All orders which this Headquarters issues which are not complied with obligate me to have them complied with by blood and fire.... Think carefully and well, because if you do not feel inclined to help us, only God will keep you and your family from falling into my hands and your properties from being left in ashes.¹⁸

¹⁶ Somoza, p. 428.

¹⁷ See Schroeder, chapter five "To Induce a Sense of Terror": The language and practice of politics in the Segovias after the Civil War; and, "Horse Thieves to Rebels to Dogs, Political Gang Violence and the State of Western Segovias, Nicaragua in the Time of Sandino, 1926-1934", *Journal of Latin American Studies* 28 (2) p. 383-434.

¹⁸ Reprinted in J.C. Smith, et al., p.250, cited in Schroeder, p. 486.

Punishment usually meant the burning of one's properties and/or death by torture, with ample evidence substantiating this point. Lieutenant W. Davies reported: "On the morning of the 18th, a body of a native was brought in to Jicaro who had been murdered by the bandits... the body had been badly mutilated with machetes and apparently the man had been tortured before his death."¹⁹ Sandino justified his army's violent practices himself, in one of his well-known aphorisms: "Liberty is not won with flowers but with bullets, and for this reason we have been impelled to use the cortes de chaleco, de cumbo y de blumers."²⁰ The "*chaleco*" referred to a cut to the waist from the body, the "*cumbo*" was one on the top of the head exposing the brain and the "*blumers*" referred slashes of both hands and legs, leaving the victim to bleed to death. Both factions blamed each other for having instigated these torture tactics; Somoza wrote:

El fatal "Corte de Chaleco", inventado por Pedrón, y del que muchas veces se hablará en esta obra, había encontrado un hermano espeluznante en "Corte de Cumbo", invención de los Centeno, familia sandinista del Calle de Namanji, de Dpto. De Matagalpa, quienes lo ensayaron en la persona del Sr. Estanislao Altamirano...²¹

Consequently, many *campesinos* joined the Rebellion or the Guardia by necessity, to protect themselves against violent retributions of the opposing side.

Since the war was essentially limited to the region of the Segovias, most newspapers of the major cities portrayed Sandino and his followers as ruthless bandits. One quote suffices to embody the major themes of the anti-heroic version:

Sandino is not a patriot but a bandit... his so-called "Movement for the Defense of the National Sovereignty" is not only dedicated to expelling the Marines, but has attacked, sacked, and burned towns and killed their inhabitants, most of them Nicaraguans.²²

¹⁹ Patrol Report, W. Davies, Jicaro, 23 September 1930, NA127/202/10, cited in Schroeder p. 507.

²⁰ This is summarized in Somoza, p. 279-280. Sometimes, the "traitor's" penis was cut and placed in the mouths of their victims as they bled to death.

²¹ Somoza, p. 153.

²² *El Centroamericano*, June 21st, 1931, cited in Schroeder, p. 486.

Somoza's depiction of Sandino as a bandit resonated harmoniously with the social perception of the majority of Nicaraguans. In the Barthesian sense, the anti-hero myth served to legitimize president's image and regime.

In contrast to the hero myth, which more often than not centered on the hero myth alone, many of the anti-heroic quotes time and again lined Sandino up to his followers. He was not divorced from his band but linguistically placed side by side it: "The days of Sandino and his so-called Rebellion are among the darkest in all of Nicaraguan history."²³ This alignment could be read as a device aimed at diminishing him, rendering the perception of his leadership ordinary rather than supernatural. Another recurring attribute of the anti-heroic myth was the rejection of the *pequeño ejército* as a product of Nicaragua: "The so-called General Sandino is followed by a bunch of bandits, most of them Honduran half-wits whose only real activity has been to protect the profits of their banditry."²⁴ The presentation of Sandino's army as foreign likely served to undermine the noble perception of this cause.

Mythmakers and Speech: The Persistence of the Sandino Hero Myth through Poetry

From 1937 until 1960, poets became the prime carriers of the hero myth, the sporadic appearance of their elegiac poems serving as dirges to Latin American revolutionary heroes rather than a political weapon for social mobilization. Pierre Vayssière explains that national literature began to develop between 1940-1946 with approximately a dozen or so works dedicated to the subject of the Sandino's struggle against U.S. intervention.²⁵ Most notably, Ernesto Cardenal's revived the hero myth through a poetic re-interpretation of the legends surrounding the history of the Rebellion in his collection of poems *Hora Cero*. Key events, namely the Tipitapa Agreement, Sandino's decision to fight against the U.S. and of course,

²³ Interview by Schroeder with Dr. Emilio Gutiérrez, Ocotal, October 1990, p. 486.

²⁴ GN-2 Note No.1 of 5 February 1929, Mjr. Bleasdale GN, NA127/209/1 and 2, cited in Schroeder, p. 498

²⁵ See Paul Vayssière, *Augusto César Sandino: ou l'envers d'un mythe*, Toulouse, Centre National de Recherches Scientifiques, 1985, p. 222-226.

his assassination, are retold in an elegiac and poetic tone. Cardenal depicted Sandino's ejército as a utopic brotherhood of men: "El abrazo es el saludo de todos nosotros/ y nadie ha abrazado como él".²⁶ Also, his followers are glorified for their willingness to sacrifice themselves for the sake of the nation:

Un ejército descalzo o con caites y casi sin armas que no tenía ni disciplina ni desorden y donde ni los jefes ni la tropa ganaban paga pero no se obligaban a pelear a nadie y tenían jerarquía militar pero todos eran iguales.²⁷

Moreover, the poem endows Moncada and Somoza with their own speech; the latter's subservience to the United States is conveyed through his English discourse: "I did it" dijo después Somoza/ I did it, for the good of Nicaragua".²⁸ Although this protest literature did not affect Somoza's regime directly, the retrieval and diffusion of Sandino's historical influence granted future insurgents with an inspirational myth, or in Gurr's terminology "normative justification" for political violence in their upcoming mission.

And so, Cardenal's poem suggests that the hero myth diffused anti-Somoza writers of the forties did not alter much from those that emerged during the years of the rebellion. Historical facts, such as his troops well-known criminality, were impoverished for a mythic version of the past. Since the revolution, "Liberty is not won with flowers but with bullets" has been ingrained in Nicaragua's national memory, while the other half of the clause has fittingly been omitted—exemplifying the selective use of data for the construction of a hero myth. In the Barthesian sense, the historical facts, i.e. literal meaning, were weakened and overshadowed by the purported imminence of the hero and an idealized version of the past.

²⁶ Ernesto Cardenal, *La Hora 0*, Montevideo, Aquí Poesía, 1966, p. 17.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 16-17.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.24.

The Death of Anastasio, the Birth of the Hero

In 1956, the growing illegitimacy of the dictator's image culminated with the assassination of the dictator by a young poet named Rigoberto López. The latter infiltrated a ceremony held in honor of Anastasio Somoza and shot five bullets into his chest. López was then shot and killed instantaneously by the former's bodyguards. In a letter to his mother, he explained: "What I have done is a duty that any Nicaraguan who truly loves his county should have done a long time ago."²⁹ Sixteen years later, Carlos Fonseca hailed him as "the legitimate son of Sandino". Following the revolution, his picture was erected alongside Sandino's and Fonseca's during national celebrations.³⁰ His martyrdom re-sparked the national revolutionary flame, granting him a place next to past heroes in the genealogical tree of anti-imperialist Nicaraguan martyrs.

However, Somoza's passing did not produce the vacuum of power anticipated: "The personalist ruler's removal by death, incapacity or even retirement does not necessarily open the way for a transition to democracy."³¹ He had taken steps to assure the transition of rule to his sons, Anastasio and Luis. The latter was constitutionally made president following his father's assassination whereas Anastasio had been made leader of the National Guard in 1955.³² Furthermore, Luis rounded up hundreds of students suspected of conspiring against the government, notably future Sandinista leader Tomás Borge, and imprisoned some of them for up to several years.

²⁹ Rigoberto López Pérez as quote in Mayo Antonio Sánchez, *Nicaragua Año Cero*, México, Editorial Diana, 1979, p. 96, cited from Walker, p. 28. Somoza was campaigning for election to a fourth term of presidency.

³⁰ 'Notes on the Testimonial Letter of Rigoberto López Pérez', in *Obras*, vol. 1, *Bajo de la bandera del Sandinismo*, Editorial Nueva Nicaragua, 1982, p. 396, cited from Zimmermann, p. 43.

³¹ Paul Brooker, *Non-Democratic Regimes: Theory, Government, and Politics*, New York, St-Martin's Press, 2000, p. 189.

³² Both sons were educated in the United States. Luis was a graduate of Louisiana State University and was President of the Nicaraguan Congress at the time of the assassination. Anastasio Jr. graduated from West Point and was Acting Director of the Guard and the Commander of the Nicaraguan Air Force.

Conclusion

Although Somoza's counter-myth of Sandino significantly stifled the propagation of the hero myth, it never managed to eradicate it entirely. The advent of opposition parties and the dissent of students in the streets of Managua (1944) officially brought forth its resurrection as well as its mobilizing function. The escalating discontent of the middle classes— throughout the post war era— set in motion the formation of crosscutting alliances in the common aim of overthrowing Somoza's dictatorship. Consequently from the late fifties and onward, political education played a crucial function in the mobilization of the masses against the authoritarian regime. A new generation of revolutionaries appropriated the hero myth for a pressing purpose of similar nature— one group in particular named itself the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional. Their recuperation of the myth is discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 4

Recuperation of the Hero Myth in Times of Social Conflict

“The time had come to take up again the rifles of Sandino.”¹

This chapter seeks to relate the major determining causes that brought forth the re-emergence of Sandino’s hero myth and subsequently, comprehend how the social and political moment affected the mythmakers’ use of it. Since it is through Nicaragua’s mass insurrection of 1978-79 that the hero myth eventually attained its highest point of popularity, an amenable starting point for the study of the re-emergence of the myth stems from theories of social revolution. More particularly, Theda Skocpol’s study *State and Social Revolutions, a Comparative Analysis of France, Russia and China* (1979) has put forth three necessary variables from which social revolutions are likely to transpire: 1) international conjuncture, 2) discontented bourgeoisie and 3) leaders proficient in mobilization (and along with them, revolutionary myths).² It is interesting to note that in the case of Sandino’s rebellion, the second variable lacked in the revolutionary equation; the bourgeoisie’s alignment with the regime prompted a social perception of his cause – within Nicaragua— centered on the premise of banditry rather than revolutionary heroism. The interplay of these factors, throughout the sixties onto the late seventies, paved the way to toppling of the Somoza dictatorship and shall now be revised to expose their effects on the hero myth’s travels throughout the post-war era.

¹ Speech by Tomás Borge, “The Second Anniversary of the Sandinista Revolution”, Managua July 19, 1981, from *Sandinistas Speak, Speeches, Writings, and Interviews with Leaders of the Nicaraguan Revolution*, ed. by Bruce Marcus, New York, Pathfinder Press, 1982, p. 128.

² See Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions. A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia and China*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999.

The Socio-Political Context

As the end of the World War II brought forth the weakening of Europe's colonial powers and the emergence of United States and the Soviet Union as the world's superpowers, the bipolar era triggered— broadly speaking— proxy wars and de-colonization movements lasting through the fifties onto the early nineties. From Algeria to China, revolutions of all types swept over the globe. Notably, Nasser seized power in Egypt, Vietnam rose against France and African countries such as Congo, Senegal, Nigeria, Rwanda and Niger became independent.³ In the United States, the civil rights movement brought to the forefront social and political injustices as well as plans to solve them while in Latin America, Castro and Che's guerilla war toppled Batista's regime (1959) and two years later, Dominican Rafael Trujillo was assassinated. Indubitably, the emancipation of dozens of countries throughout Asia and Africa combined to the international anti-imperialist and cultural revolutionary mood must have aroused nationalist sentiment throughout Latin America— especially in those countries suffering from dictatorial regimes allied with U.S. interests. In short, the international political conjuncture fertilized the soil for revolts in Third World countries.

In regards to United States' interests, the threat of international communism triggered the necessity to harmonize regional issues with the world system, producing a significant shift in their foreign policies. Concerning Latin America, the Good Neighbor policy was discarded in favor of communist containment. This was due in great part to the success of the Cuban revolution, which brought about new tactics aimed at assuaging Latin America's dissatisfaction toward the United States' foreign policy.

³ For an exhaustive chronology of events, see G.S.P. Freeman-Greenville, *Chronology of World History. A Calendar of Principal Events from 3000 BC to AD 1973*. London, Rex Collings. 1975, p. 604 to 643.

During the Second World War, Latin America had sold their products to the United States at controlled prices whereas after the war, the free market forced them to use dollars they had received to buy manufactured goods at uncontrolled inflated prices. Once the threat of communism materialized with the success of the Cuban revolution, not to mention overlapping with growing dissatisfaction toward U.S. economic treatment of Latin American countries, Kennedy's administration adopted a project entitled the Alliance for Progress. Its aim was "to transform the 1960's into a historic decade of democratic progress" by combining financial aid to a cooperative approach to social and economic development.⁴ From 1960 until 1970, Robert A. Pastor notes that Nicaragua received "on the average about the same as each of its Central American neighbors: 92.5 million in economic aid (loans, grants, PL 480-II) and 11 million in military aid".⁵

For Nicaragua, the project also called for a more honest approach to the electoral procedure. Luis abided by these new demands by principally amending the constitutional article prohibiting reelection of relatives and loosening the regime's grip on press coverage by allowing the publication of opposition pieces.⁶ Although he was the only Somoza to somewhat slacken the family's control over the nation, 4 out of 5 years of his presidency were conducted under Martial Law. Also, the Constitutional amendment regarding the electoral process did not impinge its fraudulent character; when the conservative nominee Agüerro demanded that the OAS supervise the election, he was dismissed and put under house arrest for attempting to violate national sovereignty. Consequently, a hand picked crony of the Somozas, René Schick, was imposed as liberal president in 1963. His administration enjoyed reasonable peace due its acquiescence to the

⁴Gordon Connell-Smith, p. 175.

⁵ Robert A. Pastor, *The United States and Nicaragua, Not Condemned to Repetition*, second edition, Boulder, Westview Press, 2002, p. 37. These numbers have been cited from the U.S. Agency for International Development, U.S. *Overseas Loans and Grants*, July 1, 1945-September 30, 1978, p. 56.

United States' demands— which in turn, bequeathed the regime with the latter's financial support.

Luis Somoza unequivocally denounced all communist activities in Central America and aided the United States in their attempts to suppress its spread. As it has been noted, Anastasio supported the CIA coup d'état against Arbenz government and as early as 1959, his son Luis charged Cuba for supporting the overthrow of his own regime. In effect, Cuba's revolutionary unraveling prompted an increase in revolts against Somoza, principally in the Matagalpa region. Consequently, Luis backed the Bay of Pigs Invasion by granting U.S. troops armed bases in Nicaragua from which the U.S. could launch their attack. In exchange, Nicaragua received U.S. aid in the form of military equipment; the presence of both American Army and Air Force missions developed Nicaragua's forces and granted its soldiers important training. Millet explains: "The effect of this equipment build-up combined with severe defeat that the Young Frente Sandinista had suffered at the hands of the Guardia in 1963 helped ensure relative tranquility for most of Schick's tenure in office."⁷ Despite growing dissatisfaction toward the Somocista regime, the ongoing relationship between U.S. and Nicaragua's dictatorship deflected all types of political violence geared toward the dictatorship.

All at once, the momentum of the Cuban revolution played a fundamental role in the rethinking of Nicaragua's political philosophy and military tactics, considerably affecting its revolutionary course on multiple levels. The successful materialization of a revolutionary myth, i.e. the triumph of a David versus a Goliath by means of wily guerrilla tactics and in the name of redemption of the poor, touched a cord in Nicaragua's revolutionary consciousness. In fact, Hodge

⁶ Millet notes that freedom of the press enabled the appearance of opposition articles in *The Revista Conservadora* and, even books depicting General Somoza's murderous tactics were permitted, such as Dr. Clemente's Guido's *Noches de Tortura*. See p. 224-225.

notes that although Cuba's brand of Marxist-Leninism found adherents throughout Latin America, "only in Nicaragua did it become rooted in an indigenous movement capable of making a successful revolution".⁸

After Cuba's victory, Fonseca broke with the PSN and adopted this new brand of Marxism. The PSN's non-violent approach to socialist revolution, combined to its subservience to a Russian interpretation of Central America's social and political problems, was replaced for Marxist-Leninist interpretation that put precedence on practice rather than theory. Essentially based on Sorel, Mariátegui and Gramsci's theories of revolution, Castro and Che's New Marxism rejected the positivist and rational approach to political violence and believed instead in the power of human passion in willing to action a revolutionary consciousness. This view was epitomized by Che's *foco* theory, which discounted the importance of a favorable social and political conjuncture for the making of a revolution. As an alternative method, Castro and Che believed that a small guerrilla force might propel the overthrow of the government through the gradual dissemination of its anti-imperial cause and guerilla warfare. In turn, the FLSN implemented this tactic from 1962 to 1967, yet as it only yielded gross defeats due the Guardia's superior military equipment and well-developed information system it was given up by the late sixties.⁹

At the same time, New Marxism ideology overlapped with another major social movement within Latin America that grew out of the church's direct involvement with both the rural and urban poor during the fifties and onto the

⁷ Millet p. 226: 'TV-2 jet trainers were purchased from the U.S., giving Nicaragua the largest force of jet aircraft in Central America'.

⁸ Hodge, p.179.

⁹ See Walker p. 40. The last *foco* confrontation occurred in Pacasán, 1967. The Guardia surrounded the *foco* and killed some of the FSLN's best cadres. As a result, the clandestine group opted for the quiet amassing of forces through political education until their successful hostage holding of prominent politicians in 1974. Interestingly, their last *foco* attempt in Pacasán (1967) was commemorated in September 1979. Tomás Borge, Minister of Interior, elevated the nature of the event as an exemplary moment of Nicaragua's heroic predilection in a speech covered in *La Barricada*.

eighties: Liberation Theology.¹⁰ Growing deprivations spurred by the unjust distribution of wealth spurred a radical rereading of the bible. It accentuated the revolutionary nature of Christ to promote the uprising of the impoverished against the status quo. Priests such as Ernesto Cardenal took on active roles as political teachers for the revolutionary education of the masses.¹¹ In effect, the success of the revolution was owed in great part to the coalition of Christian based groups and Marxist-oriented members of the FLSN. Walker explains: “By 1978, the progressive Catholics and the FSLN were essentially working in tandem “in expanding grassroots organizations and preparing for the final insurrection.”¹²

Sandinista ideology fused Marxist-Leninist thought with Christian Liberation theory, rendering their principles more attractive to a greater number of people. Roger Lancaster’s judicious study of the Sandinista praxis explains:

It is a form of Christian praxis not in the sense of being a subset of theology, but in the sense that it embodies a religious notion of the sacred and the profane, appropriated, perhaps consciously, perhaps unconsciously, from the popular Christian culture.¹³

This rereading of the Bible suggested that the path to salvation be through an imitation of Christ. In more direct relevance to our present study, Sandino was linked to Che Guevara’s notion of the “New Man” who essentially takes the path of Christ by liberating himself from his egotism and sacrificing his life for the salvation of the poor. On the 46th anniversary of Sandino’s death, Tomás Borge declared:

A Sandinista is one who concerns himself more for the people’s well-being than his own, who does everything possible to overcome egoism, the aversion to work

¹⁰ Liberation Theology grew out of the second Latin American Bishops Conference held at Medellín, Columbia in 1968. These bishops produced a document that condemned the social and political structure in Latin America for its mistreatment of the poor classes. Clerics were urged to found Christian Base Communities (CEB’s) to teach a revolutionized version of Christ’s message, one that incited political and social activism. CEB’s played a crucial role in organizing and mobilizing the masses.

¹¹ After Anastasio Somoza conspired to remain president for a second term, the Archbishop issued a statement denying the Church’s sanction. From then on, he played an important role in Nicaragua’s politics.

¹² Walker, p. 79.

¹³ Roger Lancaster, *Thanks to God and the Revolution, Popular Religion and Class Consciousness in the New Nicaragua*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1998, p. 138.

and a domineering attitude...he must be an example in everything: They must have a superior morality to be the sons of Sandino.”¹⁴

In short, Latin America’s anti-imperialist and religious character developed according to the social and political changes. Anarcho-syndicalism and theosophy of the twenties, embodied in Sandino’s thought, developed into Liberation theology whereas the Marxist-Leninist ideology, once associated more closely to the Soviet Union’s strand, cultivated its humanist leanings. The confluence of these movements merged to become integral elements of Sandinismo and in turn, was fused into the hero myth of Sandino; new layers were added and older ones were disregarded.

Mythmakers and Speech: Bayo, López, Castro, Che and Selser

Before revising the influence of Cuba’s revolution on the leadership of Fonseca, more specifically in relation to his ideological appropriation of the past, it is crucial to expose the hero myth’s disseminating quality by looking at its travels in neighboring nations. As we have already seen, Sandino’s hero myth was widely accepted by Latin American anti-imperial intellectuals during his time, enabling it to subsequently enthuse guerrilla leaders of future generations even before it was developed by the Nicaraguan leaders of the Frente Sandinista.

As the principal military advisor to the radical revolutionary groups collectively known as the Caribbean Legion, Colonel Alberto Bayo was the first to make known Sandino’s feats. Hodge explains: “It was Bayo who transmitted the oral traditions of Sandino’s struggle, the stories told by the survivors of his defending army who had escaped to Costa Rica, where the legionnaires were being trained.”¹⁵ This quote exposes the necessity of survivors for the continued existence of Sandino’s mythic legacy, corroborating with Weiner and Weiner’s

¹⁴ Hodge p. 258, cited from *Patria Libre*, March 1980, p. 26-30.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.168.

point: “There must also be a leader left alive after the martyrdom to elicit involvement and engage in the activity of group formation.”¹⁶ As a soldier of the Defending Army, Colonel Santos López’s direct involvement with the Caribbean Legions’ guerrilla teachings reinforces this last point. By the early sixties, he went on to advise leaders of the FLSN and partook in its attacks.¹⁷

To return to Bayo’s significant impact on the Nicaraguan hero myth, his manual *150 Questions for a Guerilla* put Sandino on the forefront by dedicating it to the “glorious guerillas of the immortal school of Sandino, hero of the world”.¹⁸ In turn, his star pupil Che Guevara—highly indebted to his master’s manual—subsequently wrote *La Guerra de Guerillas* (1967), thus becoming another transmitter of Sandino’s legacy. Finally, Hodge notes that Guevara had read Gregorio Selser’s *Sandino: General of the Free* (1959) and more significantly, that it was the first book published in Cuba’s revolutionary press.

Selser’s historical work demonstrates, once again, the persistence of the hero myth’s essential traits or in other words, the recurrent hagiographic overtones in the historymaking of Sandino’s rebellion. Once again, the tone of the book is moralizing and Sandino is portrayed as an immaculate hero whereas Americans are depicted in diametrical opposition to his moral superiority. Mythical anecdotes, namely his compassion for penitent traitors or mercilessness for rapists, are retold: “Maraboto explains that Sandino thought it is useless cruelty to burn the wounded and ordered the fire put out so that they could be picked up, because in spite of it all, they are my brothers.”¹⁹ Analogous to the maxim “In Nicaragua, señores, the mouse catches the cat”, the author entitles chapter six “The Ant Confronts the

¹⁶ Weiner and Weiner, p. 24.

¹⁷ After the revolution, Santos López published *Memorias del Coronel Santos López*, Managua, Secretaria de Propaganda y Educación Política FLSN, 1979 or 1980. Also, another veteran from Sandino’s army was Ramón Raudales. He continued organizing guerrilla campaigns up until his death in combat in 1958.

¹⁸ Hodge, p. 168, cited from Robert K. Brown’s Preface to Alberto Bayo’s *150 Questions for a Guerilla*, Boulder, Colo., Panther Publications, p. ii-xvi.

Elephant” and as in Cardenal’s *Hora Cero*, Selser continuously accents the initial act that elevated Sandino (and his men) from the mass. He writes: “Twenty nine men stepped from the ranks, with himself made thirty. A fine army- writes Belausteguigotia- to take on the Yankees!”²⁰ The physically weaker yet morally stronger fight character of the struggle re-emerges as necessary ingredient for the social perception of the act as heroic.

Also, wily methods of war are repeatedly glorified for their ability to dispirit the enemy: “A slingshot may not kill it but it can take out eye, and a pliant tree branch can take its toll, throwing a column of soldiers into sufficient confusion for hidden sharpsticks to take aim.”²¹ In other words, Selser reloaded the historical rendition of the Rebellion with mythic overtones to imbue the past with the value of heroism characteristic of Latin American tradition. Clearly, this past accorded to authors political convictions of the moment. However, due to Selser’s astute representation of Nicaragua’s diplomatic history—albeit his condemning tone toward U.S. foreign policy—the work renders the differentiation between “history as fact” and “history as memory” evermore elusive.

The hero myth’s supranational dissemination re-affirms that the value at heart of the narration corresponded to Latin America’s value system as a whole. López, Bayo, Che, Castro and Selser found in the history of Sandino a guerrilla war model to recover, follow and perfect. Finally, this spreading of the hero myth reflects the bearing of historical hero myths for revolutionary leaders seeking to

¹⁹ Gregorio Selser, *Sandino: General of the Free*, trans. by Cedric Belfrage, New York, Monthly Review Press, New York, 1981, 105. This story is also found in the works of works of Salvatierra, Bolaños and Belausteguigotia.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 75. Also, the maxim “In Nicaragua, The Mouse Catches the Cat” is the title Selser’s chapter 7.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 75. For instance, he continued to state: “Let us go back for a moment to the time when this legendary David was beginning his battle with Goliath... He teaches them the importance of the angle of the sun, the speed and direction of the winds, the art of camouflaging a position- how to take advantage of every tree, every gully, and every fold of grain for the entrenchment, very swamp for trapping the enemy... No military school had taught Sandino any of this. It comes from his profound knowledge of the land that bore him, from games played as a child, from his acquaintance with the ways of the Niquirano Indians, who had their special methods of communication, perfected over centuries, in mountainous terrain.” (75)

attain (and subsequently legitimize) power and their role in the construction and reconstruction of national ideologies.

Mythmaker and Speech: Carlos Fonseca

In relation to this last point, the author most forceful and committed to the recuperation of the hero myth in Nicaragua was none other than the leader of the FSLN, Carlos Fonseca.²² Fidel Castro's persistent invocation and elevation of José Martí as well as the Cuban revolution's admiration of Sandino incited Fonseca to project upon Nicaraguans a sense of mission based on the unfinished noble endeavors of a cultural hero, one fittingly murdered on Anastasio Somoza Senior's orders.²³ In fact, Fonseca persuaded his fellow rebels to name the organization after Sandino, thus establishing a preliminary mnemonic connection between the clandestine group and the past hero. Up until his death, he steeped himself in the study of the hero, writing five texts on the subject from 1970 to 1975.²⁴

As established in the theoretical framework, the leader concocts or recuperates myths to justify their own superiority and natural fitness to rule. These myths are trimmed and tweaked for a harmonious alignment with a present—in this case, one that was largely affected by two major movements: anti-imperialist guerrilla war and Liberation Theology. In relation to the myth's new Marxist overtones, Zimmerman writes: "There was nothing academic about Fonseca's

²² This fact has been well established by the works of Palmer, Hodge, Zimmerman and Fred Judson's "Sandinista Revolutionary Morale", *Latin American Perspective* 14 (1) (Winter, 1987), p. 19-42.

²³ Ernesto "Che" Guevara, "Apología de Martí", *El Caimán Barbudo*, 2 (12), 1967, p. 127-147, cited in John M. Kirk, "From 'Inadaptado Sublime to Líder Revolucionario': Some Further Thoughts on the Presentation of José Martí", *Latin American Research Review*, 15 (3), 1980, p. 135.

²⁴ The first work was a pamphlet entitled *Sandino: Proletarian Guerrilla* and was first published in the Cuban magazine *Tricontinental* in late 1971, then clandestinely in León, 1972. It was followed by *Political Ideology of General Sandino*, published again in Cuba, 1977. This work consists of a compilation of quotations arranged under themes exploring his major political significance i.e., as a national anti-imperialist symbol, the worker and peasant basis of the movement, the corruption of the bourgeois class etc. The three final works, *Chronology of Sandinista Resistance*, *From the Monroe Doctrine 1823 to anti-imperialist Tricontinental Conference* in 1966, the book length *Secret Chronicle: Augusto César Sandino Confronts his Betrayer* (never published entirely) and *Viva Sandino*, were finished between the end of 1974 and early 1975, yet were only published after the revolution. Zimmermann explains that *Viva Sandino* was published in several editions and represented the culmination of his thought regarding the lessons to be drawn from the Defending Army and its leader. See Zimmermann, chapter 7, "The Sandino Writings", for a detailed rendition of these works.

interest in Sandino. He emphasized the class-oriented and nationalist context of his mentor's writings and ignored the religious mysticism he considered irrelevant to Sandino's political role."²⁵ Fonseca depicted Sandino as a "path to follow" and by doing so, invoked a distinctive revolutionary trajectory characteristic of the Nicaragua people, one that Fonseca tried to imbue with Marxist-Leninist connotations.

Two important works written in the sixties became integral ideological elements in the FLSN's regime: Fonseca's famous essay *Hora Cero* opened and ended with the history of Sandino's war to expand on Nicaragua's tradition of rebellion and in turn justified the recourse to violence for the struggle against Somoza.

Peaceful changes between different factions of the revolutionary classes, which have been rather frequent in other Latin American countries, have not taken place in Nicaragua. This traditional experience predisposed the Nicaraguan people against electoral faces and in favor of armed struggle. There is no doubt, then, that the Nicaraguan people have a rich tradition of rebellion.²⁶

The *Programa Histórico*, a proposal of solutions to the nation's problems, became the program of demands under which the FLSN led their revolution in 1979. Within its introduction, Fonseca inserted "six or seven quotations from his heroes, Augusto César Sandino and Ernesto Che Guevara", exposing once more the importance of heroic memories from the promulgation of a social movement.²⁷

This last quote also reflects the general mythmaking tactic of aligning similar hero myths to the speaker in question. This time around, the cult figure most associated with Sandino was the latest hero-martyr in the genealogical chain of Latin America revolutionaries, Che Guevara. The opening of Fonseca's oath in *Hora Cero* exemplifies this point:

Before the image of Augusto César Sandino and Ernesto Che Guevara, before the memory of the heroes and martyrs of Nicaragua, Latin America, and humanity...

²⁵ Zimmermann, p. 145.

²⁶ *Hora Cero*, cited from *Sandinistas Speak*, p. 29.

²⁷ Zimmermann, p. 119.

I swear to defend the national honor with arms in hand and to fight for the redemption of the oppressed and exploited in Nicaragua and the world.²⁸

In *Sandino Guerrillero Proletario*, Fonseca again promoted Latin America's revolutionary tradition through the invocation of his two favorite heroes: "Che" Guevara ahora, Augusto César Sandino ayer, marcan con heroísmo la indispensable ruta guerrillera que habrá de conducir a los pueblos víctimas del imperialismo a la posición de sus propios destinos."²⁹ Whereas Carleton Beals and other proponents of Sandino's cause invoked the name of past and present heroes, namely Simon Bolívar and Abdel-Krim in the twenties, the Marxist-Leninist movement of the sixties brought forth Sandino's association with Castro, Martí and Lenin. Like Selser and his literati predecessors, Fonseca also made use of the recurring anecdotes surrounding Sandino's moral superiority.³⁰

Fonseca's recuperation of the Sandino demonstrates the revolutionary leader's role as ideologist, juxtaposing the past to present for future-oriented aims: "He (the leader) does not implant new ideas as such as he summarizes them in an especially coherent and appealing way; he simplifies complexity."³¹ The moral statute of the guerrilla general, the bankruptcy of the bourgeois parties, the leader's international appeal and finally, the reasons for the failure of his movement were emphasized whereas Sandino's millenarian propensities—anachronistic in the social and political settings of the sixties and seventies—were purposely disregarded.

Interestingly, Fonseca was not the only one in Nicaragua to seek the past hero for the toppling of the dictatorship, as various anti-Somoza groups within

²⁸ *Hora Cero*, reprinted in *Sandinistas Speak*, p. 41.

²⁹ Carlos Fonseca, introduction to *Sandino Guerrillero Proletario*, 1971, cited from the FLSN's official website, <http://www.fsln-nicaragua.com>. Consulted throughout January 2004.

³⁰ For instance, the *Ideario* contains Sandino's account of his decision not to fire on house in which marines were hiding, because of the pleas of the poor families who owned the houses: "That's why I forfeited a battle and let a whole bunch of those pigs go on living, because I put the interest of my fellow citizens ahead of the glory of my homeland", cited in Zimmermann, p. 153.

³¹ Thomas H. Greene, *Comparative Revolutionary Movements*, Englewood Cliffs N.J., Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1974, p. 28.

Nicaragua sought to legitimize their cause (as well as their group) by invoking Sandino's legacy ever since the forties.³² Nonetheless, it was Fonseca's version that managed to delineate the FLSN as the legitimate heirs of Sandino. The main reason for this, Palmer asserts, is that "neither Cardenal nor Chamorro built up coherent bodies of thought around the figure of Sandino, nor did they engage in prolonged and persistent armed struggle against the dictator on the basis of a structural ideology."³³ From this statement it is possible to infer that one of the fundamental factors determining Fonseca's successful appropriation of Sandino's heroic myth, apart from his vociferous manipulation of the past, partly stemmed from the leader's willingness to sacrifice himself, like his mentor, in the name of a free Nicaragua. The fact that Fonseca was killed in the midst of the struggle by the same adversary and for the same cause further legitimized the Sandinistas' heroic image as well as their revolutionary struggle. In other words, Fonseca seems to have touched the root paradigm more deeply than other leading anti-Somocista figures.

The other reason, his "more coherent body of thought" (again partly due to his prolific writings on the subject) might also have been rendered more appealing to the people due to his growing reputation as a charismatic leader. Like his mentor, Fonseca acquired a supernatural-like aura through his leadership skills and clandestine activities.³⁴ This point reinforces once more the interrelationship between charismatic leaders and their subsequent heroic image during the persistence of a specific cause. Weiner and Weiner explain: "What is interesting is that in many of these situations of cooperation between two leaders is that the martyrdom of the first helps the consolidating follower to achieve integration of

³² See Zimmermann, chapter 3, "The Cuban Revolution".

³³ Palmer, p. 94.

³⁴ Unlike his mentor, the projection of Fonseca's charisma stemmed primarily from rumors alone. He did not inherit Sandino's "rabble-rousing" talents. This substantiates Irvine Schiffer's emphasis on collective projection of charisma in the unfolding of a charismatic personality without contradicting Wellner's position either i.e. that the prime proponent of charisma resides in the character of the individual. A comparison of both cases simply reflects the vast and complex set of factors surrounding the phenomenon. See chapter 2, footnote, for the initial discussion on charisma.

the social movement.”³⁵ The relationship between speaker and speech was symbiotic, promoting at once the heroic image of the past and the present leader through a masterful manipulation of history.

A comparison of Fonseca and Sandino’s hero myths exposes a striking likeness in style, particularly in the usage of metaphor and allusions to former heroes to express a supernatural quality of the hero. For example, member of the FLSN Hugo Torres’ description of his first impression of Fonseca resembles Carleton’s depiction of Sandino. Here are two excerpts in respective order:

There in front of us, with no posturing or pretense, without even introducing himself was Carlos, the legend, Zorro, one of the Three Musketeers, Kadir the Arab, the Invisible Man, the one who escaped under the very nose of Guardia, the one who mocked his jailers with his strength and contempt for death, the one who entered his wife Haydeé’s house in León without ever arousing the suspicions of the enemy standing guard outside, and even left her pregnant escaping again, the one who died and came back to life, the one who just for the fun of it and as an example of popular creativity made Somoza and his cronies look like idiots, showing the superiority of the popular masses, which he personified, over their oppressors.³⁶

The simple folk with whom we talked here were all agoy over Sandino. He had become ubiquitous. He had been seen here; he had been seen there. At night he had gone stalking along a ridge, God of the universe. Later I found the same mythology was believed everywhere I went in Nicaragua... He had fired the imagination of the humble people of Nicaragua. In every town, Sandino had his Homer. He was of the constellation of Abdel Krim, Robin Hood, Villa, the untamed outlaws who knew only daring and great deeds, imbued ever with the tireless persistence to overcome insurmountable odds and confront successfully overwhelming power. His epos will grow- in Nicaragua, in Latin America, the wide world over. For heroes grow ever more heroic with time.³⁷

Amongst the wide array of themes (namely overt machismo, i.e. for impregnating his wife in Fonseca’s case) wily performances, incredible feats and martyrdom (fearlessness of death) intermingle to differentiate Fonseca as well as Sandino from the mass as the redeemers of the poor. Both were compared to popular hero figures crosscutting in cultures and times, reinforcing once more the metaphorical

³⁵ Weiner and Weiner, p. 24.

³⁶ Hugo Torres, “*Semblanza de una Leyenda llamada Carlos Fonseca*”, *La Barricada*, November 8, 1988, cited from Zimmermann, p. 111.

³⁷ Beals, p. 276-277.

usage of past hero myths for the promotion of emerging ones or protection of established ones.

Furthermore, Fonseca and Sandino shared similar upbringings, enticing Salman Rushdie to ask: “So what’s the connection between bastards and revolutions? I asked, but they laughed nervously. It wasn’t done to joke about saints.”³⁸ Both were raised by downtrodden single mothers plagued by poverty and frequent pregnancies, and each one received emotional and financial support (especially after their early adolescence) from their respective wealthy fathers.³⁹ Interestingly, Fonseca redefined the notion of legitimacy by making Rigoberto López the “legitimate son” of Sandino, characterizing the descent of Nicaragua’s ancestry through the persistence of a cultural quality, i.e. anti-imperialist/nationalistic martyrdom rather than marriage. Finally, neither Sandino nor Fonseca drank alcohol nor did they partake in festive celebrations. Zimmermann notes that Fonseca also copied Sandino’s rhetorical approach, using similar uncomplicated words to transmit political awareness to the peasants. In short, Fonseca’s leadership role in the clandestine activities, his superior ability to tap into the collective consciousness and the social perception of his supernatural aura resembling in form that of Sandino’s, served as initial factors in cultivating their association as well as Fonseca’s version of the past. Today their portraits stand alongside each other in commemoration ceremonies, arguably as Nicaragua’s two greatest heroes.

Discontented bourgeoisie

Although collective discontent emerged during from the post-war years, engendering coups, guerrilla attacks and anti-Somoza protests under the banner

³⁸ Salman Rushdie, *The Jaguar Smile, A Nicaragua Journey*, New York, Viking, 1987, p. 80.

³⁹ It is interesting to note that their fathers were political men, Socrates Sandino was a fervent liberal, jailed for protesting the murder of Zeledón whereas Fonseca’s father was a staunch supporter of Somoza.

Sandino, it was only when increasing discontent arose amongst the middle and upper classes that the FLSN gradually gained ground and consequently, the hero myth took flight. This dissatisfaction toward the regime arose from two interrelated factors: the economic growth of the nation and the increasingly disproportionate distribution of the newfound nation's wealth.

From 1960 to 1967, the annual rate of growth of Nicaragua was the highest in Latin America at 7%. This was due to a substantial increase in cattle production followed by, in the next decade, a sharp increase in the export of sugar, seafood, tobacco, and bananas.⁴⁰ Booth explains: "The economic boom had given rise to the expansion of landless agricultural wage laborers, urban sub-proletarians, proletarians, and while-collar sectors such as commercial and public employees."⁴¹ Moreover, it triggered a rise of expectations within the bourgeois class, which was met with an increasingly skewed distribution of the wealth—provoking discontent amongst "would-be competing elites" as well as swelling deprivations amongst poorer classes.

The rise of deprivations and expectations coincided with the reign Anastasio Jr. (1972-1979).⁴² Walker has fittingly described the period as "the Beginning of the End" for the dictator's refusal to respond reasonably to the demands of the people culminated with the revolution of 1979. As general of the Guardia as well, his leadership style resembled that of Anastasio Sr. He used the army to control the nation and increase his wealth, encouraging his soldiers to be corrupt and promising them impunity. Quite quickly, his administration was ill perceived from within the Liberal party as well as from the opposition, especially after Anastasio Jr. began expressing his resolve to stay on as president beyond the expiration of his term.

⁴⁰ Zimmermann, p. 232.

⁴¹ John Booth, "Socioeconomic and Political Roots of Nation Revolts in Central America", *Latin American Research Review*, 26 (1), 1991, p. 33-73, p. 36.

The regime's image as being illegitimate reached its first of a few peaks following the earthquake of 1972, which shook the capital to rubble and took with it 8000 to 10, 000 lives. For Somoza, the natural disaster was transformed into a profitable opportunity for the growth of his personal wealth. Instead of distributing international relief funds to the dispossessed, he channeled it into the hands of his associates and himself while at the same time the Guardia plundered the city with the aid of its army trucks. Walker explains "that much of what they did was technically legal— the self-awarding of government contracts and the purchasing of land, industries, and so on that they knew would figure lucratively in the reconstruction— but little of it was ethically or morally uplifting".⁴³ Consequently, Somoza's actions were greeted with rabid international criticism, inciting him to tighten his hold on the press. The Guardia's image was considerably damaged and many of Nicaragua's elites, infuriated by the new emergency taxes they had to pay whilst Somoza gobbled relief funds, no longer supported the president. As a result, students of elite background joined the FLSN ranks and some sectors of the business community began offering financial support.

The "Wily" Raid of 1974: The Sandinista Re-Awakening of the Hero Myth

After years of withdrawal from guerrilla warfare, for the silent accumulation of power, the FLSN sneaked into a party at a mansion held for the U.S. ambassador and successfully held hostage important government officials until the regime acquiesced to the guerrilla's demands. In exchange for their release, the clandestine group demanded a large ransom, the release and transportation of fourteen prisoners (as well as themselves) to Cuba and the broadcasting of two communiqués over national radio.

⁴² Anastasio imposed himself as president after the unexpected death of Schick.

⁴³ Walker, p. 31.

In relevance to the hero myth, the second communiqué, which was diffused through all the major radio stations, was entitled “*Augusto César Sandino: General de Hombres Libres*”. For one, this communication triggered yet another regeneration of the historical figure, one that captured for the first time in Nicaragua’s history, a wider range of receivers due to its promulgation through the media. Sandino reached viewers through the television and radio, reflecting yet another major medium of diffusion of the myth connected to the technological advances of the time

Secondly, Palmer’s analysis of the communiqué exposes the hero myth’s virtual alignment to the FLSN’s revolutionary ideology. Sandino and López are glorified for their righteous convictions and martyrdom to implicitly inspire Nicaraguans to follow the present path traced by the Sandinistas: “Historically, the emergence of a homogenous force and vanguard that synthesizes the restlessness and desires of the people has been necessary. That force is the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional... [and] is today the only legitimate vanguard.”⁴⁴ From thereon, its revolutionary efforts no longer went unknown. Sandino and López, integrated as members of the FLSN through the interrelationship between the uttering and the uttered, were made allies of the revolutionary group.

After 1974, Somoza imposed Martial Law, ordered the imprisonment of suspected dissenters, summary executions and extensive pillaging of the countryside. The illegitimacy of the regime in the perception of the people mounted evermore when these repressive methods were rampant, thus leading to the increase of discontent and deprivation.⁴⁵ In turn, the appeal to join grassroot movements increased as they provided convincing normative justifications for

⁴⁴ Palmer, p. 103, cited from “Mensaje no. 2, “*Frente Sandinistas: Diciembre Victorioso*”, compiled by Jaime Wheelock Róman, Mexico, Editorial Diógenes, 1976, p. 98-100.

⁴⁵ Booth’s comparative study of the socioeconomic and political roots of national revolts in Central America discovered that regimes which responded with violent tactics of repression were more likely to undergo revolts i.e., El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua as opposed to Costa Rica and Honduras which underwent relatively peaceful socioeconomic developments

mass revolt. That same year, the FLSN split into three factions over a dispute about revolutionary tactics but reunited in 1977 to organize the mass mobilization that was underway.⁴⁶

Major Events leading to the Revolution

As the goal is not to recount the victorious Revolution of '79, it would seem inappropriate to omit the major events that paved way to its victory, especially since it heralded yet another phase in the travels of the hero myth. However, as numerous studies have already analyzed and explained the Nicaraguan revolution, only the major triggering factors shall now be divulged for the sake of coherence. More specifically the impact of the Carter's administration, the assassination of Joaquín Chamorro, the "Group of 12"'s official support of the Sandinistas and at last, the FLSN's takeover of the National Palace.

Although Nicaragua was not initially on the forefront of the United State's foreign affairs in Latin America, Carter's anti-dictatorial approach to Latin America represented a significant shift in the United States foreign policies, one that aided the Nicaraguans' revolutionary by weakening its support of the regime.⁴⁷ The main tactic was to refashion human rights policies by standing behind governments that protected individual freedom and withdrawing economic support to dictatorial ones that engaged in repressive practices. Somoza is observed to have confided to U.S. Congressman John (Jack) Murphy that he "knew that he was in deep trouble five days after the Carter administration took office because it cancelled export licenses for the sale of ammunition for sporting

⁴⁶ For a thorough breakdown of the each tendencies ideological predilection, see David Nolan's *The Ideology of the Sandinistas and the Nicaraguan Revolution*, Miami, Institute of Interamerican Studies, 1984. The consequences of the FLSN's subsequent political reunification on the travels of the hero myth are discussed in the following chapter.

⁴⁷ See Micheal J.Kryzaneck, *U.S. Latin American Relations*, third ed., Westport Conn., Praeger, 1996, for more information on Carter's policies toward Latin America: "Partly because of his own personal convictions and partly as a reaction to past Republican policies, President Carter was conscious of the fact that the United States had to reestablish its credibility in the hemisphere." (82)

arms. That was a message ... [that Somoza] was out of favor with the United States.”⁴⁸ Clearly, the shift in foreign policy weakened the dictatorship’s military support to consequently facilitate the FLSN’s insurrectionary organization and attacks against the Guardia.

Another triggering factor was the death of well-known and beloved journalist Joaquín Chamorro on January 9th 1978 while walking from home from *La Prensa*. His death served as the catalyst that paved the way to the revolution by stimulating Nicaraguans as well as neighboring countries to rally against Somoza.⁴⁹ Thousands marched in the funeral procession and the business sector decided to split with the dictator. Two weeks following his murder, the president of the major business association COSEP (Superior Council of Private Enterprise) organized a general strike lasting until the first week of February that demanded the resignation of Somoza.

In October of that same year, a group of twelve important Nicaraguan businessmen, lawyers, priests and educators were asked by Sergio Ramírez to organize “an alliance with the democratic sector of the national bourgeoisie.”⁵⁰ They issued a statement in San José and Washington D.C. that declared their support to the FLSN and traveled throughout the world to make known their cause and solicit donations.⁵¹ In short, “Las Doces” represented the most radicalized faction from within the bourgeoisie, one that believed that only mass insurrection could bring Somoza’s downfall and solve Nicaragua’s problems. It is important to note that the Sandinistas party alienated members of this group when it became

⁴⁸ Pastor, p. 44. From WGBH interview with John Murphy, May 15, 1984, Danbury, Connecticut. It must be noted that though Carter was reluctant to provide aid to Somoza, the Sandinistas’ inclination toward Marxism posed a problem to his human rights policies. Consequently the administration seemed to back sides at points. Also, to restrain the Sandinistas from taking power, Carter attempted to set up a democratic government and sent a peacekeeping troop to Nicaragua.

⁴⁹ Chamorro’s killer still remains unknown.

⁵⁰ Robert A. Pastor, p. 47.

⁵¹ Sergio Ramírez is one of Nicaragua’s most recognized writers. Pastor explains that it was Umberto and Daniel Ortega that had asked him to organize this alliance.

clear that the bourgeoisie was not going to lead the government. Consequently, they became some of its most vociferous opponents.⁵²

On August 22nd, twenty-five FLSN guerrillas dressed up as Guardia soldiers entered the national palace and took hostage more than fifteen hundred bureaucrats. The stint granted the FLSN radio air time and press coverage, \$500,000 in ransom and the guarantee of the safe passage out of Nicaragua for fifty-nine political prisoners and guerrillas. Walker notes that: “Thousands cheered the new national heroes on the way to the airport as they departed.”⁵³ The operation’s success triggered a wave of attacks throughout the nation as a whole, namely Masaya, Matagalpa, Managua, Chinandega, León, Jinotepe, Diriamba, and Estelí. By March 1979, the three factions of the FLSN reunited to prepare for the final offensive throughout the following months. These events served as determining factors that greatly contributed to the triumph of July 1979, triggering along with it another phase in the travels of the hero myth.

Conclusion

The socio-political conjunctures of the post-war era paved the way to revolutionary openings for underdeveloped countries seeking liberation from imperial involvement. Cuba’s victory clarified and substantiated Nicaragua’s revolutionary aspirations and from 1960 until 1979, the hero myth’s popularity waxed as Somoza’s carefully constructed counter-memory waned. Moreover, concepts of the Christian Liberation movement as well as of Marxist ideology were fused into the hero myth whereas historical facts perceived as anachronistic, such as his eclectic blend of theosophy and anarcho-syndicalism, were deliberately overlooked.

⁵² See John A. Booth, *The End and The Beginning of the Nicaraguan Revolution*, p. 208-215, for a detailed rendition of the external and domestic opposition forces.

⁵³ Walker, p. 37.

As John Gunther has explained: “nation and revolution are indissolubly one.”⁵⁴ The successful alliance of a great number of people crosscutting in classes in violent warfare against a common enemy works to reshape national consciousness. In effect, the recuperation of the hero myth by Carlos Fonseca transcended it from its Segovian boundaries to be converted into a national revolutionary myth, i.e. a collective symbol of heroism shared by Nicaraguans of all creeds and classes. The emerging political party then consolidated revolutionary symbols to gain political legitimacy, thus recreating an a new version of the Nicaraguan nation, as an imagined community, wherein at the heart lied historical heroes—mythified. This political appropriation of the Sandino hero myth by the Sandinistas party is the subject of the final chapter.

⁵⁴ John Gunther, *Inside Latin America*, New York, Harper and Brothers, 1940, p. 55, cited in Thomas Benjamin's *La Revolución, Mexico's Great Revolution as Memory, Myth and History*, p. 22.

Chapter Five

The Fate of the Hero Myth in the Post-Revolutionary Era: Politicization, Rupture, Recovery

*Political domination involves historical definition.*¹

This chapter seeks to understand the hero myth's evolution during Nicaragua's post-revolutionary setting of the eighties, from the revolutionary victory of 1979 to the defeat of the Sandinista party in the February elections of 1990. With Somoza out of the country and the Guardia dismantled, the vacuum of power was filled by a nine-men National Directorate who, in their haste to transform the structure, adopted new policies aimed primarily at redistributing the nation's wealth and bettering the conditions of the poor.²

This rebuilding of the social and economic structure necessarily entailed the ideological redefinition of the past in order to align it with the party's present goals or, for the latest ideologues to forge, in Althusser's words, "a representation of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence".³ In other words, new Nicaragua needed to institutionalize its ideology for three overlapping political purposes: to legitimize the party in the perception of the people, consolidate it through the passage of governmental policies and, once the threat of opposition materialized, re-mobilize the masses against the CIA-sponsored counter-revolutionaries. And so, the guerilla-leaders-turned politicians deployed traditional myths for the creation of a Sandinista version of the past.⁴ In relevance to the present subject, the hero myth of Augusto César Sandino reached

¹ Popular Memory Groups: "Popular Memory, Theory, Politics, Method" in *Popular Memory Group and Making History*, p.213, cited in Thomas Benjamin, p. 68.

² For a concise account of the Sandinistas' goals in government, see Booth's *The End and The Beginning*, p.185-208; and Walker's *Living in the Shadow of the Eagle*, p. 42-58.

³ Althusser, p. 36.

⁴ After their reunification, the Sandinistas' three tendencies were each granted equal representation in government. Tomás Borge, Bayardo Arce and Henry Louis represented the GNP, Jaime Wheelock, Luis Carrión and Carlos Nuñez the Proletarios, and Daniel and Humberto Ortega and Victor Tirado Lopez represented the Terceristas.

the apex of its popularity as one of the nation's chief symbols of anti-imperial heroism, rendering the memory of Sandino ubiquitous in every walk of Nicaraguan life. Since it is impossible to do justice to the multiplicity of mythic themes associated with the hero myth of Sandino in post-revolutionary Nicaragua, a few illuminating premises established by leading scholars on the nature of the Sandinista ideology will offer a useful starting point by enabling an unscrambling of the mythic data.

From Andres Pérez's work on the fundamental problems at the core of the Sandinistas' leadership, the party's inability to translate its pure ideology into a practical one suggests that their ideological stance lacked practicality, if not coherence.⁵ He explains that the "Sandinistas could agree only to an official set of goals expressed as a vague commitment to socialism"... that it "was and still is a vague, contradictory, and confusing set of nationalistic slogans and proverbs".⁶ This point corroborates with Carlos M. Vilas' commentary on the fall of the Sandinistas. His work suggests that the party's extreme hold on the ideological apparatus led to a highly idealized projection of the national patriotism—one that the Directorate felt would keep Nicaraguans from voting against a party conspicuously aligned with the United States.⁷

Finally, in line with Vilas and Pérez's studies, Adam Jones' analysis of the Sandinista newspaper *La Barricada*— from 1979 until 1998— exposes the growing tension between the Sandinista leaders overarching insistence on upholding the paper's "mobilizing imperative" versus the growing articulation for

⁵ Andres Pérez, "The FLSN after the Debacle: The Struggle for Definition of Sandinismo", *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs*, 3 (1), 1992, p. 111-139. He borrows Franz Schurmann's terms of pure and practical ideology to explain that the former ideology relates to "a set of ideas designed to give the individual a unified and conscious world view, whereas practical ideology refers to "a set of ideas designed to give the individual rational instruments for action". See page 113-114 for more details. The repercussions of the FLSN's failure to transcend their pure ideology shall be discussed later in this chapter.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 120.

⁷ See Carlos M. Vilas, "What Went Wrong", *NACLA: Report on the Americas*, 24 (1) (June 1990), p. 10-18.

more professional autonomy voiced by its journalists.⁸ Highly influenced by Lenin's view of the press as a revolutionary apparatus along with the violent presence of opposition forces, the Directorate felt justified in sustaining their mobilizing imperative. Gabriela Selser, a former journalist of the newspaper explains:

I think that one of the greatest mistakes was to try to show the Patriotic Military Service as a great big "fight for love". Without trying to evaluate how it uprooted families, the fear of combatants, the fear of dying, the danger, normal natural things... There were even stories that would say things like: "He's lost an eye, he's lost a leg, he's an orphan, but still he's going to do military work."⁹

For the moment, these observations suggest that the National Directorate's pure ideology was exaggerated, unremitting and, to a reasonable degree, uniformly spread throughout the decade. In turn, they enable a trimming down of the historical data to important periods such as the months following the revolutionary victory, the weeks before elections and specific commemoration anniversaries.¹⁰

Concerning the variety of primary sources of mythical nature, this section remains grounded on Walter Benjamin's theory of the printed word as an influential tool in the conceptualization of national consciousness. As the official instrument of the FLSN, *La Barricada* provides a most condensed channel of ideological communications due to its encapsulation of a wide range of mythic speeches, namely commemoration ceremonies, political discourses, heroic imagery and announcements of newly erected monuments.¹¹ Jones' interviews

⁸ Adams Jones, *Beyond the Barricades. Nicaragua and the Struggle for the Sandinista Press, 1979-1998*, Athens, Ohio University, 2002. The term "mobilizing imperative", dubbed by the author, represents the paper's two basic functions put forth by the editor-in-chief Carlos Fernando Chamorro (son of Joaquín Chamorro). The functions were the following "1) To be a vehicle of mass information of the FLSN for the divulging of its political line, an instrument of support for the mobilization of the masses around the tasks of the revolution, and to convert itself into an effective medium of communication between the masses and the FLSN. 2) To contribute to the formation of bases committees, members, activists of the FLSN to wage the ideological struggle, arming them with arguments and revolutionary conceptions, and to be a vehicle of support for the organization of ideological work at the base." (4)

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

¹⁰ Articles on Sandino, which are most frequent during the days preceding the anniversary of assassination, between February 20th to the 23rd, have been looked at more closely throughout this chapter.

¹¹ In addition, *La Barricada* also played a substantial role as a supplier of educational books for primary and secondary schools. Jones explains: "Some 2,310,000 volumes—between 1980 and 1987—and also produced tens of thousands of copies of higher educational texts. It prepared millions of pamphlets, cards and various educational materials for FLSN activists, mass organizations and armed forces." (26)

with ex-journalists explain that this paper was the only one untrammelled by censorship laws but even so, opposition groups enjoyed a reasonable amount of freedom and were able to voice their dissent through the *La Prensa* and *El Nuevo Diario*.¹² In fact, the former served as a mouthpiece of Conservative dissent and developed an antagonistic relationship to *La Barricada* – one that consequently mirrored the fractious relationship between the two parties. To be sure, the mobilizing imperative of the nation's major papers, in their ideological battle for political legitimacy, makes them useful sources for the analysis of the hero myth.

Major Characteristics of the Sandinistas' Interpretation of the Sandino Hero Myth

Having said all this, it is now necessary to sort out the endless allusions to Sandino by delineating some of the chief characteristics of the Sandinistas pure ideology. Firstly, the juxtaposition of the Sandinistas to Sandino initiated by Carlos Fonseca was institutionalized and so, surreptitiously naturalized, to promote a teleological rendition of the past based on the unfinished heroic deeds of a national hero that, in due course, were fulfilled by his "sons" and "daughters". Just like Sandino referred to himself as a "hijo de Bolívar", Sandinistas referred to themselves (and Nicaraguans in general) as the children and even puppies of "El Padre de la Soberanía Nicaragüense". *La Barricada* affirms: "Como es sabido, el General de Hombres Libres fue particularmente un hombre de acción, pero de su ejemplo surgió la herencia que permitió a sus cachorros rescatar la soberanía y el decoro nacional."¹³ These paternal allusions substantiate Mircea Eliade's definition of myth as a story that retells "how through the deeds of a Supernatural Being, a reality comes into existence—an island, a species of plant, a particular kind of human behavior."¹⁴ In this case, the particular reality relates to post-

¹² It should be noted that *La Prensa* was occasionally banned, with the longest one following occurring in early and lasting until in June 1986.

¹³ *La Barricada*, February 19th, 1985.

¹⁴ Mircea Eliade, p. 7.

revolutionary *Sandinista* Nicaragua. Borge's retelling of Sandino's historical significance exemplifies this point: "His war explains the existence of Sandinismo, which on May 4th, 1927, gave rise to what Sandino called "war of liberators to end the war of the oppressed."¹⁵ Sandino represents the essential founder of sovereign Nicaragua, the supernatural being as originator of a "cosmos" due to the perception of him as the initial (and therefore supreme) maker of heroic deeds.

Another example illustrative of Eliade's point was the reification of Sandino's original act of defiance, i.e. the refusal of the Espino Negro Accord on May 4th, into a day of remembrance called *Día de la Dignidad*. This reification reinforced the significance of the initial act as one of the triggering factors in the transition of the leader to a hero and eventually, from historical hero to national hero myth. Also, it is possible to infer from the preceding data that though Fonseca was the one to doggedly instigate the study of Sandino for his groups' revolutionary purposes, it was the National Directorate that directly affected the hero myth's fate in the post-revolutionary setting. Again, the importance of survivors for the perpetuation of the hero myth reflects the symbiotic relationship between martyr leaders and surviving followers in the propagation of memories that serve the cause in question.

Furthermore, more recent hero myths were added to the genealogy of national heroes for having adopted their mentor's path. Pegged "el Continuador de Sandino", Carlos Fonseca was indubitably one of the party's most employed hero myth. To name only a few examples, his portrait hung along with his mentor's in front of the National Palace days following the revolution, the anniversary of his death was commemorated each year and an eternal flame was kept over his tomb up until the takeover of UNO extinguished it. Moreover, Fonseca was consistently

¹⁵ This quote is from a speech by Daniel Ortega to the plenary session of the 6th summit Conference of Non-Aligned countries on September 3-9, 1979. Cited from *Sandinistas Speak, Speeches, Writings and Interviews with Leaders of the Nicaraguan Revolution*, ed. by Bruce Marcus, New York, Pathfinder Press, 1982, p. 47.

depicted as the essential protagonist of the revolution, “el Jefe de la Revolución”. On the sixth anniversary of the revolution’s victory, Minister of Interior Tomás Borge explained in a long interview printed in *La Barricada*: “Sin aquella base visional y responsable de la estrategia revolucionaria de Carlos, no hubiese sido posible todo lo demás.”¹⁶ What is more, Fonseca’s legacy is connected to his rediscovery of Sandino, i.e. “Carlos aprendió de Sandino, lo que aprendimos de Carlos”, to give credit to the former as the discoverer of the nation’s father figure.¹⁷

Despite the fact that Rigoberto López Pérez acted independently from any political group, he may be perceived as one of the most celebrated heroes after Sandino and Fonseca. Pictures and articles on his martyrdom portray him as the quintessential “New Man” in *La Barricada* as well as during commemoration ceremonies. He is depicted as the one who broke the silence and brought justice to Sandino’s murderer— the link between Sandino’s Rebellion and Fonseca’s revolution. Carlos characterization of him as the “son of Sandino” was passed on in the post-revolutionary rhetoric of the Sandinista leaders.¹⁸ Borge wrote: “He was a man of concrete acts, a rebel whom Prometheus would have admired.”¹⁹ His heroic act reinforced the importance of sacrifice for the liberation of the people and thus, re-enchanted the struggle of the oppressed against the oppressor. In short, Fonseca and López, and other less famous martyrs were depicted as descendants of Sandino as well as heroes in their own rights for embodying the classic attributes of the ideal Latin American revolutionary hero.²⁰

¹⁶ *La Barricada*, June 15th, 1985.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, June 15th, 1985.

¹⁸ See website, “Página Oficial del Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional, www.fsln-nicaragua.com, consulted in March 2004. Under the rubric “Nuestros Héroes and Mártires”, the portrait of six revolutionary heroes along with their biographies represent prime figures of Nicaraguan hagiography. Rigoberto figures amongst them while Sandino, Camilo Ortega Saavedra, Leonel Rugama, Carlos Fonseca and Gasparo García Laviana (all heroes from the sixties onward) are the other five.

¹⁹ Borge, *Patience Impatience*, p. 77.

²⁰ Less known martyrs were assiduously commemorated by the FLSN with monuments erected in their honor, and their biographies appearing in *La Barricada*. For example, the two soldiers who died along with Fonseca, Crecencio Aguilar and Benito Carvajal, were invoked through speeches and articles on the anniversary of their

George Black has aptly summarized another major and overlapping attribute of the FLSN's ideology as an attempt to forge a sense of perpetual revolution.²¹ This ideological tactic reinforced the sense that national membership was acquirable through the manifestation of a persistent cultural value, i.e. anti-imperialist martyrdom for the liberation of the nation. Exemplary of this strategy was the myth-riddled masthead of *La Barricada* where, on the top right corner resided the imprint of Augusto César's portrait while on the left loomed a guerilla soldier in combat. The visual juxtaposition promoted a sense of continuity between the rebellion of 1927-33 and the revolution of 1979; positioned on the first page of the newspaper, the mythic symbols also served as a daily reminder of Nicaragua's revolutionary tradition.

Another method was the endless application of patriotic slogans. Perhaps one of the most common was and remains "*Sandino Vive*" for its continued permeation in everything from the walls of buildings to children's textbooks. It is imperative to note that this slogan surfaced in the forties during the peaceful protest of 1944 and from thereon, consistently re-emerged as a catchphrase of dissent. Clearly, the drastic changes incurred by the post-revolutionary setting of the eighties caused the slogan to take on a new role as a promoter of revolutionary continuity. In the same mood, Minister of Interior Tomás Borge appropriated a biblical text to formulate: "Sandino Yesterday, Sandino Today, Sandino Always".²² This sanctification of the profane reflects once more the manipulation of the nation's religious convictions, i.e. by means of its combination to revered heroes, for the legitimization of the party's image.

deaths. Also Maria Luisa Espinoza, the first female FLSN member to be killed by the Guardia, was commemorated and AMNLAE (Luisa Amanda Espinosa Association of Nicaraguan Women) was named after her.

²¹ George Black, *Triumph of the People*. London, Zed Press, 1981. His precise words are "to make the spirit of the revolutionary war permanent".

²² This quote pervades the pages of *La Barricada* and is a spin off of Sacred Text Hebrews 13:8.

This sense of continuity was also applied to his heroic counterparts. In one instance, *La Barricada*'s published a photo of Rigoberto López's corpse—taken after he was murdered by the Guardias—along with a heartfelt article retelling the marvels of his deed, with a title that read: “Rigoberto López Pérez, Es de los Muertos que Nunca Mueren”.²³ In tandem, the same slogan was employed to describe Fonseca's death, again by Borge: “Carlos is one of the dead who never die.”²⁴ Both quotes aligned with Ernesto Cardenal's memorable and consoling verse concerning Sandino's assassination: “Pero cuando muere un héroe, no se muere sino que un héroe renace en una Nación” or the just as famous: “Te mataron y no nos dijeron dónde enterraron tu cuerpo, pero desde entonces todo el territorio nacional es tu sepulcro.”²⁵

The first page of *La Barricada*, on 17th of July 1980, provides a quintessential example of the major of the multifarious ideological strategies deployed by the paper. It stated “En Nicaragua *Siempre* Será 19 de Julio” to announce the upcoming commemoration ceremony celebrating the first anniversary of the revolution. On the same page, there are pictures of Sandino and Fonseca, the slogan “Sandino Ayer, Sandino Hoy and Sandino Siempre” and an article featuring progress made in education and agrarian reform since the victory. In relation to the actual event, 600,000 persons attended the celebration (one-quarter of the population). Black reports: “They lined up behind the portrait of Sandino and Fonseca, the red and black flags of the FLSN and the banners of their mass organizations, which by now had grown to represent more than half a million members.”²⁶

²³ *La Barricada*, September 15th, 1979.

²⁴ Tomás Borge, *The Patient Impatience. From Boyhood to Guerilla: a Personal Narrative of Nicaragua's Struggle for Liberation*, trans. by Russell Bartley, Connecticut, 1991, p. 450.

²⁵ The first quote by Cardenal can be found *Hora Cero*, p. 27; the second can be found in the work of Pierre Vayssière *Auguste César Sandino: ou l'Envers d'un Mythe*, p. 223. Both recur in *La Barricada*, for instance, see cover page on February 20th, 1994.

²⁶ Black, p. 190.

The invocation of hero figures to promote a sense of revolutionary perpetuity and for the legitimization and consolidation of the party also worked simultaneously to mobilize the people against opposition groups, namely the Catholic Church hierarchy, COSEP, *La Prensa* and the United States' forces. As early as September 1979, the front-page cover of *La Barricada* read: "En la Tierra de Sandino, no Queremos Asesinos" and was accompanied by a picture of peasants holding up banners of Sandino to denounce the presence of Somocista forces in the Western Nicaraguan area. Moreover, by 1985, the growing deterioration of social and economic conditions along with the capsizing of programs aimed at helping the poor, induced a substantial increase in the mobilizing function of the hero. The sense of revolutionary continuity did not abate as Daniel Ortega announced after winning the 1984 elections to *La Barricada* and the people of Nicaragua: "El nuevo gabinete revolucionario es una continuación del triunfo de 19 de Julio de 1979."²⁷ Nonetheless, the threat of the Contras reloaded the meaning of his words with mobilizing insinuations.

In fact, Jones' periodization of *La Barricada*'s three main phases shows that an "overlapping and eventually overriding emphasis on national defence" marked the years 1984 to 1988.²⁸ This was due in part to the announcement of Reagan's embargo on Nicaragua and the Sandinistas' passing of a law that made conscription obligatory. An article in *La Barricada* entitled "A los yanques les Damos la Misma Respuesta de Sandino" exemplified the need to legitimize the continuance of the anti-imperialist struggle by means of the heroic past. It wrote: "Cardenal llamó a los participantes a no dejar que el imperialismo yanque siga tratando de destruir al pueblo nicaragüense, y les recordó que "en estas trincheras

²⁷ *La Barricada*, January 8th, 1985.

²⁸ Jones, p. 10. The first phase focused more on reconstruction and state building whereas the third phase shifted toward economic damage and political conciliation. These phases do not contradict the fact that *La Barricada*'s ideological propensity was inflationary and unremitting but suggests the fluctuation of the hero myth's functions according to the socio-political realities at hand.

ni nos vendemos ni nos rendimos.”²⁹ Here, Cardenal defended the war by invoking Sandino’s mantra “Patria Libre o Morir” as the necessary response to give the United States, using Sandino’s precise phrasing to reinforce once more the usefulness of the heroic symbols for the propagation of the prime ideologists’ political purposes.

Interestingly, Joaquín Chamorro, the perpetual anti-Somocista who struggled to bring down the dictatorship through arms in the forties and fifties and with his pen up until his death, the one whose assassination triggered mass mobilization, was deliberately excluded from the genealogical chain of national heroes constructed by the party. *La Barricada* made no mention of him, nor was he remembered, like other heroes, on the anniversary of his death. From this omission, it is possible to infer that had the victory of ’79 paved way to the taking over of power by the Social Democrats, the official history would have been written quite differently. Zimmermann noted that “Fonseca had a particular dislike for Pedro Joaquín Chamorro. Ernesto Cardenal, a friend of both men, has said that Fonseca made much harsher public and private statement about Chamorro than the newspaper editor ever made about the younger rebel.”³⁰ In other words, Fonseca’s determination to delineate the FLSN as the natural descendants of Sandino, along with the subsequent takeover of power by the 9-men directorate induced a rewriting of history that ignored recognized heroes perceived as political opponents. And so, a fundamental reason that helped delineate the FLSN as the legitimate heirs of Sandino, more than Fonseca’s charismatic leadership and prolific body of work (as seen in the previous chapter), was quite likely the fact that the insurgent leaders of the FLSN took over the regime in July 1979.

²⁹ *La Barricada*, February 19th, 1985.

³⁰ Zimmermann, p.156. This animosity partly stemmed from Fonseca’s belief in violent insurrection. For him, Chamorro’s bourgeois rhetoric would only pass on the power into the hands of the Conservatives rather than into a Marxist-oriented revolution.

Nonetheless, the Conservative newspaper *La Prensa* instilled Chamorro's hero myth by consistently glorifying him as a central hero of the revolution. Essays were devoted to his feats and excerpts of his political writings were published to reinforce his revolutionary fervor. *La Prensa* venerated him on the day of his assassination and challenged the FLSN's ownership of the hero myth by making known Chamorro's longtime interest and admiration of the historical figure.

Y dicen sus detractores que Sandino mató y quemó casas y fincas. Pero bien, decimos nosotros, y el que asesino a Sandino, consumando la más negra de las traiciones, podrá acaso arrojar la primera piedra, ya no digamos contra el General de Hombres Libres, pero ni siquiera contra cualquiera de sus subalternos.³¹

In an ideological vein resembling Fonseca's, Chamorro's writings vindicated the counter-myth of Sandino's as a bandit. Instead, his works emphasized the moral aim of his struggle rather than the means he was required to use. Finally, drawings incorporating Chamorro and Sandino, as early as 1978, provided another strategy for the integration of Chamorro in the national heritage. In one particular illustration, Sandino, Chamorro and Fonseca are arranged under the banner "Unidad!" to promote the celebration day of national unity, suggesting that though the Conservatives accepted Fonseca as a national hero, the Sandinistas completely disregarded Chamorro.³²

From *La Prensa's* (as well as *El Diario's*) appropriation of these hero myths, it is possible to infer that Sandino's anti-hero myth was further pushed into the realms of "un-useful" history. The fall of Somoza regime along with the takeover of power of the Sandinistas enabled the hero myth to transcend its clandestine sphere of influence and subsequently, opened its way into the political arena where opposing parties argued their versions of the past through the symbol of Sandino. An article in *La Prensa* that rebuked a statement made by Daniel

³¹ *La Prensa*, January 10th, 1980.

³² It must be noted that *La Prensa's* allusions to Fonseca diminished as the ideological struggle with *La Barricada* became fiercer.

Ortega to Madrid's newspaper *El País* exemplifies this fact. The latter proclaimed that Sandino contained "algo de la revolución mexicana y otro poco de la bolchevique".³³ In retort, *La Prensa* published an article entitled "No, Sandino No Era Comunista", in which Sandino's supposed ties to Bolshevism was discredited with compelling historical evidence regarding the Comintern's dissatisfaction with the guerilla leader for not adhering to their codes of conduct.³⁴ Clearly, the paper's defense of the hero myth against Marxist insinuations exposes how each side promoted a historical version that coincided with their political views. Interestingly, this same phenomenon occurred during Sandino's time as opposing groups accused or proclaimed him as a Communist according to their political penchant; in some ways, the evolution of Marxist thought in 20th century Latin America may be inferable through layers of myth added to Sandino's hero myth.

The appropriation of Darío in post-revolutionary Nicaragua reflected but one more of the major heroic historical figures (this time cultural in type) whose past was rewritten to align with the FLSN's political vision. Sergio Ramírez, novelist and Vice-President, is noted to have loathed the bourgeoisie's depiction of Darío as an ethereal de-politicized bohemian, and made it the task of the revolutionary party to "rescue" his past by imbuing it with political overtones of revolutionary, if not leftist, propensity. Likewise, Ernesto Cardenal, Minister of Culture, "proclaimed categorically that Darío was an anti-imperialist and a revolutionary who anticipated the Sandinista Revolution in his song", that he had inspired Sandino whom in turn became the mentor of Fonseca.³⁵ Similarly to Sandino's *Día de Dignidad*, the date of Darío's birth became *Día de Independencia Cultural*. Moreover, at the opening of the Darío museum, Carlos

³³ It is important to note that Ortega's Marxist rhetoric oscillated according to the USSR's support and the intensity of the war. However, no statement to my knowledge ever blatantly described Sandino as Communist, albeit indirect allusions such as the precedent one were often uttered

³⁴ *La Prensa*, February 23rd, 1985. The paper quotes Sandino to reinforce their point: "De qué manera puedo ser traidor a un partido, al que nunca he pertenecido."

Núñez stated: “We are placing him on the altar of the country, beside our General of the Free Men Augusto César Sandino.”³⁶

The third and last major attribute of the hero myth’s fate relates to the caliber of diffusion in which the same legends were retold and new modes of diffusion were propelled. The revolution’s success along with the advent of power by FLSN transformed him into a popular celebrity, enabling the myth to seep into the consciousness of the people through the transmission of past legends— true or false—of the guerrilla leader and “padre de la revolución”. To briefly name a few more examples, the day of his assassination was converted into a national holiday with the papers urging the people to join in celebration. Announcements in the *La Barricada* read, three days in advance: “Sábado 23 a las 3 de la Tarde Todos con Sandino a La Plaza de la Revolución”.³⁷

To promote the international appeal of his deeds, the paper included numerous excerpts by prominent Latin American anti-imperialists such as Esteban Pavletich, Gabriela Mistral, Gregorio Selser and Farabundo Martí highlighting his heroic deeds and in turn, (once again) exposing the international prominence of his personage. There was even an excerpt written in German with a communication on the bottom reading: “La resonancia mundial de la lucha del General Sandino se proyectaba en todos los idiomas. La universalidad del Héroe de las Segovias y de su gesta, así como la solidaridad de las fuerzas progresivas siempre estuvo presente.”³⁸ On the second anniversary of the revolution, Borge reinforced this point before a crowd of half a million people:

Our revolution has always been internationalist, ever since Sandino fought in the Segovias. There were internationalists from all over the world who fought alongside Sandino, men from Venezuela, Mexico, Peru. Another who fought

³⁵Cited from David E. Whisnant, “Ruben Darío as a Focal Cultural Figure in Nicaragua, The Ideological Uses of Cultural Capital”, *Latin American Research Review*, vol. 27 (3) 1992, p. 7-49, p. 36.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

³⁷ *La Barricada.*, February 20th, 1980.

³⁸ These excerpts are all from the first anniversary of his Sandino’s death, under the FLSN government, on February 23rd, 1980.

alongside Sandino was the great hero of the Salvadoran people named Farabundo Martí.³⁹

Another one of the manifold legend re-hashed for general knowledge was General Altamirano's undying devotion to Sandino (proven to be untrue by Schroeder's interviews) through the publication of a personal letter: "Pues entre nosotros no existe ninguna rivalidad, ni creo existirá nunca; supuesto de que Ud. es uno de los Elementos más importantes que tiene nuestro Ejército, según lo ha demostrado y lo está demostrando con sus grandes actividades."⁴⁰ Essentially, the hero myth of Sandino and his pequeño ejército loco, which had circulated since the beginning of the Rebellion, differed more substantially in the level of popularization rather than in the essence of the legends.

Also, interviews with Sandino's only daughter Blanca and grandchildren were published to spark (as well as to satiate) the people's interest in their national hero. The mystery over the *lieu* of his remains made first page headlines and even comic strips retelling the major events of his battle were published in the Sandinista newspaper as well as in educational textbooks for children.⁴¹ From the national radio station to the airport, the park of Granada to the streets of Managua, museums to monuments, a wide range of public institutions took on his name.

In the Barthesian sense, the glorification of Sandino as the fundamental hero of the nation served to promote the new party in power. Fittingly, revolutionary-leaders-turned-politicians figured between massive icons of heroism to ostentatiously elevate their image as the legitimate descendants of these national heroes; they too were separated from the crowd through the constant visual juxtaposition of past heroes and present political leaders. The portrait of Christ, Che Guevara and Pham Van Dong figured amongst the erected heroes partaking in

³⁹ Tomás Borge's speech "The Second Anniversary of the Sandinista Revolution, Managua, July 19th, 1981, cited from *Sandinistas Speak*, p. 132.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, *La Barricada*. By 1981, the amount of details transmitted on the day of his assassination substantially diminished to a few articles a year.

commemoration ceremonies.⁴² In the literal sense, the hero myth of Sandino, Fonseca and López embodied essential values of the Nicaragua's root paradigm, earning them a place in the official history of the nation. On the *metahistorical* level, the mythmakers appropriated hero myths to promote themselves as the nation's essential leaders. Yet again, past and present revolutionary martyrs were juxtaposed for the symbiotic legitimization of speakers and their subjects.

In reiteration to the general point regarding the style of language, the delineation of the heroes from the masses through allusions to their differences helped create a supernatural-like quality characteristic of hero myths, one that divorced the hero as well as the speaker from the crowd. Borge writes:

Among the people I know, the one who most remind me of him is Bayardo Arce, just as the one who most reminds me of Francisco Moreno is René Nuñez. Carlos Fonseca doesn't remind me of anybody and nobody reminds me of Carlos Fonseca, because he wasn't like anyone else, and yet he was like everyone.⁴³

Like Sandino, Fonseca is linguistically enveloped in heroic overtones by insinuating his uniqueness. At the same time, he is "like everyone", enabling the readers to ally themselves with their national hero for sharing common ancestral traits embedded in Nicaragua's revolutionary tradition.

The Socio-Political Context: Failures and Successes of the Hero Myth

How did the hero myth succeed and how did the hero myth fail in relation to the ideological aims of the party in power? Until now, this chapter has understood the myth's functional character as a promoter of revolutionary continuity for the legitimization, consolidation and mobilization of the Sandinista regime. To better understand how it succeeded and failed to accomplish its mythmakers' goals, the hero myth shall be posited against the drastic social and

⁴¹ This fate distinguished him from contemporary hero myths such as Pancho Villa and Zapata whose bodies serve as political weapons amongst the poorer classes of today.

⁴² On September 15, 1985, Van Pham Dong was honored with a celebration in Managua. *La Barricada* positioned pictures of Sandino and Che besides Pham Van Dong throughout the article; photographs taken at the opening ceremony (Managua) also included portraits of these heroes.

political events that affected the post-revolutionary period. For the sake of coherence, this section has been broadly divided in two phases demarcated by Nicaragua's first democratic elections on November 4th 1984, when Ortega emerged as president and in response, Reagan announced the United States' embargo on Nicaragua, which remained in effect until March of 1990. Phase one discusses the party's ideological naturalization of the FLSN as the legitimate descendants of Sandino through the social and economic reforms established by the party. Phase two explains how the growing discrepancy between the Sandinista ideology and the deteriorating standard of living led to de-naturalization of the FLSN as the natural inheritors of Sandino's legacy and in turn, the myth's transcendence from Sandinista party's political control.

Phase One

During the first two years of FLSN's administration, the Sandinistas were able to consolidate their power due in great part to the unanimity of the people against the Somoza regime. This type of mass accord, Max Weber has explained, often arises in the early stages following a revolution due to the subordinate groups' acceptance of the new commands as valid norms.⁴⁴ Walker explains that the victory had been unconditional; the National Guard was dismantled and mass organizations had formed grass root groups that supported the new regime and consequently, truncated rival groups. Another factor of prime importance working in favor of the new regime was Carter's continued policy of non-intervention in Latin American affairs. Although his administration did not approve of the party's Communist rhetoric and the growing presence of Cuban and Soviet advisors, a 60 million dollars aid package was nevertheless sent "in the hopes of manipulating

⁴³Borge, p. 238.

⁴⁴ See Frank Parkin, *Max Weber, A Revised Edition*, New York, Routledge, 2002, for more details.

the Sandinistas in a direction acceptable to conservative Washington”.⁴⁵ The president’s unwillingness to intervene militarily in Nicaragua facilitated the National Directorate in achieving some of its chief goals, namely the confiscation of properties owned by Somoza’s family (while respecting the rest of the private sector), the reorganization of the Sandinista armed forces and the formation of grass root groups.

These grassroots organization included the Sandinista Defense Committees (CDS), the Sandinista women’s organization (AMNLAE), the Sandinista Youth (JS-19), the Association of Rural Workers (ATC), the Sandinista Worker Central (CST), and the National Union of (Small) Farmers and Cattlemen (UNAG) and were geared at promoting the sectoral interests of the people. More importantly for this present purpose, they served a crucial role in the reconstruction of an imagined community sovereign in perception by “transmitting a common body of common knowledge and attitudes toward national history, heroes, values, and principles”.⁴⁶

The regime’s biggest success concerned its Literary Campaign, winning Nicaragua the 1980 award of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). It not only reduced illiteracy to an unprecedented degree (by 1982, total enrollment of all levels of education was approximately twice that of 1978) but also, it helped construct a Sandinista version of history by imbuing its texts with national and revolutionary messages. Bayardo Arce described it as “a strategic task to consolidate our Revolution” and George Black explains that of all the mediums of political education, the crusade was without a doubt the most important in the early years.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Walker, p.45. However, when signs that the new government was fostering revolution in El Salvador emerged, Kryzaneck explains that the Carter administration moved further away from its conciliatory approach and started to consider a military containment policy. See p. 86-88.

⁴⁶ For a concise explanation of the Sandinist Social Program’s major goals, see Walker, p. 119-130; Booth, p. 193-195; and Black, p. 265-280.

⁴⁷ This quote is cited from Black, p. 311. See p. 311-315 for a thorough breakdown of the primer *El Amanecer del Pueblo* as an example of the ideological overtones in the educational sector.

And so, up until Reagan's administration, the Sandinistas' political ideology of a better tomorrow beheld no blatant contradictions with the social and economic changes. Despite the growing fear of war, the relatively non-interventionist nature of Carter's administration combined with the unconditional defeat of the dictatorship helped synchronize Sandinista ideology with Sandinista policy. This considerably legitimized the party in the eyes of the people and brought about their re-election in 1984—notwithstanding the growing enmity caused by war and conscription.

Phase Two

Before continuing, it is important to discuss the most likely outcome of leftist social revolutions. Qualitative and quantitative analyses have shown that leftist movements—following a successful takeover of power—rarely attain their goals of total reconstruction.⁴⁸ Thomas Green explains:

Regime access is least characteristic of leftist revolutionary movements and most characteristic of bourgeois revolutionary movements. This in turn helps to explain the greater emphasis on organization by leftist revolutionary leaders, and their haste to replace existing political institutions with revolutionary forms of government as soon as the movement captures power. Lacking regime access and weak organizational structure, no revolutionary movement should expect success—regardless of the personal talents or ideological resolve of its leaders.⁴⁹

In this excerpt we find three characteristics of post-revolutionary leftist movement fomenting their downfall: lack of regime access, lack of organizational structure and consequently, haste to replace political institutions with revolutionary forms of government. These factors, along with the persistent intervention of the United States added to the opposition force within Nicaragua to impair most of their social reformation plans and policies. They shall be now revised to expose the impact of the revolution's failure on the perception of the myth.

⁴⁸ For instance, see Thomas Greene, *Comparative Revolutionary Movements*, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, Prentice-Hall, 1974; *The Politics of Violence, Revolution in the Modern World*, ed. by Carl Leiden and Karl Schmitt, New Jersey, Prentice-Hall, 1967; A.S. Cohan, *Theories of Revolution, An Introduction*, Sheffield, Nelson, 1975.

⁴⁹ Greene, p. 32. Clearly, there are exceptions to these principles such as Cuba.

Firstly, lack of regime access stemmed from the new party's inability to satisfy the demands and expectations of their major adversaries: bourgeois and élites groups who found their privileges threatened by the social and economic reforms administered by the new regime. As early as 1980, Conservatives on the Junta resigned due to the fact that the organizations representing their class' interests was relegated to a minority representation on the new Council of State. Two of the new regime's most strident opponents, the right-wing business organization COSEP and the Church hierarchy led by Cardinal Obando y Bravo, publicly backed the Contras and squarely blamed the Sandinistas for the economic and social problems plaguing the country.⁵⁰ This privileged minority, as we have already seen, found their voice in the conservative newspaper *La Prensa* and an ally in the president of the United States.

After taking power in November 1980, Ronald Reagan drastically overturned Carter's policies toward Latin America. The new administration's prime concern was to put an end to the "Communist Reign of Terror" that was supposedly sweeping over Latin America. Kryzanek explains:

Instead of stressing human rights, Reagan chose to criticize the terrorism of leftist guerrillas; instead of breaking ties with authoritarian regimes, Reagan made overtures to countries like Brazil, Chile, and Guatemala and offered restored aid; instead of normalizing relations with Cuba, Reagan lambasted Castro and talked in a manner that suggested a return to the days of confrontation.⁵¹

Regarding Nicaragua, Reagan was determined to undermine the consolidation of the Sandinista regime by means of military support and economic pressures. In 1981, he authorized 19 million dollars for a 500 men Nicaraguan armed force to drive out the Cuban infrastructure within Nicaragua – known to be training and

⁵⁰ Two of the major contra groups were the Fuerza Democráticas Nicaragüenses (FDN) and the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias Nicaragüenses (FARN). The former was composed of ex-officers of Somoza's National Guard and was headed by Alfonso Callejas, an ex-president of Somoza and Adolfo Calero, ex-president of Coca-Cola. The latter group was led by Fernando Chamorro and also included a wing of the Miskito group (MISOURA). In response to Contra activity near the Río Coco area, the Sandinistas forced some 8,500 to 10,000 Miskito Indians to evacuate their homes, causing them to side with the Contras and Nicaragua's upper classes. See Booth, p. 209-214 for more information.

⁵¹ Kryzanek, p. 91.

supplying arms to the Salvadoran guerrillas. In 1983, the United States sharply reduced Nicaragua's sugar quota and by 1984, aid to the Contras, mostly military, mounted to over 72 -100 million dollars. Pastor states that "the Reagan support for the contras was unprecedented in its scale, duration and openness".⁵² Consequently, Nicaragua's economic growth of the first few years leveled off by the mid-eighties and gradually plummeted thereafter.

After 1985, and largely as a result of Reagan's low intensity war and economic strangulation methods, war-related expenditures consumed half of the nation's budget, consequently weakening if not totally depriving social programs of badly needed funds. The new educational and health care programs came to a halt and the initial aims of grass root organization's were superseded for ones aimed at mobilizing the masses against the opposition forces, i.e. such as recruiting draftees and performing vigilance tasks against counterrevolutionary attacks. In other words, these organizations, once impelled to serve the interests of the people, became party-dominated instruments employed in the political vein of directorate in question. Consequently, as the standard of living depreciated, membership gradually decreased owing to a lack of spare time as well as an overall dissatisfaction toward the organizations overt party-oriented motives.

Decision-making problems further arose owing to the directorate's representation of three divergent political tendencies. George R. Vickers explains:

Although the FLSN criticized the "caudillo style" of personalistic politics which typified political systems throughout Central America from the 1930's onward, and prided themselves on their collective leadership, the fact is that the different ministries tended to be fiefdoms for the individual ministers as well as strongholds for the different tendencies.⁵³

Even though the Sandinistas moved quickly to consolidate and expand their support by building organizations representing sectors of their constituencies,

⁵² Pastor, p. 210. Ironically, at the same time the Contras were complaining of lack of funds, the Iran-Contra fiasco showed that they had received over 100 million dollars of U.S. aid by 1986.

⁵³ George R. Vickers, "A Spiders Web", *NACLA: Report on the Americas*, 24 (1) (June 1990), p.19-28, p. 22.

leaders approached issues separately. For instance, while ex-Tercerista Victor Tirado tried to reassure the private sector about Sandinista commitment to a mixed economy, ex-Proletario Jaime Wheelock wrote with a “downright threatening” language into the agrarian reform statute. Although, they were successful at mobilizing people, i.e. 400,000 turned up in Managua four days before the election, they failed at organizing their followers through coherent and consistent political approaches to social and economic issues.

What is more, to appease opposition groups and gain the support of the discontented bourgeoisie, the Sandinistas made broad economic concessions to large private farmers at the expense of the poor. Subsidies were granted to the middle and wealthy entrepreneurs by cutting back the consumption and income of the revolution’s base of support. To make matters worse, from 1988 onward, the demands of teachers and health workers for higher pay and those of construction and automotive workers were accused of siding with the United States by the leaders of the FLSN.⁵⁴ The party’s goals, once bent on restructuring the state to benefit the poor, were overturned for its political desire to access the regime. As their policies could no longer meet the demands of the poor and their initial successes were reversed, their increasing backing of the upper classes disenchanted many of the FLSN’s poorest supporters.

The lack of regime access, domestic and foreign opposition along with the leaders’ contradicting political tactics combined to undermine their revolutionary goals as well their political legitimacy. By the time Election Day arrived (November 1990), the Nicaraguan people had grown weary of the contradictions within the party and more importantly, of the grievous living conditions brought

⁵⁴ See Carlos M. Vilas, “What Went Wrong”, *NACLA: Report on the Americas*, 24 (1) (June 1990), p. 10-18, for more details on political mistakes made by the National Directorate.

on by civil war.⁵⁵ Approximately 30 000 (0.9%) of the population had perished, and the economy was worst off than ever before in its history.⁵⁶ And so, to the surprise of the FLSN, 55% of the population voted for Violeta Chamorro. So ended the post-revolutionary era of the Sandinistas and with it, their ideological control of Nicaragua's past.

The Failure of the Revolution on the Perception of the Hero Myth

The FLSN's loss to the UNO reinforces the point that myth's potentiality, in relation to the aims of its subjects, is limited to the social and political conditions guiding its course. During their 1990 campaign, the Sandinistas continued to deploy their brand of national and anti-imperialist propaganda on an inflationary and unremitting level despite the gross asymmetry between the ideological rendition of reality and the miserable conditions of daily life. In fact, *La Barricada* worked in great part as a travel journal for the electoral campaign, with huge pictures of Sergio Ramírez and Daniel Ortega permeating its pages beneath the backdrop of Fonseca and Sandino's portraits, and articles expressing the pre-imminence of the FLSN victory.⁵⁷ Vilas purports:

The Sandinistas and their supporters believed that patriotism would keep the people from voting for a candidate openly identified with the aggressor onto an electorate that was much more concerned with the concrete and specific issues of living conditions on which the revolution had been unable to deliver.⁵⁸

Although the party's ideology was believable during the general euphoric mood of the early eighties, it grew to be perceived as redundant when the heroic tone no longer corresponded to the living conditions of the people. It could not compensate for deprivations brought on by a decade of civil war; Reagan and Violeta

⁵⁵ By 1988, international pressures for a peace agreement- especially amongst Central American leaders- criticism over the United States intervention and the USSR's incapability to provide the Sandinistas with ammunition impelled the FLSN's to hold up a democratic election.

⁵⁶ Although the austerity program set in motion since 1988 had decreased inflation from 33,602% to 1,690%, foreign debt still amounted to 7.5 billion and gross domestic product declined 11.7%.

⁵⁷ It must be noted that portraits of Fonseca figured more prominently in these pieces of writing.

⁵⁸ Carlos M. Vilas, p. 9.

Chamorro's alternative solutions overrode the revolutionary sentiment of the people.⁵⁹

The failure of the revolution on the perception of the myth brought forth a rupture between the FLSN's ideology and the Sandino hero myth. Just days after the elections, perhaps more aware of the limitations of mythic speeches as political tools, *La Barricada* removed the Sandino logo from the front page (along with the drawing of a guerrilla soldier) for a more professional imperative.⁶⁰ Furthermore, from the time of her electoral campaign, Chamorro is noted to have said that "Sandino le pertenece a todos los nicaragüenses". Her words foreshadowed the upcoming official denaturalization of the Sandinistas as the only children of Sandino as well as the new status of the hero myth as a common denominator for all political parties' to deploy.

The takeover of the UNO engendered a *desandinisation* campaign that called forth, on an ideological level, for the destruction of revolutionary murals and rewriting of school textbooks. David Kunzle's work on Nicaragua's Revolutionary murals shows that the U.S Agency for International Development spent 6 million dollars to reduce the presence of revolutionary graffiti throughout the nation. New civic textbooks took on a religious agenda, opening with the Ten Commandments and calling "divorce a disgrace" and even failing to mention Augusto César Sandino and Carlos Fonseca in the chapter of national heroes.⁶¹ Moreover, Sandino's name was stripped off from the airport, Fonseca's flame was extinguished and later on, his tomb was bombed. Once again, official history took

⁵⁹ Following in Reagan's footsteps, Bush's administration took advantage of the situation by pumping "12 million dollars of electoral assistance to Chamorro and the State Department, CIA, the National endowment for Democracy".⁵⁹ He also promised an end to the embargo and millions of dollars of economic assistance if the people voted for Chamorro. With regards to UNO, the party made use of the memory of her late husband, Joaquín Chamorro (as well as Violeta's maternal image) with posters of the martyr trailing behind her during marches and rallies and *La Prensa* publishing pictures of the happy couple. Articles consistently stated: "El cambio que ofrece la UNO es el cambio que Joaquín quiso. Que Nicaragua volviera a ser República."

⁶⁰ Chamorro's statement comes from an article in *La Prensa*, June 2nd, 2001. In regards *La Barricada*'s modifications, Jones' explains that it reverted to its former orientation as a largely passive mouthpiece for the FSLN in 1994 i.e., the time of elections. Finally, the paper was officially closed down in 1998.

another swerve, this time to the right through the eradication of as many testimonies of the Sandinista version of the past as possible, as well as the replacement of political messages permeating educational textbooks with more conservative ones.

Its successes may thus be defined in view of its inherent nature as a value in the form of a narrative. The popularization of the hero myth on a national level led to its validity as a story of heroism, believed as true by the nation for embodying at once specific values unique to Nicaraguan culture as well as universal ones. At this forked road, the hero myth's mobilizing purpose also encouraged Nicaragua's nation-building process by creating unity and cohesion between disparate groups through the dissemination of popular living ethnic memories. In other words, if hero myth's success is measured according to its flourishing reception, its indoctrination by the Sandinistas enabled the myth to make fruitful headway in the eighties. Furthermore, the growing fame of the myth resuscitated the interest of social scientists worldwide, paving the way to its appeal as a subject of historical interest as dozens of historical works have been written ever since.

Sandinista in the Post-Sandinista Nicaragua

Although the study of the hero myth stops in 1990, it must be clarified that the Sandinistas' deployment of the hero myth has not petered out completely. In front of a crowd of Niquinihomo natives, Tomás Borge, a year after the elections stated that "el Frente Sandinista siempre ha luchado y luchará por los intereses populares y jamás renunciará a sus principios porque la causa de Sandino sigue siendo la misma".⁶² This insistence on re-aligning the party with the hero went on

⁶¹ David Kunzle, *The Murals of Revolutionary Nicaragua, 1979-1992*. Berkeley, University of California Press, 1995.

⁶² *La Barricada*, February 22nd, 1991.

to pervade Sandino's centennial commemoration in 1996. Alejandro Bendaña commenced his speech by ascertaining the hero's apolitical place as a source of inspiration for all Nicaraguans to share and esteem went on to emphasize the need of Sandinistas to follow and study his path more diligently than everyone else.

Nonetheless I want to address myself to my Sandinista brothers and sisters as just one more Sandinista, one who has had the privilege of being able to spend time studying Sandino. Because even though we can call on all Nicaraguan's to respect the symbol of Sandino something more is expected of those worthy of calling ourselves Sandinistas: loyalty to Sandino's thought.⁶³

The speech goes on to relate Sandino's feats and focuses closely on his spirituality, expressing the latter's love of God and Jesus as well as his religious approach to revolution. This accent on Sandino's spirituality may be perceived as promoting the Sandinistas' own religious propensity in the face of the Conservatives' criticism, which has always depicted them as communists (and thus atheists). Once again, religion and politics intermingle in the discourse of politically driven speeches, equating loyalty to Sandino with love of God and thus, love of God with loyalty to the Sandinistas.

Sandino's mystical propensities seem to be one of the latest fascinations surrounding his mythic aura. A four-articled Special Report by *La Prensa* (July 2001) illustrates this point by bringing to light a puzzling letter by Moncada to Somoza's wife, Salvadora María Debayle.⁶⁴ The first article exposes contents of the letter contrary to the documented mutual hatred between Sandino and Moncada. The latter writes to Salvadora for "un algodoncito empapado en Sandino" to serve him as a good luck charm. In the following articles, "Sandino militó en logia metafísica" and "Alejandro Bolaños afirma: Moncada no era místico", the literal interpretation of the letter is overridden for a more reasonable

⁶³ *A Sandinista Commemoration of the Sandino Centennial*, Speech Given by Alejandro Bendaña to the Commemoration of the 61st anniversary of the Death of General Sandino. February 21, 1995. Cited from <http://www.hartford-hwp.com/archives/47/003.html>, p. 1-7, p. 1. Consulted on March 1st, 2003.

⁶⁴ *La Prensa*, June 2nd, 2001. *Reportaje Especial*. The four articles are entitled in order of appearance: "Moncada quería un talismán de Sandino." "Alejandro Bolaños afirma: "Moncada no era místico." "Sandino se veía a sí mismo como un mesías." "Sandino militó en logia metafísica."

one. Historians Bolanos and Marco Navarro agree that the correspondence must have contained “un mensaje cifrado para Somoza”, concerning the upcoming assassination of the guerrilla leader. However, they disagree on the nature of Sandino’s mystical propensities. Bolaños’ explains Sandino’s political ideas from a deranged perspective whereas Navarro defends Sandino as an example of millenarian tradition. Though historians might never agree on the make-up of Sandino’s personality, the unending interest of the figure is a testimony of myth’s potency in invigorating intellectual contemplation as well as in shaping the collective memories of the nation. It proves, once more, that once a myth is formed, it is unlikely to fade away completely.

Interestingly, Bolaños’s work *El Iluminado* discredits Sandino as well as Fonseca’s heroic stature.⁶⁵ He claims that Sandino was unbalanced and mixed up in eclectic religious cults whereas Fonseca was a product of Cuba’s communism and so, that he sought to rid Nicaragua of its Catholic roots and replace them with Marxist beliefs. The cover of this monograph consists of Sandino’s disembodied torso in the middle of the seal of Joaquín Trincado’s Magnetic-Spiritual school whereas a dubious photo of Fonseca with the mark of Soviet Union’s insignia figuring in the middle of his forehead is placed at the back cover. At the bottom of his head loom the nine directorates; their pictures are stamped with the words “Made in Cuba”. The transparency of Bolaños political leanings, not to mention its presence in special reportage by *La Prensa*, suggests that the anti-hero has not been eradicated either. According to the theory of myth, and the research of this present paper, it will likely continue to be believed.

Since the political stakes are not as high, commemorations honoring his memory may be perceived as more subdued and less loaded with political overtones. Instead, the hero myth can be perceived as having retrieved its essential

⁶⁵ Alejandro Bolaños Geyer, *El Iluminado*, Masaya, Nicaragua Libre, 2001.

function in the realm of collective memory making— as an inspirational narrative remembered by a specific people (Nicaraguans of all creeds and classes) serving as an honorable reference point of the nation’s beginnings. This retrieval of the myth’s essential function is substantiated by its continued revival in various arrays of mythic speech. For instance, Armando Morales’ lithographs of seven moments in Sandino’s life entitled “Adios Sandino” represent pivotal moment of Sandino’s war and complement other forms of mythic speech with visual interpretations.⁶⁶ These pictorial representations of the past re-imbue the hero myth with its heroic spender, this time rejuvenating the living memory through an artful interplay of shadow and light.

Conclusion

Post-revolutionary Nicaragua heralded the most complex and multifaceted phase of the hero myth’s travels, one mirroring the tumultuousness of the social and political context of the nation. The break out of the civil war re-triggered its mobilizing function yet this time, both sides employed it to construct and defend their version of the past. Unanimously accepted by the majority of Nicaraguans, the hero myth of Sandino became a common denominator and reference point for all people of the nation to share— a symbol embodying a multifarious array of cultural values, such as the Christ figure, the father figure, the epitome of Nicaragua’s heroic tradition.

The electoral defeat of the Sandinistas followed by the desandinization campaign has somewhat de-politicized the myth, enabling it to settle in the crux Nicaragua’s collective memory as a narrative embodying a value, believed as true

⁶⁶ See Elizabeth F. Ugarte “Historia y Memoria en el “Adiós a Sandino” de Armando Morales” on <http://www.denison.edu/istmo/v1n1/articulos/memoria.html>, p. 1-6. August 2001. Consulted on October 12th, 2002. “Adiós Sandino” is displayed at the National Museum of Art in León. The lithographs are entitled “Las Mujeres de Puerto Cabeza”, “Sandino en la Montaña”, “Adiós a Sandino”, “General Pedrón (Pedro Altamirano)”, “La última cena del General Sandino”, “Rendimiento del General Sandino frente al “Hormiguero” and “el Asesinato del General detrás del Viejo Campo de Aviación”.

despite any historical records that might prove otherwise. In other words, the success of the revolution dispelled the Black version of the myth to render the White version more believable to a larger number of people and in turn, a celebrity figure as well as a matter of contention in the unending struggle for political power.

Conclusion

This thesis has argued that the historical figure, Augusto César Sandino, gradually came to be perceived as a hero as well as a hero myth during the Rebellion of 1927-1933. The aim has been to illuminate the social phenomenon on two realms, the specific and the general, by retelling the history of the myth from a structural and evolutionary perspective. Consequently, it has sought to explain the emergence and survival of the hero myth by understanding it in relation to theories of myth, ideology, leadership, rebellion and revolution.

From a theoretical perspective, this study has reinforced the premise of myth's irrefutable nature and in turn, has suggested the definite link between past hero myths and contemporary hero myths related to the political sphere of the nation. Like Prometheus battling against omnipotent Zeus full-knowingly to fail or Robin Hood stealing from the rich to give to the poor, the hero myth of Sandino exposes the enduring presence of the David vs. Goliath type myths in modern history. This is especially noticeable in areas such as Nicaragua where anti-imperial sentiments are strongly felt. In other words, as long as such power struggles exists, rebel or revolutionary leaders challenging their imperial nemesis through wily methods, a moral rhetoric and who die perceived as martyrs at a forked road in time, will likely be perceived as heroes and gradually be transformed into hero myths. The latter's popularity may rise or plunge, resonating differently according to the period in which it is told, but the underlying value of heroism is incontrovertible; once formed, "the hero myth takes on life of its own".¹

On a more specific level, this thesis hopes to have shed more light on the historical life of the hero myth by pinpointing its prime authors and in turn,

viewing their politically oriented goals according to the socio-political contexts. Its major mythmakers have been, to name only a few, Sandino himself, poet-journalist Froylán Turcios, poetess Gabriela Mistral, Colonel Bayo, Che Guevara, poet—turned Minister of Culture Ernesto Cardenal, writer/journalist Joaquín Chamorro, revolutionary leader Carlos Fonseca, Minister of State Tomás Borge and vice-president Sergio Ramírez. The perpetual re-appropriation of the hero myth further suggests that the social perception of it has evolved according to the needs of its mythmakers. In turn, this approach has exposed the fundamental functions of the myth as a mobilizing tool (against Somoza's regime in the sixties and seventies and anti-Sandinista forces in the eighties), an ideological symbol for the consolidation and legitimization of the post-revolutionary regime and finally, as an ethnic narrative serving to create group solidarity.

New Questions, more Historical Paths

The insights brought forth from this thesis have triggered a related set of questions regarding the workings of the hero myth in the present structure. Firstly, a thorough study of the hero myth in its current neo-liberal phase might provide important information for an overall understanding of its mythic course. Secondly, since the hero myth has come to embody a myriad of identities, new insights may be drawn from situating it within the ongoing debate over the evolution of “traditional” and “modern” imaginary constructions in Latin America.

Thirdly, as this paper has concentrated solely on the mythic speeches of the more influential mythmakers of Nicaragua, a study of its re-appropriation by marginalized groups seeking to promote their collective interests or mobilize against the political system may broaden our understanding of the hero myth's

¹ Orrin E. Klapp, p. 135.

workings.² In other words, how has the Sandino hero myth been perceived and employed by the popular classes from its inception until today? Though this question may be answered more aptly by field research on the subject, Jeffrey L. Gould's work on Chinandegan society offers some worthy clues. Gould explains that the working classes of San Antonio sympathized with Sandino because of their own resentment toward Moncada's brand of liberalism: "Sandino probably stimulated union organizational efforts. Sandinismo undoubtedly accentuated the anti-oligarchic elements in obrerismo and widened the gap between Moncada's regime and Liberal labor organizers".³ Although, the majority of Chinandegans did not join Sandino's army, their approval of his cause translated into strikes on the railroad and sugar plantations. This case clearly illustrates the versatility of the hero myth insofar as it is interpreted with an eye to the interests of diverse social groups.

Finally, and perhaps most problematically, there remains the question of how to understand the hero myth's effects on the collective consciousness of the Nicaraguan people. Some historians have affirmed that hero myths entrenched in the political culture of a system discourage the masses from bettering their social and economic situations, whereas others have focused on its ability to stimulate groups into dissension.⁴ The former consider that the constant invocation of a glorious past does, which does not coincide with their present conditions, enforces national guilt and, even worse, encourages passivity toward their poor living conditions. The ample popularity of this position overshadows its major weakness,

² See Samuel Brunk's "Remembering Emiliano Zapata: Three Moments in the Posthumous Career of the Martyr of Chinameca". *Hispanic American Historical Review* 79 (3) 1998, p. 457-490. His work discusses the re-appropriation of the Zapata hero myth by groups seeking political representation.

³ Jeffrey L. Gould, *To Lead As Equals, Rural Protest and Political Consciousness in Chinandega, Nicaragua, 1912-1979*, The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill and London, 1990, p. 37.

⁴ For examples of works focusing on the paralytic effects of the hero myths, see Ilene O' Malley's *The Myth of the Revolution: Hero Cults and the Institutionalization of the Mexican State, 1920-1940*. New York, Greenwood Press, 1986; and, Carrera Damás, Germán's "Simon Bolívar, el Culto Heroico y la Nación",

namely, the lack of compelling evidence suggesting the poor (albeit corrigible) current state of our research methods on the subject.

A sociological perspective on the history of hero myths may serve as a fruitful starting point by innovating methods for the inquiry of the phenomenon and the operationalization of the data at hand. Furthermore, a comparative approach to the studies of the travels of Latin American hero myths may bring forth more nuances to our present understanding of the phenomenon.⁵

For now, this thesis has taken the initial step of providing an overview of the travels of the hero from its inception until the electoral defeat of the Sandinistas. The fact that the essential characteristics of the hero myth have neither been displaced nor changed considerably in nature proves that Sandino is veritably a myth of the Nicaraguan nation. He has indubitably left, in Sidney Hook's words "the positive imprint of his personality upon history— an imprint that is still observable after he has disappeared from the scene."⁶

Hispanic American Historical Review 63 (1) 1983, p. 107-145. Samuel Brunk's work on Zapata, mentioned in the previous note, is a compelling example exposing its active influence on the masses.

⁵ For instance, the serious clash over Zapata's remains during commemoration ceremonies as opposed to the very absence of Sandino's remains has induced a different set of consequences yet to be explored in relation to each other.

⁶ Hook, p. 158.

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