

The Democratic Problematic in Central America and the Surprising Case of Nicaragua¹

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1. Democracy: The Central American Variants

Perceptions of what democracy is or ought to be vary according to historical contexts, analytical constructs, and ideological convictions. This is clearly evident when we look at the alternative possibilities offered by the liberal tradition with its emphasis on individual rights and competition; the Marxist tradition which focuses on modes of production and social class solidarity; and the organic tradition's more holistic approach and corporatist linkage of state and society. Elite and popular tendencies within each of these traditions yield yet more disparities: elite pluralism and citizen participation within liberalism; Leninist dual power and parliamentary socialism within Marxism; and exclusionary corporatism and inclusionary corporatism within the organic tradition.² Comparisons often tend to be raw as when, in a conversation with then Nicaraguan Vice President, Sergio Ramírez, novelist Salman Rushdie quoted Nina H. Shea, program director for the International League for Human Rights, who stated, "Repression in Nicaragua is not as conspicuous or as bloody as in other parts of Central America. But it is more insidious and systematic." Ramírez shot back, "You see, if we do not murder and torture people as they do in Salvador, it just proves that we are so fiendishly subtle."³ In the mind of some critics, as long as the Sandinistas remained in power, that was "proof" of their anti-democratic nature. When the party accepted its defeat in the 1990 elections and ceded power to the Chamorro government, outgoing President Daniel Ortega was able to claim credit for the successful transition to democracy in Nicaragua without renouncing the Sandinista ideals of social class solidarity

and national unity. In order to better understand the achievements and remaining challenges of one nation, it is necessary to know the general limitations that other nations have experienced in circumstances which are similar in some respects but clearly not all respects.

This paper explores the democratic problematic throughout Central America in the belief that an understanding of the limits of democracy on the isthmus helps to situate the efforts toward democratic construction in Nicaragua. It presents a heuristic exercise without pretending to solve the puzzle of how best to pursue democracy in the region. It does, however, share with proponents of the popular tendencies of the three traditions mentioned above the conviction that an appropriate, desirable and ultimately sustainable democracy is one that incorporates and enfranchises the great majority of its citizens. It further seeks to provide a preliminary sketch of the political parameters in the other Central American countries with an eye toward seeing how the distinct patterns of development throughout the region seem to fit the various traditions and tendencies of democracy mentioned above. This exercise helps to situate the Nicaraguan experience in its regional and international context. Finally, it offers a preliminary evaluation of the appropriateness of the traditions themselves.

2. The Democratic Problematic in Central America

Ortega's last act as president was the first step in the real revolution Nicaragua needed: It moved his country toward replacing the rule of power with the rule of law.

[But]...[e]stablishing the rule of law in societies that have never known it may be too much to ask of those who take power through arms...

The question is, then, can anyone accomplish this job, for it also seems to be beyond the grasp of governments that reach office through the ballot. The presidencies of José

Napoleón Duarte in El Salvador, Alan García in Peru, and Virgilio Barco in Colombia were works of Greek tragedy. Determined to break their countries' traditions and impose the rule of law, they ended up presiding over some of the most violent and repressive periods in their nations' histories.⁴

The establishment of the rule of law, of course, is a very important constitutive element of democracy. However, it can not simply be imposed upon a polity. In order for the rule of law to be respected, other changes in the society, economy and culture must also be forged to win people's trust and earn legitimacy. Recent studies of nonrevolutionary transitions from authoritarian rule to some form of liberal democracy have been justified based upon the normative preferences of their authors and their assertion that revolutions have been rare in the past and are unlikely to succeed in the future. Furthermore, according to this view, attempts to radically restructure the state precipitate the growth of more severe or equal forms of repression. Active opposition from the West is assured while support from elsewhere is unavailable or unreliable.⁵ In the language of the traditions framing this discussion, these authors state an explicit normative preference for liberal democracy over either Marxist or organic democracy. This is so even though they generally agree that, with the exception of revolutionary experiments, variations in regime type do not seem to have had significant effect on the great and increasing inequalities which characterize the economies and societies of Latin America.⁶

Even assuming a preference for liberal democracy, outside of Costa Rica it is difficult to find any established political tradition to serve as an historical reference for redemocratization in Central America. Rather, as Richard Stahler-Sholk notes, liberalization has to be conceived in terms of the aspirations of the majority of participants in the overthrow of the authoritarian regime.... Liberalization required the construction of an

entirely new order.⁷ In the context of Central America's perceived geopolitical importance to the United States and the central role of armed insurgency in the Central American transitions, the probability of the realization of the inauguration and consolidation of liberal democracies in the region in the 1980s appeared to be low.⁸ Even in the 1990s, after the fires of the cold war had cooled, the viability of liberal democracy in El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala was by no means assured, any more that it was in Nicaragua.

Liberal democracy in general practice, elite pluralism would have to rely upon a high degree of popular apathy or at least a low degree of popular mobilization. At a time when social needs outstripped the institutional capacity of the state to deliver or its political will and creativity, the tendency toward increasing citizen participation would receive little encouragement from the ruling parties in the region. Peeler points persuasively, however, to the attraction of liberal democracy even in its elite tendency.

Those who have suffered imprisonment and torture usually do see a difference. The conventional concept of democracy emphasizes citizen rights and liberties which, to the extent they are respected, guarantee that persons will not be arbitrarily abducted, tortured, and murdered by the authorities. In many parts of Latin America today, the realization of even that part of the democratic canon would be a major gain; there it makes sense to work for the establishment of democracy, with all the imperfections we know only too well.⁹

Without denying that liberal democracy may, in some circumstances, constitute an unusually pleasant mode of being dominated,¹⁰ critics remain not only unsatisfied with its shortcomings but unpersuaded of its ability to serve as a means for the marginalized majorities to realize even minimally adequate progress toward the solution of their most pervasive and fundamental problems. These authors view liberal democracy as a system which provides an effective mechanism for the distribution of power among political parties

that represent the interests of owner classes. In this view of liberal democracy, _elections have not been a means for the transfer of state power to workers or peasants._ Furthermore, _when the possibility of such a transfer has appeared, the military has assumed power._¹¹ They conclude that the capitalist state, which is ultimately protected by the use of military coercion, must be overthrown by armed force. Only then, according to this view, once the armed protector of the old state is dismantled, can the people build a new democracy which will allow them to defend their own interests.¹²

Gabriel Aguilera argues that the apparent transition to elite pluralism which began in Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras in the 1980s is merely a means of maintaining the *status quo* for the traditional political economy by making some lesser compromises to avoid undergoing transformations of greater significance. By contrast, in Sandinista Nicaragua democracy meant a commitment to the improvement of the minimal standard of living for the poor and an eradication of racism and exploitation. _While the first approach guarantees freedom of movement and expression to political interests of diverse classes,_ according to Aguilera, _the second refers to the building of new societies with the participation of all the population (such that)Ythe democratic and participatory (organizations of government) are not necessarily realized through elections and political parties and they are not measured simply by electoral results, but rather by indices of participation and by changes in living conditions for the majority of the people._¹³ Throughout Central America, as in Nicaragua, the question of democracy cannot be answered simply by reference to elections and due process no matter how valued these may be. A demobilized democracy results in a system of

rewards and punishments subject to elite manipulation. It spawns widespread popular disenchantment with the *clase política* and engenders a culture of suspicion and ridicule.

The choices are clearly not easy ones. In the face of elite intransigence, the revolutionary option may seem to be the only way to begin to fully incorporate workers and peasants into the political process and, with them, to address a series of tremendous social and economic imbalances. But those who pursue this option are made to pay a high price by counterrevolutionary forces and their powerful outside backers.¹⁴ Not only is the price paid in bearing the brunt of political conspiracy, military aggression and economic sabotage a high one, but the payment period is made to last a long time and people grow weary. Furthermore, the complex problems of governing in the context of scarce resources and weak institutions—both public and private—are not amenable to short term solution and tend to be compounded by faulty analysis and/or inexperienced policy implementation. On the other hand, a transition to elite pluralism (which will always be only partial) that cannot challenge the perceived interests of the dominant coalition, including domestic and foreign elites, faces severe limitations on what it can hope to accomplish in terms of promoting and defending the most elementary rights of the majority of its citizens. But the problem is more difficult still. Some argue that revolutionary transitions were possible only under the personalistic dictatorships of Batista, Somoza, and Stroessner. This belief is reinforced by the strength and sophistication of the repressive apparatuses in most countries *vis à vis* a relatively weak insurgency and by a renewed interest in liberal democracy by the “relevant players” throughout most of Latin America.¹⁵

One way out of this problem is to assume that U.S. policy makers resisted revolutionaries because they were _pro-Soviet._ In this scenario, revolutionary insurgencies are unlikely to succeed in the future without the international support they might have received from the Soviet Union. This might make it easier for the U.S. to accept the need for radical change in the area and to accommodate it rather than to continue to resist it. Without U.S. military backing of repressive regimes and counterrevolutionary forces, radical restructuring could be accomplished by an incrementalist strategy.¹⁶ This seems to be the strategy of many Central American progressives today. However, this argument seems to lose sight of the long history of U.S. control in the area and protection of its perceived economic interests which predate the existence of the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, in the post cold war period, it is possible to envision a future U.S. regime that might respond to mass-based pressure and pursue an enlightened policy more in keeping with the long term interests of the majorities in both Central America and the United States.¹⁷ In conformity with the prevailing elite consensus, President Clinton continues to link free markets and democracy, yet he also argues for social responsibility and shows latent potential to forge a _new covenant_ or convergence that might leave open the possibility of working toward a transnational *concertación*. Having said this, we should never lose sight of the need for Central Americans to come to terms with their own differences and to forge workable compromises among themselves with enough flexibility to create the framework of a viable consensus for national and regional progress. This is especially important if it turns out that revolutionary options are not on the near horizon. Cas appears to be so in the mid-1990s. Given these alternatives and expectations,

how might those dedicated to incorporating the vast majorities into the social, economic, and political life of their nations accomplish their goals?

3. Liberal Democracy in Central America

The United States is always saying that there are democratic advances in Central America because there have been elections of civilian governments in El Salvador, Honduras, and Costa Rica. In Central America there is a situation of grand contradictions, between a minority with access to well being and an immense majority forgotten and marginalized.

If these problems are not resolved, it will be difficult for democracy to function elsewhere in Central America as it effectively does in Nicaragua. We are proud to defend our idea of democracy which, besides elections, includes profound social change. *Democratic systems will be unable to endure in Central America without these profound changes.*¹⁸

Without putting too strict an interpretation on this statement by former Nicaraguan Vice President Sergio Ramírez, many who would agree that liberal democracy has yet to consolidate itself in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, point instead to Costa Rica as the only example of stable liberal democracy in Central America. For the past forty-five years, Costa Rica has fit the pattern of liberal democracy. But which pattern does it fit better: that of elite pluralism or that of citizen participation? And does it combine this liberal democracy with any other tradition? A key success of Costa Rica's democracy has been an accommodation among competing elites. The circle of elites has widened over time, but it has not focused attention on mass mobilization in the direction of a democracy of citizen participation.¹⁹ Costa Rica abolished the military and established a representative government and a welfare state in the late 1940s.²⁰ From 1949 to 1982, national development was based on the premise that unfettered capitalism causes undesirable and

destabilizing socioeconomic dislocations and inequalities.²¹ Thus the state provided social guarantees, regulated businesses, owned certain means of production, engaged in joint ventures with private capital, made public investments, and redistributed income.²² Social welfare and education initiatives, especially in the 1960s, helped to reduce the concentration of income among the top twenty percent while improving indices of infant mortality and life expectancy. However, by the 1980s evidence of a deterioration in the distribution of income began to appear. Land reform efforts did not meet with great sustained support or success as the pace of growth in the number of people needing land outstripped the rate of distribution of titles.²³ In the 1980s and 1990s Costa Rica was traveling the standard path of economic restructuring and adjustment so familiar elsewhere on the isthmus. This direction threatened the social cohesion and coping mechanisms of Costa Rican democracy, casting doubt upon its ability to negotiate a difficult and uncertain future.

Former President Oscar Arias praised Costa Ricans for their tolerance of bad policies and worsening conditions and proposed that liberal democracy could offer a way to solve the country's social problems such that _Costa Rica (could) demonstrate to the world that it is possible to build a more just society and that it can be accomplished at a much lower social cost within a (liberal) democratic framework than a Marxist one.²⁴ Having said that, Arias believed that violent change would probably return if peaceful change were to fail. However, he reported in 1983 that economic power had become overly concentrated and that since 1949 political power had become increasingly concentrated as power at the municipal level had diminished. Given these conditions, he concluded that _Ythe democratic system should struggle to distribute power, economic as well as political, and this

is a difficult struggle because power tends to become concentrated, so we need to find mechanisms to distribute it... *We need economic democracy because liberal political democracy is insufficient.*²⁵ The standard approach to economics, however, has tended to concentrate economic resources rather than to make them available to broader sectors of the population.

The social democratic project of the 1948-1980 period has been replaced by a more laissez-faire economic model ascendent in the late twentieth century as redistributive measures and the state's role in the economy have been reduced since 1982.²⁶ Furthermore, the concept of social democracy enabling equal political participation seems to be an ideal that distances itself from the Costa Rican reality more each day, and becomes instead a simple procedure to elect governors within a framework of relative liberties, which are also becoming more limited.²⁷ In spite of some moves toward incorporating popular organizations such as the development of housing in cooperation with the National Patriotic Committee (COPAN),²⁸ this pattern fits better with the elite pluralist tendency than with that of citizen participation.²⁹ It is only faintly influenced by the popular Marxist or social democratic tendency and then more so during the period before 1980 than since.³⁰ Finally, Howard Wiarda suggests that Costa Rica's large state sector has operated according to corporatist patterns in its relations with labor, social security, peasants, and business.³¹ Without a renewal of the nation's commitment to social solidarity, it is difficult to imagine how to save through repression the Costa Rican political economy, as presently fashioned, can go forward very much further.

The other countries of Central America have much more limited experience with liberal democracy, and in each case the military and the United States play preponderant roles

which give meaning to the phrases *_democracia de fachada_* and *_democracia restringida_*. It remains to be seen to what extent Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala will develop elements of political liberalism in their nations. Honduras has been characterized by a weak indigenous elite *vis à vis* external actors and the military. Strong oligarchies and relatively autonomous militaries have predominated in El Salvador and Guatemala with the added dimension of racism as an *_instrument of domination and exploitation of 60 percent of the population_* in Guatemala.³² Post World War II commercialization of agriculture and light industrialization resulted in rural dislocations and an expansion of the urban work force and the middle class. However, with the exception of Costa Rica, people in these sectors did not have access to political representation.³³ Ebel argues persuasively that corporatist structures of interest representation permeate all of Central America. In his estimation they have been weakest in Honduras due to the segmented nature of its power elites, but that began changing in the 1980s as a result of the fast rate of U.S. militarization of the country.³⁴ With the exception of El Salvador with the return of leaders of the Democratic Revolutionary Front (FDR) and the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) to participate in the legal political process and subsequent elections, there is clearly no Marxist influence *within* any of the other countries' political systems. This does not mean that there is no democracy possible without some variant of Marxism, only that a renewed commitment to the socially excluded does appear to be a *sine qua non* if democracy is to find an enduring hold in Central America. As the Marxist and Christian left have insisted for a long time.

If competition is an important aspect of democracy, as it is for liberal democracy, then it is important to focus on the social bases of those who are competing. *_In order to provide*

some guarantee that a regime will be responsive to politicized social needs, according to Shugart, "we must stress the criterion of participation or inclusiveness as a necessary condition for democracy."³⁵ With this in mind, it is significant to note that during the 1980s the FDR-FMLN successfully undermined José Napoleon Duarte's social bases due to their ability to organize and his inability to deliver promised reforms.³⁶ Furthermore, the development of an alternative power structure of local popular power began to show some promise.³⁷ Although the FMLN-led coalition did not perform as well as it had hoped in the 1994 elections, it did emerge as the party with the second highest vote count after the National Republican Alliance (ARENA) in the elections for the presidency and the national assembly and the FMLN won power in a number of municipal councils in ex-conflictive zones such as in Suchitoto, Cuscatlan.³⁸ This was a hopeful sign for the political system because it meant that, at least in El Salvador, popular sectors were ready and able to participate in a regime of citizen participation, or even one of elite pluralism that would hold open a realistic possibility of admitting popular participation. This is in large measure what the struggle for democracy is about: finding peaceful ways that the popular sectors can gain meaningful access to power.

4. Nicaragua in the 1990s

4.1. The Persistent External Sector

Joseph Tulchin and Knut Walter suggest there has been a pattern in the United States' attempts to _export democracy_ to Nicaragua which has conformed to an _iron law of intervention._ According to them,

The iron law operates until and unless the U.S. government explicitly decides to limit its intervention and to give up the policy objective of forcing democracy on the intervened people. At that moment, the political forces in Nicaragua return to their traditional patterns of behavior in which governance is organized by personalistic dealings rather than by free expression of the popular will and in which power is considered a zero-sum game, not to be shared or given up except under force.³⁹

Others observed a direct link between U.S. hostility toward the Sandinista regime and _the reproduction of a militaristic and repressive state apparatus within Nicaragua._ Gearóid Ó Tuathail, for example, cited the imposition of a military draft and military expansion which _allowed the Sandinistas to widen repressive powers and crush any dissension it consider[ed] dangerous._ Furthermore, he concluded, _While there [were] significant differences in substance, the form of the contemporary Nicaraguan state [was] very similar to the Nicaraguan state under Somoza._⁴⁰ It is not necessary to agree with this comparison of the Sandinista and Somocista regimes in order to note a relationship between foreign pressure and domestic repression.⁴¹

By 1990 every sitting Central American president had endorsed some form of standard free-market economics while they had also cut public spending at a time when the process of social marginalization and polarization was accelerating. Each of these presidents had been supported as candidates by U.S. groups with National Endowment for Democracy (NED) links.⁴² This suggests that in Central America, as elsewhere, regardless of the party in power in Washington, the United States sought to impose its preferred versions of economic liberalism while being less insistent upon political liberalization, except in so far as it would

advance the cause of economic liberalism and/or perceived United States political or economic interests.

There was a haunting consistency as well as simplicity to the Reagan regime's approach to Nicaragua in this regard. As New York Times correspondent Stephen Kinzer noted, "[Colonel Oliver] North was the ultimate example of what happens when policy planners refuse to be guided by reality, and instead sift selectively in order to find facts that fit their own views. This kind of contempt for truth tainted the Reagan administration's policies in Central America, stacking the intelligence deck in favor of predetermined conclusions."⁴³ For North, as for others determining the course of action from Washington, the Sandinistas were Marxist Leninists and represented the threat of the expansion of communism in the backyard patio of the United States. Ironically, this *a priori* judgement drove a policy which became, in large measure, self-fulfilling. As the United States and the contras bore down upon the Revolution, the revolutionaries became increasingly intolerant and repressive, until finally believing relief to be at hand they conformed to Washington's key requirements and further liberalized their regime.

At the beginning of the decade of the eighties, John Carbaugh, an aide to North Carolina Senator Jesse Helms, was successful in inserting in the Republican party platform a phrase to "support the efforts of the Nicaraguan people to establish a free and independent government" by which Carbaugh intended to mean the overthrow of the Sandinista regime.⁴⁴ As the decade drew to a close and Washington's attention was being drawn elsewhere, in March of 1989, President Bush sounded a more pragmatic note with the conclusion of a bipartisan accord that emphasized diplomacy over military pressure in United States-

Nicaraguan relations. "We do not claim the right to order the politics of Nicaragua," he said. "That is for the Nicaraguan people to decide."⁴⁵ The Bush regime—particularly as represented by Secretary of State George Schultz—appeared to be entertaining the possibility of accepting an elected socialist government in Central America. With the victory of Violeta Chamorro, however, that intriguing proposition was never put to a test.

In the first two years of the new regime, United States aid flowed in moderate quantities to help to pay the arrears on Nicaragua's national debt, to improve the country's balance of payments and to back up a currency stabilization plan launched in March 1991. Despite claims by the director of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) in Managua Janet Ballantyne that U.S. aid was given with no conditions, it was clear that credits were being restricted to the larger export-oriented producers and that other monies were being channeled into organizations deemed politically acceptable by the United States government. The director noted with enthusiasm the appearance of the new shops that had popped up recently around the city. USAID funds, she explained, normally went into development projects, but due to the mess the Sandinistas had made of the economy, most of the current aid—around \$552 million in the first two years—was going to stabilize the economy. However, a small portion, some eight million dollars in the 1990-1991 period and a total of twenty million over four years, was marked for the promotion of grassroots democracy so that the people could have a real say in their government. On the surface this seemed similar to what Miguel D'Escoto of the Communal Movement expressed when he spoke of the need to reinvigorate the political and social participation of the grassroots. Could the process of *concertación* be broad enough to include both of these visions of

participatory democracy? _The difference between D'Escoto's definition of democracy and mine,_ the director explained, _is that he always talks about the people's rights without wanting to talk about their responsibilities._⁴⁶

In Ballantyne's opinion, there was a need for *concertación*, but the winners should remember that they had won, and the losers should remember that they had lost. It would take time to get the economy turned around, but the process had begun. That year Nicaragua would stop being a net importer of rice. _The social sector never pulls the economic sector along with it,_ she said. However, when queried about the combined rates of unemployment and underemployment approaching sixty percent, the alarming rise of urban crime and domestic violence in the nineties, and reports of incipient guerilla activity in the countryside, she emphasized that it would take time for Nicaragua to get back on its feet. _In the meantime,_ she said, _the people cope, die and resort to violence._ But in the meantime, too, the returning _Miami Boys_ were setting up shop in the new upscale malls filled with consumer choices for the few who could afford to make them. At the same time, from the Rio conference on development and the environment in June 1992, the insistent voice of a persistent revolutionary sounded a note of reason.

Stop transferring to the third world the lifestyles and consumer habits that ruin the environment. Make human life more rational. Adopt a just international economic order. Use science to achieve sustainable development without pollution. Pay the ecological debt instead of the foreign debt. Eradicate hunger and not humanity.

Now that the supposed threat of communism has disappeared and there is no more pretext to wage cold wars or continue the arms race and military spending, who then is preventing these resources from going immediately to promote third world development and fight the ecological destruction threatening the planet? Enough of selfishness. Enough of insensitivity, irresponsibility, and deceit. Tomorrow will be too late to do what should have been done a long time ago.⁴⁷

There clearly were conditions on U.S. aid to Nicaragua. By July 1992, Jesse Helms was leading the charge, along with ten other senators, to suspend U.S. aid to the Chamorro government. They reasoned that Chamorro's neoliberal economic reforms were insufficient and that the Sandinistas retained too much power. The senators wrote, "We understand that as many as 400 United States citizens have had their property confiscated in Nicaragua and there is no evidence that these properties have been returned to their rightful owners.... We believe that the United States should not give aid to a government that refuses to respect private property rights." Furthermore, the senators opposed the aid on the grounds that the Sandinistas "remain in control of the army, the police, immigration, customs, the legal system and the country's only intelligence agency."⁴⁸ Clearly, if the United States government had evolved to a willingness to "let the Nicaraguan people decide" who would be their rulers, as President Bush had said, it did not appear to be content to let those chosen rulers rule without the benefit of continued U. S. tutelage.

4.2. Continuity and Change in the Transition

As Samuel Huntington notes, "Poverty is a principal, probably the principal, obstacle to democratic development." According to him, "The future of democracy depends on the future of economic development. Obstacles to economic development are obstacles to the expansion of democracy."⁴⁹ If he were simply to add to poverty the arrogance of external control in the name of democracy, his case would be more credible. Yet, it is precisely the international dimension of dictatorial control, sanctioned and even demanded by powerful

liberal regimesCwhich liberal treatments such as Huntington's leave out of the analysis of the constitutive elements of democracy. In his sympathetic yet critical treatment of the Revolution, Salman Rushdie opposed press censorship absolutely, debated the merits of the process in his own mind and concluded that _imperfection, even the deep flaw of censorship, did not constitute a justification for being crushed by a super-power's military and economic force._⁵⁰ What kind of democracy was this in which a people who had struggled under such overwhelmingly adverse conditions to free themselves from the hindrances of United States-Somoza domination, should triumph only to be crushed slowly and deliberately for their efforts?

As noted by Morris Blachman and Kenneth Sharpe in 1992, _If we judge electoral politics in Central America using formal procedural criteria drawn from Western European and North American electoral and party systems, we conclude that all countries except Costa Rica and to some extent Nicaragua are far from democratic._⁵¹ Sandinista practice seemed to borrow more closely from the elite tendencies of Marxism and liberal democracy when those tendencies appeared to offer the best ways to pursue their long term goals of popular democracy. The Sandinistas had created not only a _mixed economy_; they had created a new cultural mixture and a mixed polity in a world of increasing social segregation. In contrast to conventional interpretations of revolutionary practice and official (anti-communist) versions of history, it was a mixture that had incorporated more influence of liberal democracy than any of its northern neighbors in Central America.

The Nicaragua of the 1990s appears to be in a period that might be called one of a _democratization of violence_ with various combinations of *recontras* and *recompas* forming

revueltos and *rejuntos* being held in check by the national army under Sandinista command.

The stark contrast between rich and poor and the sharp deterioration of conditions for the majority of Nicaraguans today is daunting. The viability of liberal democracy is doubtful in this context. Huntington cites seven factors that have been present in past reversals:

- 1) the weakness of democratic values among key elite groups and the general public;
- 2) severe economic setbacks, which intensified social conflict and enhanced the popularity of remedies that could be imposed only by authoritarian governments;
- 3) social and political polarization, often produced by leftist governments seeking the rapid introduction of major social and economic reforms;
- 4) the determination of conservative middle-class and upper-class groups to exclude populist and leftist movements and lower-class groups from political power;
- 5) the breakdown of law and order resulting from terrorism or insurgency;
- 6) intervention or conquest by a nondemocratic foreign power;
- 7) *_reverse snowballing_* triggered by the collapse or overthrow of democratic systems in other countries.⁵²

What are possible causes of reversal of democratic transitions in the 1990s? According to Huntington, *_systemic failures of democratic regimes to operate effectively,...sustained inability to provide welfare, prosperity, equity, justice, domestic order, or external security could over time undermine the legitimacy...of democratic government._*⁵³ Secondly, the demonstration or *_reverse snowballing_* effect of a series of authoritarian acts such as the 1991 Haitian coup, the attempted coup in Venezuela and the *_auto-golpe_* in Peru in 1992 *_could have ramifying effects even on other countries where those preconditions (for democracy) are strong._*⁵⁴ Finally, *_[i]f a nondemocratic state greatly increased its power and began to expand beyond its borders, this too could stimulate authoritarian movements in other countries._*⁵⁵ He continues with a variety of possibilities including religious

fundamentalism, authoritarian nationalism, populist dictatorship, communal dictatorship, and _electronic dictatorship,_ an interesting form of authoritarian rule _made possible and legitimated by the regime's ability to manipulate information, the media, and sophisticated means of communication._⁵⁶ However, inadequate regime performance, the demonstration effect of the authoritarian acts of others, and external abuse of power—whether by nondemocratic or democratic foreign powers, although he does not account for the latter—, are the three main factors he considers as probable causes of reversal of democratic transitions. The extent to which these factors are present in the Nicaragua of the 1990s can be seen in the process of *concertación* which began in the final years of Sandinista rule and continued under the Chamorro regime.

4.3. The Politics of *Concertación*

The day of her inauguration, Violeta Chamorro proclaimed the primacy of liberal democracy and announced her intention to reconcile the polarized Nicaraguan polity under her leadership. As she put it,

There is no sovereignty without liberty. There is no justice without liberty. There will be no Nicaragua without liberty because the soul and the reason for being of all Nicaraguans is liberty. But liberty is also respect. Respect for the rights of others; respect for law, respect for the conscience and opinions of others.⁵⁷

One element of the _respect_ that she would show the Sandinistas would be her recognition of the role they would have to play in maintaining social order and political stability. Thus, General Humberto Ortega, brother of outgoing president Daniel Ortega, would remain in command of the national armed forces for the time being.⁵⁸ Critics would

charge that this diminished Nicaragua's liberal democratic credentials, but Nicaragua was moving in a liberal democratic direction, however haltingly. To the surprise of many of their adversaries, most Sandinistas accepted their new role of loyal opposition. To the surprise of many Sandinistas, losing state power at the ballot box brought new opportunities to evaluate the experience of the decade past and to reconsider priorities and strategies for the future without having to contend with the heavy weight of governing in troubled times. Nicaragua's liberal democracy had come sooner and with different dimensions than most Nicaraguans or outside observers had expected, but it had come. Nothing spoke more eloquently of that achievement than the transfer of power which took place on 25 April 1990 with the inauguration of President Chamorro.

In the immediate aftermath of their electoral defeat in 1990, the Sandinistas spoke of governing from below. As defeated candidate Daniel Ortega expressed the concept,

We were not born above, we were born below and we are accustomed to fighting and struggling in front of our executioners, in front of our torturers. We are accustomed to fighting and struggling from the prisons. Therefore, now that there is a popular power, a revolutionary power, we are in much better condition, in the short term, to return to govern this country from above.

The day that we return to govern from above will arrive because the FSLN with the people of Nicaragua, will continue governing from below...

We will continue governing from below, and we will make them respect our rights. They want to govern, fine, we have already given them the opportunity to govern, we have passed on to them the charge and the charge is a very heavy one, we are going to see how it goes for them.

They wanted the Front to be the opposition. Fine, we are the opposition and we are going to defend this democracy so that the people can exercise its full right of opposition, not to be an extreme or capricious opposition, but rather one against all that which goes against the people, because we will not permit that to take place...

Brothers and sisters, we are going to continue this battle for democracy, for national dignity, for Nicaragua, and we are going back to the neighborhoods, to the factories, to the people, we will continue with the Face the People [meetings], because the FSLN

[Sandinista National Liberation Front] was born in the people, is in the people, and never will stop being in the people.⁵⁹

Whatever lift the concept of governing from below might have given to the party faithful, it led some others to doubt the sincerity of the FSLN's professed willingness to cooperate in a smooth transition of power and its acceptance of the voters' mandate that there be a change in the national government. On the other hand, for those who felt that the context of the elections had been unjust, unfair and profoundly undemocratic, the rhetoric of governing from below offered a tangible way for people to maintain their own dignity and their hope in a future based on the potential of popular participation in the affairs of the nation. This relieved some of the pressure that might have acted as an obstacle to the transferral of the reins of power to the Chamorro government. At the same time, an important process of negotiation of the terms of the transition took place between the winners and losers of the elections. A process that led to substantive compromises which were reflected in the Transition Accords. Key elements of these accords included respect for the Revolutionary Constitution, the honoring of titles to property granted during Sandinista rule and the continuity of Sandinista leadership in the armed forces and national police.⁶⁰

During the first year of UNO rule the process of accommodation between the Chamorro-Lacayo faction of UNO and the pragmatic leadership of the FSLN culminated in a series of understandings known as *_concertación_* agreements, a term which connotes a coming together in mutual compromise and cooperation for the common good of the nation.⁶¹ As this process deepened and weathered a series of strikes, the pragmatists within UNO and the FSLN began to create the political space in which a new stabilizing politics of a reconstituted political system could be played out.⁶² Interestingly, family ties seemed to be playing an

important role in the politics of *concertación*, not only with respect to domestic political cleavages, but inCa perhaps unexpectedCdefense of Nicaragua's national dignity.

The presence of notable families on both sides of the profound political fractures in contemporary Nicaragua may...be understood as a moderating buffer against foreign political pressures, particularly the virulent anti-Sandinismo expressed by agencies and high-ranking officials of the US government. Family interconnections have woven a defensive web over doña Violeta's government to confront pressures from US hardliners to remove from the state, and above all from the army, every remnant of Sandinismo, and to protect Sandinista cousins in their positions. Accordingly, what some observers interpret as the FSLN's cooperation in the stabilization of doña Violeta's government is made easier by those family links, or at least these links contribute to a reduction in the intensity of confrontations.⁶³

In contrast to the old politics of polarization, recrimination and the continuation of politics by other means, the new politics of *concertación* was planted in the composted soil of national exhaustion with the realities of the recent past. Flanking the _centrists_ within UNO and the FSLN were the extremists to the right and the left within the divided UNO and the divided FSLN and beyond. These were the players who were still true believers in their theories of history and still believed in the necessity of winning in a zero sum game of annihilation of the enemy.

In the meantime, the centrists went forward, marching into *terra incognita*, trying against all odds to construct something that would work; trying to find a middle path that would enable Nicaraguans to produce as well as to consume, to benefit from as well as to contribute to national development. As *envío* writers put it, they were trying to give neoliberalism a soul. As the process of consultation between the Minister of the Presidency, Antonio Lacayo, and the leadership of the FSLN became normal, speculation arose that the government and the Sandinistas were engaged in a common project of _co-government._ Despite their evident accommodation, both sides pointed to the lack of Sandinista cabinet members and insisted

that their consultations fell far short of constituting a form of co-government. Nevertheless, by mid-year 1992 they were approaching the creation of an institutional arrangement with Sandinista participation in governmental commissions which would lead to national accords. This quest, of course, seemed fraught with contradictions.

Looked at from the outside, it seems impossible that a revolutionary social force politically committed to the popular sector of society and organized as a party could enter into institutional agreements to share political responsibilities with a neoliberal government committed to capital and big business. But despite the theoretical incompatibility of the two projects, and the implicit risks for both the government and the FSLN of a political strategy that conceals both projects, the waters seem to be parting to make way for what some hopefully refer to as *_revolutionary neoliberalism._*⁶⁴

Despite the hope for a neoliberalism that would incorporate the popular sectors into a viable national project, the harsh reality remains that this process is circumscribed within the limits set by foreign financial agencies as reflected by the policy prescriptions of the IMF. As Lacayo has expressed it, *_We are willing to incorporate the Sandinista reform proposals into the plan and go forward with them, as long as the international lending agencies 'look with favor' on them._*⁶⁵ However, this fiscal model tends to leave out the estimated 86 percent of the rural population and 55 percent of urban inhabitants who are unable to satisfy their basic needs while waiting for economic *_take-off._* As former contra general staff officer and high level negotiator, Rubén, put it in mid-1991, *_Our peasants need health centers, they need schools, they need financing, they need fair prices for their crops, they need roads. The problem is that the government can't provide these things now. It's broke._*⁶⁶ From there, we re-enter the logic of exaggerated social marginalization, social unrest, political mobilization, political exclusion and apocalypse. Important sectors of former contras, alienated from the Chamorro

government and at the margins of the *concertación*, have declared their intentions to form a political party which would attract demobilized Sandinistas,

based on the common peasant identity...a party of the poor, the plebeian masses, the mestizos, the peasants, the *chapiollos* [hicks], those who risked and gave their lives, health and fortunes independently of the banners imposed by the rich, white, cultured urbanite gentlemen from either side, who are *familia* to one another and who hold control of government institutions both then and now.⁶⁷

Despite the politics of exhaustion and the palpable will to reconcile the nation, often expressed within families that had split their thought and behavior during the eighties, for some it was difficult to think that much had really changed from the *status quo ante*. With Nicaraguan vocabulary continuing to grow by the invention of new words such as *recontras*, *recompas*, *revueltos*, and *rejuntos*, it was possible for one United States journalist to conclude,

New violence was brewing. To me it looked as though low-level warfare could become endemic. The emergence of the re-contras had served to underline just how little the contra war had accomplished. After a decade of fighting, Nicaragua suffered from all the maladies that had plagued it a decade earlier: elite rule, police corruption and abuse, land hunger, illiteracy, contagion. In the U.S. view, the war that made Washington feel good had come to a storybook conclusion. But in Nicaragua, it was proving harder to move on; the contra war would remain the nation's frame of reference for years to come.⁶⁸

Beginning in 1992 through the middle of the decade, it was difficult to see how Nicaragua's *concertación* could hold together. It was becoming more and more contradictory. In mid-1992 army troops under the command of General Humberto Ortega were forcing landless peasants off of large farms which were being returned to previous owners and they were using force to dislodge workers occupying state factories.⁶⁹ Anticipating a new name in place of the _Sandinista Popular Army,_ Rafael Solís explained, _It is very important that the United States have the perception that this is a national army that will maintain order._⁷⁰ As the army paired down to between 18,500 and 27,000 troops and became more professional, it

looked less Sandinista than *Ortequista*, but it seemed that the man who headed it would probably withstand calls from the political right for his resignation.⁷¹ He had already won the apparent approval of then U.S. Secretary of State, James Baker.⁷²

The *concertación* had differential impacts. Many of the 60,000 discharged soldiers looked with resentment upon a number of their former high-ranking officers who had retired as large landowners or owners of companies. As a veteran with eleven years of military service expressed it, _At Christmas we asked for some food from the army and we got nothing. We have received more support from Violeta than from the EPS [Sandinista Popular Army]. The government gave us rice, beans, sugar and a toy per family. The army has turned its back on us. I feel betrayed._⁷³ Yet, the Sandinistas had a history of pragmatism and the Ortegas came out of the most pragmatic wing of the FSLN. Perhaps this cooperation with the government was simply the most sober and prudent reflection of an evolving Sandinista reading of the historical moment rendered to date. At the same time, President Chamorro was coming under the coordinated pressure of her Vice President, Virgilio Godoy, National Assembly president Alfredo César, and Managua mayor Arnoldo Alemán in the form of a _technical coup_ in an effort to force her to dismiss General Ortega and to pass a new property law which would return property deeded during Sandinista rule to its previous owners. The ultimate aim of this alliance of forces reportedly was to force Violeta's resignation which would open the door to a Godoy presidency.⁷⁴ Alternatively, rumors circulating in Managua in 1992 suggested that this group might call for early elections in 1994 rather than as scheduled in 1996.⁷⁵

The regime's moves to bring the economic model into line with general standards approved by the prevailing international consensus seemed to require yet greater social sacrifice and political repression, making the legitimacy of the liberal parliamentary process more difficult to discern for large and growing sectors of the population.⁷⁶ As polarization deepened toward the end of 1992, General Humberto Ortega reflected on the precarious nature of post-revolutionary politics, “In Nicaragua there is a cult of war and arms,” he said, “and if there is no way out of the serious political-social situation, it could lead to a new violent and anarchic outbreak, increasingly dangerous for the nation's stability.”⁷⁷ By year's end, President Chamorro had dismissed National Assembly president Alfredo César and installed a provisional board of directors as Governance Minister Alfredo Mendieta posted police at the House of Government to block entry until new Assembly leaders could be elected in the new year.⁷⁸ As 1993 began, nine UNO dissidents, identified as centrists, joined with the 39 Sandinistas in the National Assembly to elect Socialist Party member Gustavo Tablada to replace Alfredo César as Assembly president while 1,000 UNO demonstrators marched outside protesting the election as a masquerade and demanding the resignation of Presidency Minister Lacayo as well as that of President Chamorro.⁷⁹ Meanwhile, a new regime was coming to power in Washington led by a president who employed a North American version of the rhetoric of *concertación*, making references to a new covenant of shared sacrifice which could not be readily deciphered. Beyond his support for the North American Free Trade Agreement, the new U.S. president said little about his policies toward Latin America, and he appeared unsure of whom to appoint as under secretary of state for the region. Nevertheless, his election signaled the end of the Reagan-

Bush years and gave some relief to an embattled liberal democratic center which sought to establish a new center of gravity to provide stability to the Nicaraguan political system.⁸⁰ At the close of the December 1994 Summit of the Americas, however, President Clinton invoked the *spirit of Miami* as if all good things would come together, but amidst that rarified rhetoric of hope, it was difficult to find substantive and effective commitments to the hemisphere's poor—the very key to a lasting transition to democracy.

5. Conclusion

While it is important to recognize that each Central American country has its own particular history and its uniquely national search for an appropriate democracy, it is equally important to recall that each of the five Central American republics shares much in common. Although much better situated and prepared, even the exception of Costa Rica's liberal democracy cannot escape this reality.⁸¹ The rule in Central America has been one of oligarchy-led, militarily enforced and U.S. backed regimes which have ruled over deeply divided societies—prime examples of exclusionary corporatism (sometimes with a veneer of elite pluralism to fashion *democracias de fachada*). Increasingly today, the proclivity of extranational institutions to dictate liberal economic and punishing social policies threatens the ability of would-be social democracies from living up to the first part of their name. If this trend continues, there will likely be a temptation to use armed force in Costa Rica; the

incipient efforts at political liberalization in northern Central America will be challenged as the levels of urban street violence, hemorrhagic dengue fever and rural insecurity continue to rise; and the new Central American exception of Nicaragua's liberal democracy—made possible by a revolutionary rupture with the past followed by a process of national reconciliation—could become increasingly difficult to differentiate from a revised and updated form of *Somocismo*—a modified exclusionary corporatism with elections.⁸²

An alternative conclusion would observe that the revolutionary rupture with the past appears not to have been as complete as initially thought, hoped or feared. Similarly, the recurring manifestations of pre-revolutionary political patterns are likely to be less definitive than expected, feared or hoped. If so, then a narrow opening can be found between the complete victories imagined by the protagonists of the Central American political traditions discussed here—An opening of partial victories through which Nicaraguans could pass as they reach for a new consensus based not on the premise that the winners take all, but on the national certainty that all must be winners.⁸³

¹This is a revised and shortened version of my paper by the same title presented at the Annual Meeting of the North Central Council of Latin Americanists (NCCLA) at La Crosse, Wisconsin, 22-24 September, 1994. I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer whose detailed comments prompted several important revisions of a previous version of this paper. I also gratefully acknowledge travel support from the Office of the Dean, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, Butler University which facilitated presentation of this research to my NCCLA colleagues.

²For a comprehensive discussion of these alternative perspectives where I test the hypothesis that the Sandinistas sought to realize a new hybrid of the popular tendencies of the three traditions and conclude that they were unable to do so, see my *El Proceso, from Triunfo to Concertación: In Search of Appropriate Democracy in Nicaragua (1979-1993)*, Ph.D. dissertation, University of North Carolina, 1994.

³As quoted in Salman Rushdie, *The Jaguar Smile: A Nicaraguan Journey*, New York: Viking, 1987, p. 31.

⁴Tina Rosenberg, *Children of Cain: Violence and the Violent in Latin America*, New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1991, p. 329.

⁵See Guillermo O'Donnell, *Introduction to the Latin American Cases*, in Guillermo O'Donnell, Philippe C. Schmitter, and Laurence Whitehead, Eds., *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Latin America*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987, p. 10.

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 14. Indeed, amidst widespread democratization as understood within the liberal paradigm, Abraham F. Lowenthal notes, *Although it has become unfashionable worldwide to talk about class struggle, the divisions in Latin America have become notably sharper. Income distribution, long more inequitable in Latin America than elsewhere in the world, has become even more unequal in most countries.* See his *Charting a new course*, *Hemisfile*, Volume 5, No. 4, July/August 1994, p. 12.

⁷Richard Stahler-Sholk, *Building Democracy in Nicaragua*, in George A. Lopez and Michael Stohl, eds., *Liberalization and Redemocratization in Latin America*, New York: Greenwood Press, 1987, p. 60.

⁸*Ibid.*

⁹John A. Peeler, *Latin American Democracies*, Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1985, p. 5.

¹⁰*Ibid.*

¹¹Ronald H. Chilcote and Joel C. Edelstein, *Latin America: Capitalist and Socialist Perspectives of Development and Underdevelopment*, Boulder: Westview Press, 1986, p. 98.

¹²However, in the 1990s, many on the left as well as others, exhausted by the wars of the 1980s, were inclined to try to work out liberal formulas of civilian-military relations. See, for example, Jorge Castañeda, *Utopia Unarmed: The Latin American Left After the Cold War*, New York: Vintage, 1993.

¹³As cited by Mark B. Rosenberg, *Obstacles to Democracy in Central America*, in James M. Malloy and Mitchell A. Seligson, eds., *Authoritarians and Democrats: Regime Transition in Latin America*, Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh

Press, 1987, pp. 199-200. See Gabriel Aguilera, *Las perspectivas de la crisis en Centroamérica*, presented at the Sixth Central American Congress of Sociology in Panama, March 1985.

¹⁴This is visible most recently in the Mexican government's repression of the Zapatista uprising in Chiapas and the organized attack on Bishop Ruiz by local elites in early 1995. See John Ross, *Ruiz under fire in Mexico*, *Latinamerica Press*, Vol. 27, No. 7, March 2, 1995, pp. 1 and 8.

¹⁵O'Donnell, *Introduction to the Latin American Cases*, pp. 4-6.

¹⁶See Michael Soberg Shugart, *Thinking about the Next Revolution: Lessons from U.S. Policy in Nicaragua*, *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs*, 29:1, Spring 1987, pp. 73-92.

¹⁷For an approach promoting such a course, see Richard Fagen, *Forging Peace: The Challenge of Central America*, New York: Basil Blackwell Inc., 1987.

¹⁸Sergio Ramírez, *Social Change and Democracy*, *Nicaraguan Perspectives*, No. 13, Spring 1987, p. 5, my emphasis.

¹⁹Peeler, *Latin American Democracies*, pp. 126-127.

²⁰See Morris J. Blachman and Kenneth E. Sharpe, *The Transitions to 'Electoral' and Democratic Politics in Central America: Assessing the Role of Political Parties*, in Louis W. Goodman, William M. LeoGrande, and Johanna Mendelson Forman, eds., *Political Parties and Democracy in Central America*, Boulder: Westview Press, 1992, p. 38.

²¹John Booth, *Costa Rican Democracy*, *World Development*, 150: 1, Summer 1987, p. 47.

²²*Ibid.*

²³Mitchell A. Seligson, *Development, Democratization, and Decay: Central America at the Crossroads*, in James M. Malloy and Mitchell A. Seligson, eds., *Authoritarians and Democrats: Regime Transition in Latin America*, Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1987, pp. 181-184.

²⁴Oscar Arias Sánchez, *El poder tiende a concentrarse*, in Ricardo Sol, ed., *El Reto Democrático en Centroamérica*, San José: Departamento Ecuménico de Investigaciones, 1983, pp. 95-96.

²⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 97-98, my emphasis.

²⁶Booth, *Costa Rican Democracy*, p. 48.

²⁷Manuel Rojas B. *Costa Rica: ¿liberación o liberalismo?* *Nueva Sociedad*, 83, Mayo/Junio 1986, p. 9.

²⁸See Lowell Gudmundson, *Costa Rica's Arias at Midterm*, *Current History*, 86: 524, December 1987, p. 431.

²⁹See Peeler, *Latin American Democracies*, p. 127.

³⁰See Booth, *Costa Rican Democracy*, pp. 50-51.

³¹Howard J. Wiarda, *Finding Our Way? Toward Maturity in U.S.-Latin American Relations*, Washington: American Enterprise Institute, 1987, p. 20.

³²Rodolfo Cerdas Cruz, *Colonial Heritage, External Domination, and Political Systems in Central America*, in Louis W. Goodman, William M. LeoGrande, and Johanna Mendelson Forman, eds., *Political Parties and Democracy in Central America*, Boulder: Westview Press, 1992, pp. 22-25; the quote appears on p. 23.

³³Blachman and Sharpe, *The Transition to Electoral...*, pp. 36-37.

³⁴Roland H. Ebel, *The Development and Decline of the Central American City-State*, in Howard J. Wiarda, ed., *Rift and Revolution: The Central American Imbroglia*, Washington: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1984, pp. 70 and 91.

³⁵Shugart, *Thinking About the Next...*, p. 13.

³⁶*Ibid.*, p. 20.

³⁷Department of Social Sciences, Universidad de El Salvador, *An Analysis of the Correlation of Forces in El Salvador*, *Latin American Perspectives*, Issue 55, 14:4, Fall 1987, p. 430.

³⁸Interview with Alfonso Rivas, President of the Board of Directors of the Cuscatlan Reconstruction Committee of Suchitoto, 22 July 1994. In the presidential run-off ARENA's Armando Calderón Sol received 68.35 percent of the vote followed by the FMLN-led left coalition's Rubén Zamora with 24.9 percent. The vote percentages for the legislative Assembly were split among ARENA, the FMLN and the Christian Democrats with 45 percent, 21.4 percent and 17.9 percent respectively. ARENA won 207 municipalities, the Christian Democrats 30, the FMLN 15, the National Conciliation Party 9 and the Authentic Christian Movement 1. See the Report by the U.S. Citizens Elections Observer Mission, *Free and Fair? The Conduct of El Salvador's 1994 Elections*, June 1994, p. 9. I am grateful to Tim Crouse, Program Director of Companion Community Development Alternatives, for sharing this report with me.

³⁹Joseph Tulchin and Knut Walter, *Nicaragua: The Limits of Intervention*, in Lowenthal Abraham F., ed., *Exporting Democracy: The United States and Latin America, Case Studies*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991, p. 112.

⁴⁰Gearóid Ó Tuathail, *The Creation of a New Nicaragua? A Study of the Processes of Reproduction and Transformation under the Sandinistas, 1979-1985, with Special Emphasis on the Economy*, Occasional Publications of the Department of Geography, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Paper Number 15, January, 1988, p. 13.

⁴¹Of course, not all evidence of authoritarian tendencies can be attributed to U.S. interference in the region. This has been made clear most recently by the critique of the FSLN by the newly formed Movimiento Renovador Sandinista (MRS) led by Sergio Ramírez. See, for example, Leslie Wirpsa, *Ernesto Cardenal describes Sandinista split*, *National Catholic Reporter*, May 26, 1995, p. 9.

⁴²In addition to Violeta Chamorro, the list includes Alfredo Cristiani in El Salvador, Rafael Callejas in Honduras, Rafael Calderón in Costa Rica, and Jorge Serrano in Guatemala. See William I. Robinson, *A Faustian Bargain: U. S. Intervention*

in the *Nicaraguan Elections and American Foreign Policy in the Post-Cold War Era*, Boulder: Westview Press, 1992, note 56, p. 194. Officially, the NED was created by the U.S. Congress to support the development of democratic processes rather than to concern itself with partisan outcomes. However, as Robinson's study shows, unofficially the NED has served political interests.

⁴³Stephen Kinzer, *Blood of Brothers: Life and War in Nicaragua*, New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1991, p. 335.

⁴⁴Roy Gutman, *Banana Diplomacy: The Making of American Policy in Nicaragua, 1981-1987*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988, p. 20.

⁴⁵Sam Dillon, *Comandos: The CIA and Nicaragua's Contra Rebels*, New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1991, p. 284.

⁴⁶(Separate) group interviews with Miguel D'Escoto and Janet Ballantyne, Managua, January 9, 1992.

⁴⁷Fidel Castro, Speech in Rio, in *cdp: nfd.ifeatures*, July 25, 1992. Cuban development policy has often failed to meet these standards for sustainable development, but that is not a reason to ignore this warning.

⁴⁸Inter Press Service, *_Nicaragua: Ten Senators Back Suspension of U. S. Aid,_* Inter Press Service, July 7, 1992.

⁴⁹Samuel Huntington, *_Will More Countries Become Democratic?_* *Political Science Quarterly*, Volume 99, Summer, 1991, p. 31.

⁵⁰Rushdie, *The Jaguar Smile*, p. 49.

⁵¹Blachman and Sharpe, *_The Transition to Electoral..._*, p. 43.

⁵²Huntington, *_Will More Countries..._*, pp. 17-18.

⁵³*Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*

⁵⁵*Ibid.*

⁵⁶*Ibid.*, p. 20.

⁵⁷Violeta Chamorro as cited by Stephen Schwartz, *A Strange Silence: The Emergence of Democracy in Nicaragua*, San Francisco: Institute for Contemporary Studies, 1992, pp. 127-128.

⁵⁸In mid 1994, General Ortega decided he would step down on February 21, 1995 contingent upon passage of the Military Organization Law with new regulations governing the terms of office in the military including the stipulation that the commander in chief of the armed forces would serve a term of five years. General Major Joaquín Cuadra Lacayo succeeded Ortega in keeping with the announced schedule. See *_Ortega to Leave Command of Military Forces in February 1995,_* *La Jornada* (Mexico City), 5 May 1994, p. 50, as translated and reprinted in *Central America NewsPak*, Volume 9, No. 7, Issue 215, May 2-May 15, 1994, p. 10.

⁵⁹Resolución de la Asamblea Sandinista, *‘Cambios de Gobierno...y la Revolución se queda,’* in Editorial Revolución, *Elecciones en Nicaragua*, Madrid: Editorial Revolución, 1990, pp. 106-107.

⁶⁰By 1995, however, the constitution had undergone major reforms; property disputes continued to be waged; and Humberto Ortega and René Vivas had been replaced as the heads of the military and police respectively (see note 58 above).

⁶¹It should be remembered, however, that the process and spirit of *concertación* had begun during the electoral campaign in the fall of 1989. In an interview on 19 February 1990, Central American Historical Institute director Alvaro Argüello indicated a process of consensus building which was a social process with an international dimension including the church, the private sector, and the government, which specifically acknowledged the need for a permanent end to the contra war. French Socialist Jean Silverman, interviewed on 20 February 1990, saw in this earlier *concertación* the beginnings of a vision of a national project of cooperation between competing parties after the 1990 elections. University of Central America sociologist Amalia Chamorro, in an interview 19 February 1990, noted the beginnings of *concertación* in the late 80s with the return of the Beauty Contest and the renewed orientation toward a market economy.

⁶²Part of the adhesive which helped to keep the *concertación* from coming apart, apparently, could be found in an intricate set of interlocking family lineages. Just as children of traditional elite families were able to send their children to universities in Western Europe and the United States with support from the revolutionary government while others were sent to Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, the traditional sectors within the ruling UNO coalition clustered in the *‘grupo de Las Palmas,’* named after the Managua neighborhood in which Violeta lives, display *‘a strong propensity to maintain a dialogue with the FSLN.’* See Carlos Vilas, *‘Family Affairs: Class, Lineage and Politics in Contemporary Nicaragua,’* *Journal of Latin American Studies*, Volume 24, Part 2, May, 1992, pp. 331-337; the quoted passage is from p. 335.

⁶³*Ibid.*, p. 339.

⁶⁴Instituto Histórico Centroamericano, *‘The FSLN-Government Balancing Act,’* *envío*, Managua, Volume 11, Number 131, June 1992, p. 7.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, my emphasis. With regard to the restrictive standards of the IMF, see Fernando Henrique Cardoso, *‘Democracia y Desarrollo,’* *Revista de la CEPAL*, 56, Agosto 1995, pp. 7-11, where he replies to an IMF denial of credits by exclaiming, *‘What do you know about this? For the love of God, a little less arrogance...’* They need a bit more of political dimension, the dimension of democracy...of the valor and of the faith that...society has. The self esteem, the capacity to recuperate. All of this counts. [We need]...criteria that are a bit broader. That are not just hypotheses and theories that are so often mere prejudices...Our people deserve better than that. They deserve to have us exercise leadership that permits an effective advancement of democracy and growth with greater equality and social justice_ (11).

⁶⁶Dillon, *Comandos*, p. 313.

⁶⁷Vilas, *‘Family Affairs...,’* p. 336.

⁶⁸Dillon, *Comandos*, p. 319.

⁶⁹Trish O’Kane, *‘Nicaraguan army now courts US military,’* *Latinamerica Press*, July 16, 1992, p. 3.

⁷⁰Ibid., Solís is Humberto Ortega's lawyer. A U. S. Army munitions team traveled to Nicaragua to assist in the counting and classification of munitions, and Nicaragua military officers had begun attending classes in U. S. military academies.

⁷¹Estimates of troops size vary. In its July 30, 1992 issue, *Latin American Weekly Report* gives the lower number while Trish O'Kane reports the higher figure in her report, cited above. In mid 1994, when Ortega announced his intention to step down in February 1995, he probably did so more for his own domestic political reasons than to respond to U. S. pressure.

⁷²Of course, the appeal for approval from Washington is not new in Nicaraguan history. As Tulchin and Walter observe, beginning as early as the period leading up to the U.S. supervised elections of 1912, competing factions have been prepared to do whatever was necessary to precipitate U.S. intervention on their behalf because that was the only way they could have access to power. Without such intervention, either in the form of persuasion and pressure by the local representative of the U.S. government or by the threat of force from officials in Washington, it was impossible to effect a peaceful change in control of the central government_ (_Nicaragua: The Limits of...,_ p. 119).

⁷³As quoted in O'Kane, _Nicaraguan Army...,_ p. 3.

⁷⁴Inter Press Service, _Nicaragua: Chamorro Shrugs Off 'Technical' Coup,_, newsdesk, edp.englilibrary, August 10, 1992.

⁷⁵However, by 1994 conservative opponents focused on passage of a new law that would prohibit Antonio Lacayo from succeeding Violeta in the presidency by virtue of their family ties. See John Otis, _Nicaragua Debates Whether Love, Politics can Mix,_, *Miami Herald*, 9 July 1994, p. 17A.

⁷⁶Instituto Histórico Centroamericano, _The Social Tidal Wave,_, *envío*, Managua, Volume 11, Number 136, November 1992, pp. 7-9. In an evaluation of the government's response to pressures from the IMF, the World Bank, and the United States government, the authors concluded, _The government could get a technical 'A,' but in social conduct it is a flunk-out. According to United Nations data, 53% of the economically active population are under- or unemployed; 70% of all Nicaraguans have trouble satisfying their most basic needs; infant mortality is 71.8 per 1,000 live births; social security only covers 18% of the employed population; rural illiteracy is an estimated 40%; 3 out of 4 Nicaraguans do not have access to sewage services or even latrines; 62.5% have inadequate housing and no consistent access to potable water; 12.5% live in dangerously overcrowded conditions; and 70% have a calorie intake below the minimum considered necessary for normal development_ (4).

⁷⁷nicanetny, *NY Nica News Update* #146, November 15, 1992.

⁷⁸nicanetny, *NY Nica News Update* #153, January 3, 1993.

⁷⁹Others elected to Assembly leadership were Sandinista Reinaldo Antonio Téfel, first vice president; Liberals Iván Salvador Madrid and Guillermo Chavarris, second and third vice presidents, respectively; Conservative Frank Duarte, first secretary; and Sandinistas Ray Hooker and Marcia Quezada, second and third secretaries, respectively. See nicanetny, *NY Nica News Update* #155, January 18, 1993.

⁸⁰Clinton's apparent first choice for the Assistant Secretary position for Latin America, Mario Baeza, was defeated by conservative opposition led by Jorge Mas Canosa and the Cuban American National Foundation. Clinton then settled on Alexander Watson for the position. By 1994, Watson and United States Ambassador to Nicaragua John Maisto had worked out what they referred to as a policy of _constructive neutrality_ over the objections of North Carolina senator Jesse Helms. See Arnie Matlin, personal notes of Sister Cities Conference '94 keynote address by Xavier Gorostiaga, July 21, 1994, ahmatlingvcp in igc:carnet.sisters, August 2, 1994.

⁸¹See Richard L. Millett, 'Central America's Enduring Conflicts,' *Current History*, Volume 93, Number 581, March 1994, p. 124.

⁸²Of course, something similar could also be developing in the northern Central American cases, but revolutionaries have neither held nor relinquished national power there and their experience with liberal democracy is more limited than even that of Nicaragua. If Nicaragua's identification as a liberal democracy is tentative and qualified, it is too early to make equivalent claims in Honduras, El Salvador or Guatemala.

⁸³Brian Meeks' discussion of Roberto Mangabeira Unger's, *False Necessity: Anti-Necessitarian Theory in the Service of Radical Democracy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987 is useful in this regard. What is needed, he concludes in his *Caribbean Revolutions and Revolutionary Theory: An Assessment of Cuba, Nicaragua and Grenada*, New York: MacMillan Caribbean, 1993, is 'an 'anti-necessitarian' approach, which neither treats social reality as inevitable nor determined by a pre-ordained agenda of possible change' (37), but rather 'a more flexible multi-layered and cumulative approach to change...a window which may look out in many possible directions, including one opening towards greater disentanglement' (40).