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Review of Sandinista Narratives: Religion, Sandinismo, and Emotions in the Making of the Nicaraguan Insurrection and Revolution

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Review of *Sandinista Narratives: Religion, Sandinismo, and Emotions in the Making of the Nicaraguan Insurrection and Revolution*

Comments

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revolutionary subjects is less a product of top-down universalistic and abstract ideological appeals than it is a result of being nested in specific national, historical, and cultural contexts, and shaped in contingent and dynamic processes of sociopolitical upheaval. *Sandinista Narratives* argues that opponents of the Somoza dictatorship did not share a uniform set of motivations or logics. Rather, they were inspired by a complex array of values and beliefs—Catholic liberation theology, self-defense, Sandinismo, and Marxism—interpreted through and embedded in Nicaraguan culture. Reed provides a sophisticated analysis of how taken-for-granted cultural practices can form part of a process of revolutionary subjectivity formation and how tradition can be mobilized and reshaped with creativity and self-awareness.

Early chapters offer insights into consciousness raising in Christian Base Communities (CBCs) during the prerevolutionary period and describe spiritual exploration and transformation as a basis for progressive activism. They examine core precepts of the Catholic liberation theology movement and how it was interpreted and adapted to Nicaraguan realities. In CBC counterhegemonic spaces, participants forged and shared collective interests through reinterpretation of Biblical narratives. Activists gained a sense of purpose, a commitment to resistance and social change, and a rationale for political action. Similarly, Sandinismo, named after the national folk hero, Augusto Sandino who fought the U.S. Marine occupation of Nicaragua in the 1920s and 1930s, “provided a logic of conduct and action, a cognitive and emotional map that mediated the relationship between objective conditions and radical mobilization” (p. 122).

Sandinista Narratives next explores how the Nicaraguan revolutionary movement gained momentum with a series of contingent events, both spontaneous and driven by a mix of actors—the FSLN guerrillas, political parties, and the government. FSLN guerrillas planned “accelerators,” (p. 141) such as open defiance of the Somoza regime and symbolic armed victories, that emotionally empowered participants, and shifted emotions to courage and pride. Other “emotional moments” (p. 2) of state repression in the 1970s—the assassination of a well-known opposition journalist or later aerial bombing campaigns—were interpreted in deeply emotive ways, fueling collective moral outrage and further resistance.

In 1979, the Somoza regime was toppled and the FSLN initiated its program of economic and social transformation. The dynamics of mobilization shifted from popular culture to encompass the FSLM’s more explicitly ideological mobilization of revolutionary subjectivity. Reed argues that this period of revolutionary consolidation saw the

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Jean-Pierre Reed’s *Sandinista Narratives: Religion, Sandinismo, and Emotions in the Making of the Nicaraguan Insurrection and Revolution* explores the individual and collective formation of revolutionary identity and agency in Nicaragua. Expansive in historical scope, it covers the 1970s guerrilla struggles to overthrow the Somoza family dictatorship, the 1980s FSLN (Sandinista National Liberation Front) revolutionary government, and the post-revolutionary period. Reed approaches political identities not as self-apparent or static, but as reflexive projects of ongoing, and often enduring, transformations of self. With a close and sensitive reading of texts, testimonies, and interviews of movement participants from this tumultuous era of Nicaraguan history, Reed questions the narrative of a top-down inculcation of revolutionary ideology by a movement vanguard. He centers instead the less well-studied bottom-up roles of emotions, spirituality, and agency in Global South mobilizations. The formation of

emergence of what Anthony Giddens terms “life politics”: “a politics of identity through which individuals reflexively and in practice determine who they want to become and what kind of society they wish to create for themselves” (pp. 6-7). Life politics move from the politics of opposition to the politics of creation. They seek to negate the existing unjust order and provide people with the capacity to develop their potential. While the FSLN was voted out of power in 1990s, Reed suggests that this transformative revolutionary subjectivity and its principles and ideals persisted as a viable and transformative identity well beyond the vicissitudes of the FSLN as a political party.

With its in-depth, wide-ranging, and ambitious exploration of the complexities of Nicaraguan revolutionary identity, *Sandinista Narratives* makes an important theoretical contribution to social movement research. It expands both the geographic and political range of comparative case studies of mobilization. Likewise, it offers rich and nuanced empirical exploration of the role of reflexive agency, emotions, and popular culture play in radical social change in the Global South.
