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# Sandinistas and prostitutas: Reeducation and rehabilitation of prostitutes in revolutionary Nicaragua, 1980-1987

Sydney Marshall  
*Iowa State University*

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**Sandinistas and *prostitutas*: Reeducation and rehabilitation of prostitutes in  
revolutionary Nicaragua, 1980-1987**

by

**Sydney Marshall**

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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Program of Study Committee:  
Bonar Hernández, Major Professor  
Amy Rutenberg  
Maximilian Viatori

The student author, whose presentation of the scholarship herein was approved by the program of study committee, is solely responsible for the content of this thesis. The Graduate College will ensure this thesis is globally accessible and will not permit alterations after a degree is conferred.

Iowa State University

Ames, Iowa

2018

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## **DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated to my grandma Rosa, for her love, support, and inspiration. Thank you for accompanying me on my first trip to Nicaragua, introducing me to long-lost family, and helping me embark on this journey. *Te amo mucho abuela.*

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**ABSTRACT**

In June 1981, the Sandinista Police conducted a series of arrests of prostitutes throughout Nicaragua. The Sandinistas (or the *Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional*, FSLN) triumphed over the previous dictatorship of Anastasio Somoza Debayle, assuming control over the country in the summer of 1979. The Sandinistas, a revolutionary group influenced by socialist ideology, led a revolution (1979-1990) that sought to change multiple aspects of Nicaraguan society, including the economic role of women. Why did the Sandinistas focus on eradicating prostitution at a time of internal division and international conflict? In March 1982, the FSLN created the Institute of Social Security and Social Welfare (INSSBI) to establish social programs dedicated to aiding those in economic need. The aim of this program (1982-1987) quickly shifted toward reeducating and rehabilitating prostitutes and other economically marginalized women. By rehabilitating those most adversely affected by capitalism, patriarchy, and the Somoza dictatorship, the Sandinistas sought to create a new society.

This study focuses on the role of women in the Nicaraguan revolution by examining the Sandinista's attempt to integrate prostitutes into a new socialist society. Prostitution offers a way to understand how the Sandinistas tried to alter social and cultural norms in the revolutionary period. This attempt to integrate prostitutes (according to the Sandinistas, the group most economically marginalized by capitalism) into the public allowed the INSSBI project provided financial independence to these women, altering gender-power dynamics in society and giving them the opportunity to have a public voice. The revolutionary government emphasized ideology as a way to correct the faults of the capitalist and patriarchal society under Somoza, which shows the Sandinista

focus on gender equality in the formation of the new revolutionary state. With an understanding of the revolutionary government's attitude toward prostitution, we can begin to understand the complex gender relations and power in late 20<sup>th</sup> century Nicaragua.



## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

On June 21, 1981, the headline of the Nicaraguan newspaper, *La Prensa*, read, “Several Women Arrested: Police Unleash War on Prostitution.” Two images accompanied the article, one of which depicted five men thrusting their weight against the shambles of a home constructed of cardboard and tin, as several men and women stand in the background. The other photograph showed a group of men swinging sticks at a dilapidated home. The most striking component of the picture, however, is not the group of enraged adults, but rather the young boy in the bottom corner. A child no more than twelve years old holds a stone the size of his torso as he prepares to throw it, with his sight set on the house. The image of the young boy suggests how the controversial issue of prostitution was not solely a police matter, but one that involved members of a community in Nicaragua’s capital, Managua. The article reported in a seemingly straightforward manner, “More than fifty women of the frivolous life were captured on the afternoon of June 18<sup>th</sup> in the vicinity of the Oriental Market [in northern Managua], in a police operation against prostitution, which left one woman injured and 30 shacks of wood and cardboard destroyed.” María Cruz, one of the arrested women, explained, “we have to sell our bodies to eat.”<sup>1</sup> As she held her head to stop the bleeding from her clash with the police, her face contorted in misery, Cruz stood by the pile of rubble that had been her neighborhood before the men dismantled the aforementioned buildings with sticks and stones. Over the next couple of days, four police units, agents of the *Policía del Orden Interno* (Internal Order Police, POI), and two hundred other individuals set out to eradicate prostitution, in the process destroying over thirty houses in Managua.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “Varias mujeres arrestadas: Policía desata guerra a la ‘prostitución,’” *La Prensa*, June 21, 1981, 16.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Instituto Nicaragüense de Seguridad Social y Bienestar (hereafter INSSBI), *Racionalidad administrativa en*

What created such a visceral reaction in Cruz's impoverished neighborhood? This example illustrates the violence and agitation that prostitution created in Nicaragua. With the triumph of the *Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional* (Sandinista National Liberation Front, FSLN) over the dictatorship of Anastasio Somoza Debayle (1967-1979) in 1979, FSLN members, the Sandinistas, inherited the political and social problems of the preceding government. Strongly influenced by socialist ideology, the Sandinistas led a revolution (1979-1990) that sought to change multiple aspects of Nicaraguan society, including the economic role of women. The FSLN believed that, as a foundational aspect of the Nicaraguan revolution, the government must consider "the level of health and welfare of the people" as an "essential priority of the revolutionary program." In its desire to provide social services, in March 1982, the FSLN merged the Ministry of Social Welfare with the Nicaraguan Institute of Social Security. The result of this merger was the new *Instituto Nicaragüense de Seguridad Social y Bienestar* (Institute of Social Security and Social Welfare, INSSBI), which established several social programs, including a rehabilitation program for those affected by war, drug addiction, and alcoholism. As the INSSBI defined its objective, motivation shifted away from problems of substance abuse because "its criminal character escaped institutional jurisdiction." Instead, the INSSBI focused on reeducation programs designed to integrate prostitutes and other economically marginalized women into a new, revolutionary socio-economic system.<sup>3</sup>

This thesis examines the role of women in the Nicaraguan revolution, focusing on the Sandinistas' attempt to integrate prostitutes into a new socialist social order. Women became active participants in revolutionary change in post-Somoza Nicaragua during the revolution and the Contra War (1979-1990). The new Sandinista government sought to change women's

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<sup>3</sup> Instituto Nicaragüense de Seguridad Social y Bienestar (hereafter INSSBI), *Racionalidad administrativa en bienestar social* (Managua: Instituto Nicaragüense de Seguridad Social y Bienestar, 1986), 4, 3, 2.

position in society. But if the revolution sought to improve the status of Nicaraguan women, the Sandinistas argued, then revolutionaries also needed to help liberate those most oppressed by capitalism: prostitutes. Sandinistas believed that prostitutes represented what was wrong with the capitalist society they inherited from the Somoza era. In this way, the FSLN used the INSSBI's program of reeducation to enact social change, attempting to liberate oppressed women and integrate them into a new economic system. The FSLN (and INSSBI) viewed prostitution not as a problem of fallen women and moral degradation as religious reformers might have done, but rather as a social consequence of a dictatorial rule and capitalism. For Nicaraguan revolutionaries, this marginalization was exacerbated under the Somoza regime by the "corrupt" policies of the dictator's military force, the National Guard, whose members often accepted bribes and arrested prostitutes that did not acquiesce to their demands. Understanding this context as an ideological problem, the INSSBI sought to reform the social problem of prostitution through reeducation and new economic alternatives.

Through an analysis of the INSSBI's reeducation program for prostitutes (1982-1987), this study argues that the Sandinistas viewed the *prostituta* (prostitute) and *prostibulo* (brothel) as symbols of the old society, one tainted by capitalism, controlled by patriarchy, and corrupted by Somoza.<sup>4</sup> The Sandinista attempts to rehabilitate prostitutes pushed prostitutes out of designated businesses that operated brothels to street corners. By integrating prostitutes (according to the Sandinistas, the group most economically marginalized by capitalism) into the public, the INSSBI project provided financial independence to these women, altering gender-power dynamics in society and giving them the opportunity to have a public voice. The Sandinista government's emphasis on ideology in trying to correct the faults of the capitalist and

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<sup>4</sup> INSSBI, *Estudio sobre la prostitución en Nicaragua* (Managua, Nicaragua: Instituto Nicaragüense de Seguridad Social y Bienestar, 1982), 59.

patriarchal society under Somoza shows its emphasis on gender equality in the formation of the new revolutionary state. While historians have focused on women's participation as revolutionaries or political organization as mothers, this thesis offers a new perspective on women's position in a changing society under Sandinista rule during the 1980s.<sup>5</sup> It sheds light on the FSLN's treatment of prostitutes, the transformation of prostitution itself, and highlights a contradictory aspect of the INSSBI project. Through their effort to liberate prostitutes affected by capitalism, the Sandinistas actually reinforced traditional gender roles. This process, which has remained an understudied topic in the historiography, has had lasting consequences into the post-Sandinista era.

### **Methodology and Sources**

This project draws upon historian Joan Scott's argument on how historians can use gender as a category of analysis. Scott defines gender as both a component of social relationships based on apparent differences between the sexes and, more importantly, as a way to understand relationships of power. With this definition in mind, Scott calls upon historians to approach their subject with caution, analyzing the interrelationships between the individual and social organizations. Gender offers a way to decode meaning and understand complex human relationships. Scott further calls for the use of gender to analyze politics and vice versa, stating, "that changes in gender relationships can be set off by views of the needs of state." In other words, because gender is a means to study power, historians can examine how gender is used to construct and consolidate power. This study benefits from Scott's analysis of the relationship

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<sup>5</sup> For more information on women's political activism see Helen Collinson and Lucinda Broadbent, eds., *Women and Revolution in Nicaragua* (Atlantic Heights, NJ: Zed Books, 1990); Karen Kampwirth, *Women and Guerrilla Movements: Nicaragua, El Salvador, Chiapas, Cuba* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002); Karen Kampwirth, "Feminism, Antifeminism, and Electoral Politics in Postwar Nicaragua and El Salvador," *Political Science Quarterly* Vol. 113, No. 2 (Summer, 1998): 259-279; Margaret Randall, *Sandinista's Daughters: Testimonies of Nicaraguan Women in Struggle* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1995). For more information on women's roles as mothers see Lorraine Bayard de Volo, *Mothers of Heroes and Martyrs: Gender Identity Politics in Nicaragua, 1979-1999* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001).

between the twentieth-century democratic state and gendered political ideologies. She suggests that the welfare state “demonstrated its protective paternalism in laws directed at women and children.”<sup>6</sup> Historians of Latin America have taken Scott’s call, thus drawing from Scott’s discussion of gender and power dynamics and the state’s paternalistic tradition.<sup>7</sup> Building upon these contributions, I argue that an examination of the reeducation program of the Institute of Social Security and Social Welfare of the Sandinista government illustrates the paternalistic attitude of the state toward women. In the process of promoting social equality, the Sandinistas, out of their desire to “save” those prostitutes most devastated by capitalism, reinforced traditional gender roles within Nicaraguan society.

My methodological approach allows for both a top-down analysis of Sandinista policy toward prostitutes and a bottom-up analysis of the women themselves. I draw information from a multitude of sources, including INSSBI reports, articles from both the anti-Somoza and anti-Sandinista newspaper (*La Prensa*) and the Sandinista newspaper (*Barricada*), published interviews with leaders of the INSSBI project and Sandinista revolutionaries, and journal articles on prostitution published by the Central American University in Managua (Universidad de Centroamericana, UCA). These varied sources have allowed me to reconstruct the Sandinista policy toward prostitution. While other scholars mention the INSSBI-CAV program, often in passing or in a brief footnote, I collected numerous INSSBI-conducted reports and surveys to analyze the revolutionary government’s attempt to integrate marginalized women into the

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<sup>6</sup> Joan Scott, “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis,” *The American Historical Review* 91, no. 5 (Dec. 1986): 1072, 1071, 1067-1068.

<sup>7</sup> There is a growing literature on the topic about Latin America, see, for example, William E. French and Katherine Elaine Bliss, eds., *Gender, Sexuality, and Power in Latin America Since Independence* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2007); Elizabeth Dore and Maxine Molyneux, eds., *Hidden Histories of Gender and the State in Latin America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000); and Steve J. Stern, *The Secret History of Gender: Women, Men, and Power in Late Colonial Mexico* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), to name a few.

economy and society.<sup>8</sup> Scholars of the Nicaraguan revolution tend to discuss women in terms of their participation in or exclusion from national politics. My work provides a more nuanced view of the FSLN and its attitude toward prostitution in particular and women in general. I utilize interviews conducted by INSSBI members and members of the Women's International Resource Exchange (WIRE), an international nongovernmental organization devoted to assisting women in "Third World" nations, as well as statistical information on the background of Nicaraguan prostitutes. While tremendously valuable, the sources are limited in regards to the voices of the prostitutes themselves. For instance, the INSSBI reports do not provide names or ethnic backgrounds for individual women. However, as this project takes place in the context of the revolution and my research provides important insights into the continuities and/or changes experienced by Nicaraguan women during this time, my work contributes to the historiography women and the Nicaraguan revolution. I reconstruct the Sandinista perception of the prostitute as a way to show how the FSLN reestablished traditional gender roles.<sup>9</sup>

### **Historiography**

My research builds upon diverse studies on prostitution in Latin America from historical approaches to research that can lead to applied solutions. One historical analysis on Latin

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<sup>8</sup> In the early 1980s, the INSSBI joined with the *Centro Ecuménico Antonio Valdivieso* (Antonio Valdivieso Ecumenical Center, CAV) to create the INSSBI-CAV rehabilitation program. For references on the INSSBI-CAV program, see Helen Collinson and Lucinda Broadbent, *Women and Revolution in Nicaragua*; Victoria González, "From Feminism to Somocismo: Women's Rights and Right-Wing Politics in Nicaragua, 1821-1979" (PhD diss., Indiana University, 2002); Victoria González, "'El Diablo se la llevó': política, sexualidad femenina y trabajo en Nicaragua (1855-1979)," in *Un siglo de luchas femeninas en América Latina*, eds. Asunción Lavrín and Eugenia Rodríguez Sáenz (San José, Costa Rica: Editorial Universidad de Costa Rica, 2002), 54-70; and Gustavo Leal, *Investigation on the Trafficking, Sex Tourism, Pornography and Prostitution of Children in Central America and México: Regional Synthesis* (San José, Costa Rica: Casa Alianza Internacional, 2002).

<sup>9</sup> More work needs to be done to locate prostitutes' voices in this narrative. Some examples of scholars giving attention to women's voices during the twentieth century from below include Sarah Davies, *Popular Opinion in Stalin's Russia: Terror, Propaganda and Dissent, 1934-1941* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, Inc., 1999); Lillian Guerra, *Visions of Power in Cuba: Revolution, Redemption, and Resistance, 1959-1971* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014); and Greg Grandin, *The Last Colonial Massacre: Latin America in the Cold War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

American prostitution is Donna Guy's *Sex and Danger in Buenos Aires: Prostitution, Family and Nation in Argentina* (1991). Her study explores the social and political effect of prostitution in Argentina at the turn of the twentieth century. In her other notable work, *White Slavery and Mothers Alive and Dead: The Troubled Meeting of Sex, Gender, Public Health, and Progress in Latin America* (2000), Guy takes a historical approach to discuss the origins of "white slavery." She explores nineteenth-century debates between Europeans and Argentines over moral reformation and legalization of prostitution to tackle public health concerns, including strategies for combating venereal diseases. Both works introduce gender into the discussion of state politics and economics; however, Guy's work does not go into great detail regarding the context of government policies.<sup>10</sup> Aside from Guy's work, this historiography on prostitution, which has raised many avenues for further research, falls roughly into two camps: studies on public health and international human rights. For instance, Gustavo Leal's succinct regional report examines sex tourism and prostitution in Central America in an attempt to find institutional responses to combat these issues.<sup>11</sup> Other works concern human rights and sex trafficking, such as those of the International Human Rights Law Institute (IHRLI), which analyzes the trafficking of women and children and commercial sexual exploitation in Central America and the Caribbean at the beginning of the twenty-first century. These works, with the exception of Guy's, though useful for improving global health policy and human rights, are more prescriptive than descriptive. They concisely boil down the complexities of Latin American prostitution, leaving little room for

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<sup>10</sup> See, Donna Guy, *White Slavery and Mothers Alive and Dead: The Troubled Meeting of Sex, Gender, Public Health, and Progress in Latin America* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000). See also her *Sex and Danger in Buenos Aires: Prostitution, Family and Nation in Argentina* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991). For more information on prostitution in Latin America see, Katherine Elaine Bliss, *Compromised Positions: Prostitution, Public Health, and Gender Politics in Revolutionary Mexico City* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001); Anne Hayes, *Female Prostitution in Costa Rica: Historical Perspectives, 1880-1930* (New York: Routledge, 2006); and Susan Midgen Socolow, *The Women of Colonial Latin America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

<sup>11</sup> Leal, *Investigation on the Trafficking, Sex Tourism, Pornography and Prostitution*, 7.

nuanced interpretation of its social and cultural effect on Latin American society. While studies of prostitution exist, they are limited to the functionality of the sex trade and government reactions toward the institution, rather than an analysis of its interaction with society.

In contrast, the literature on Nicaragua in this period (1979-1990) has not focused specifically on prostitution, but rather the broader narrative of women in the Nicaraguan revolution. During the 1980s, scholars and activists, such as Margaret Randall, examined how the Sandinistas treated women during the revolution. They mostly reported descriptive and politically biased works that were uncritical of the FSLN. Lorraine Bayard de Volo explains that these writings, usually articles, summarized the history of Luisa Amanda Espinoza Association of Nicaraguan Women (AMNLAE), the women's organization within the FSLN, and reviewed gender debates. Because many authors were Sandinista supporters, Bayard de Volo further points out, the "FSLN itself was rarely examined critically or in depth with regards to the lingering patriarchy in the revolutionary society."<sup>12</sup> Thus, early scholarship on this period lacked critical judgment of the FSLN government and its policies.

Scholars since then have taken a more detached approach toward examining gender relations among the Sandinistas during the Nicaraguan revolution. Political scientist Karen Kampwirth criticizes the dearth of studies on women's participation in revolutionary organizations, especially the FSLN. Kampwirth argues that structural factors, namely, economic globalization, increasing single-female-headed households, and mass urban migration, and ideological/strategic factors, including the advent of liberation theology and FSLN's shift to mass mobilization, allowed more women to join the FSLN.<sup>13</sup> While Kampwirth focuses on women's motivations for joining the revolution, Rosario Montoya investigates gender relations

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<sup>12</sup> Bayard de Volo, *Mothers of Heroes and Martyrs*, 13.

<sup>13</sup> Kampwirth, *Women and Guerrilla Movements*, 36-37, 2.



among the Sandinistas. Montoya argues that as the Sandinista state became an instrument of social change, it reflected the social hierarchies within state institutions, asserting male power over women's legal status.<sup>14</sup> Bayard de Volo proposes that the Nicaraguan revolution should be viewed through a gendered lens, suggesting that the revolutionary process fostered a gendered discourse. The FSLN used maternal images to encourage support and recruit women to join the revolution. This discourse was both empowering in that it allowed women the political space to declare their views, but hindered their discourse to aspects regarding motherhood.<sup>15</sup>

Scholars of Nicaragua have given some attention to the topic of prostitution. The most compelling analysis on Nicaraguan prostitution prior to the revolution is Victoria González's work on politics and women's sexuality. González argues that women supported the Somoza regime because the "populist clientelism" of the dictatorship was an "intimate reciprocal" system that met their economic and political needs.<sup>16</sup> González demonstrates the complex nature of prostitution during Somoza-era Nicaragua and concludes that the prostitute became associated with the corruption of the government.<sup>17</sup> She contends that the presence of women in the public sphere, through the institutionalization of prostitution, political mobilization of some prostitutes, and the employment of thousands of women by the Somoza government, threatened Nicaraguan *machismo* society.<sup>18</sup> González implies that the FSLN linked prostitution to capitalist oppression because it "fit well into revolutionary critiques of capitalism," and that a more serious discussion of prostitution would have led to a debate on sexism, which did not occur during the revolution.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Rosario Montoya, *Gendered Scenarios of Revolution: Making New Men and New Women in Nicaragua, 1975-2000* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2012), 159.

<sup>15</sup> Bayard de Volo, *Mothers of Heroes and Martyrs*, 4, xiv, 2.

<sup>16</sup> González, "From Feminism to Somocismo," 249.

<sup>17</sup> González, "El Diablo se la llevó," 57.

<sup>18</sup> Machismo is the notion of what it means to be a man, often tied to aggressive behavior and power over women. For more information on machismo in Nicaragua, see Roger N. Lancaster, *Life is Hard: Machismo, Danger, and the Intimacy of Power in Nicaragua* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

<sup>19</sup> González, "From Feminism to Somocismo," 220.

Illuminating on the gendered aspects of the revolution, my work departs from the traditional historiography of women in the Nicaraguan revolution, for it delves into government policy toward prostitution and its impact upon society. Based on the language used by the INSSBI, the Sandinistas were aware of the problems posed by patriarchy, dominance, machismo, and although their attempts were unsuccessful in achieving gender equality, they did try to alleviate gender discrimination. I suggest an examination of the limits and contradictions of the Sandinista policy toward prostitution can allow us to further explore the Sandinista revolutionary process. González discusses somocista women and, in this context, my work differs from hers in that I investigate the role of prostitutes during the transition from the Somoza dictatorship to the revolutionary period.<sup>20</sup> That is, I examine women, in this case prostitutes, under the Sandinista revolutionary government as a way to illustrate the contradictory policies promoted by the state. Building upon her work and others that have shed light on the relationship between gender and politics, my work seeks to show how the Sandinistas used gender to construct and consolidate political power, rehabilitating prostitutes to fit the worldview of the FSLN.

### **Historical Background**

It is important to understand the rise of the Somoza dictatorship as a way to comprehend why the Sandinistas came to power and their policies toward prostitution. After several failed promises to build a canal in Nicaragua, in 1902 the United States set its sights on Panama and built a canal. The U.S. Marines then occupied Nicaragua from 1912 to 1933 to prevent another foreign power from disrupting its economic interests and building a rival passage to the Panama Canal. The presence of the U.S. Marines fueled a guerrilla war led by Augusto César Sandino's peasant movement (1927-1933).<sup>21</sup> During the occupation, the U.S. government supervised the

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<sup>20</sup> Somocista refers to a supporter of the Somoza leadership in Nicaragua.

<sup>21</sup> Michel Gobat, *Confronting the American Dream: Nicaragua Under U.S. Imperial Rule* (Durham: Duke

election of 1929, which led to the peaceful rise to power of José María Moncada. Then in 1932, the United States installed Juan Bautista Sacasa as head of state.<sup>22</sup> President Sacasa, in a decisive move supported by the United States, placed his niece's husband, Anastasio Somoza García, as commander of the U.S.-trained military force, *la Guardia Nacional* (National Guard). In 1933, as Sacasa took office, the U.S. Marines pulled out of Nicaragua, leaving the Sandino rebels in the countryside. By 1936, Somoza had forced Sacasa to resign and taken control of the country. With his new position and the absence of foreign occupation, Somoza formed the *Partido Liberal Nacionalista* (Nationalist Liberal Party, PLN), controlled the National Guard, and ordered Sandino killed, paving the way for his own tenure in power (1937-1947 and 1950-1956), and those of his sons, Luis Somoza Debayle (1956-1963), and Anastasio Somoza Debayle (1967-1972 and 1974-1979). Supported by the U.S. government, Somoza García's rise to power in the 1930s set the stage for his family's dynasty for the next forty years.<sup>23</sup>

From 1927 to 1955 prostitution in Nicaragua flourished under the Somoza regime. Prior to the Somoza regime (from the 1880s to 1927), the state treated prostitution like other countries in Latin America at the time: laws surrounding prostitution vacillated between prohibition and regulation. Until 1927, those involved in the sex trade were punished for vagrancy. As foreign interference and internal struggle caused tension throughout the country, commercial sex changed by the late 1920s and early 1930s. By 1927, the state required prostitutes to register their occupation and report for weekly gynecological exams. Meanwhile, the National Guard, the military force controlled by the Somoza family, supported prostitution for its own economic

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University Press, 2005), 3, 1.

<sup>22</sup> Robert Pastor, *Condemned to Repetition: The United States and Nicaragua* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 26-27.

<sup>23</sup> Pastor, *Condemned to Repetition*, 27; Matilde Zimmermann, *Sandinista: Carlos Fonseca and the Nicaraguan Revolution* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 5.

benefit. According to González, many prostitutes remained in poverty because, even though they made money, a large portion of their earnings went to their madams or the fines paid to the National Guard.<sup>24</sup>

Somoza's Nicaragua was inconsistent in its attitude toward prostitution. While the National Guard thrived off of prostitution, Nicaraguan legislators declared prostitution (and those who fostered the trade) illegal. González notes this contradictory situation occurred out of the PLN's public display of sexuality, which promoted male promiscuity, prostitution, and rape of women. This national agenda was full of inconsistencies as, on the one hand, the PLN held one of the most inclusive nation-building agendas for women by including them in projects as low-paid workers. On the other hand, the Somozas represented promiscuity through their many extramarital affairs and institutionalized prostitution.<sup>25</sup> The National Guard played a tenuous role as both enforcer against and benefactor of the commercial sex trade. To negotiate this position, National Guard members fined or imprisoned independent operators that did not pay extortionary bribes.<sup>26</sup> As Helen Collinson points out in her investigation on women and the revolution, the *Guardia* was heavily involved in prostitution; brothel owners paid a fee to the Guard and in exchange Guard members returned runaway prostitutes.<sup>27</sup> The National Guard not only turned a blind eye to brothels, but also actively participated in the operation of commercial sex. At the end of the youngest Somoza's reign, National Guard members owned commercial businesses such as bars, nightclubs, and restaurants, where prostitution was openly practiced.<sup>28</sup> This more

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<sup>24</sup> González, "From Feminism to Somocismo," 201, 202.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 188.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 203.

<sup>27</sup> Collinson and Broadbent, *Women and Revolution in Nicaragua*, 69. Victoria González provides further historiographical examples in her article, "El Diablo se la llevó," 62. For example, in his study of Chinandega, Nicaragua, Jeffrey Gould observes the case of Alejandro Acevedo, a National Guard member who owned two brothels. Amalia Chamorro also notes the importance of prostitution in creating the corrupt climate of the Somoza regime in her work on the Nicaraguan state during the *somocismo* (Somoza era).

<sup>28</sup> Leal, *Investigation on the Trafficking, Sex Tourism, Pornography and Prostitution*, 41.

open system of prostitution changed the relationship between the pimp and the prostitute. For the INSSBI, these “open forms” of prostitution reflected the commercial relationship between the businessman and the prostitute, in which owners used “the sale of sex as a complement to the sale of their products and / or services: liquor, food, music, dancing, rooms, games and drugs.”<sup>29</sup> While technically illegal, prostitution prospered under the Somoza regime due to the influence of the National Guard.

As the Somoza regime crumbled and the Sandinistas came to power, this open (yet illegal) system of prostitution changed because of the economic crisis of the late 1970s and early 1980s. Rural Nicaraguans flocked to the cities as the revolution spread throughout the countryside. The increased urbanization that resulted from the Sandinista insurrection added to the already prevalent urbanization trend. For example, between 1940 and 1975 the population in Managua rose from 62,500 to 400,000 people. Between 1975 and 1985, as Nicaraguans experienced the end of a dictatorship and the birth of a revolutionary process, the population in the capital doubled, reaching nearly one million people. Managua, still recovering from the economic shockwaves of the 1972 earthquake (which destroyed nearly 90 percent of its commercial buildings), was ill equipped to handle the increased population.<sup>30</sup> Dealing with infrastructure issues in the capital and Sandinista insurrection in the countryside, Somoza proved unable to deal with rapidly deteriorating economic conditions. To make matters worse, an increasing number of foreign private investors pulled out of Nicaragua to protect their assets.<sup>31</sup> Some citizens believed prostitution increased during this time, as the economic situation negatively affected individuals’ ability to support their families. One study found that over 50

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<sup>29</sup> INSSBI, *Estudio sobre la prostitución en Nicaragua*, 41-42.

<sup>30</sup> Collinson and Broadbent, *Women and Revolution in Nicaragua*, 57; 56.

<sup>31</sup> INSSBI, *Estudio sobre la prostitución en Nicaragua*, 19-20.

percent of Nicaragua's prostitutes had entered the institution out of dire economic need.<sup>32</sup> To put it differently, the economic problems of the 1970s placed greater hardships on urban women, meaning more women needed a source of income. It was in this context of a struggling economy that the FSLN gained control of Nicaragua, and it was this type of commercialized prostitution they tried to combat.

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<sup>32</sup> Collinson and Broadbent, *Women and Revolution in Nicaragua*, 70, 69; In 1986, the INSSBI-CAV found that out of the 81 prostitutes interviewed in Managua, 44 said their condition for admission into prostitution was out of a "pressing economic situation," 17 joined out of "economic need and abandonment by their partner," 8 entered to "earn more money," and 12 were sold into the trade. For more information see, Jackeline Cuevas, *Prostitución en Nicaragua: Una experiencia de reeducación, proyecto INSSBI-CAV, 1983-1986* (Managua, Nicaragua: Centro de Documentación de la Mujer, 1987), 25-30.

## CHAPTER 2: SANDINISTAS AND THE PROSTITUTA: CREATION OF INSSBI AND INSSBI-CAV PROGRAM

### Origins of the Reform Campaign

The initial effort by the Sandinistas to reform prostitution was difficult and inconsistent. An examination of the origins of the reform process shows the various ways the FSLN tried to reform society and, more specifically, responded to prostitution. The Sandinista government took several steps to reform prostitution. Its first action consisted of redefining prostitution.<sup>33</sup> After overthrowing the regime of Somoza Debayle in July 1979, the Sandinistas wasted no time getting started in their effort to remodel society. The very next month, in August 1979, the revolutionary government issued a decree known as the Law on the Maintenance of Order and Public Security, which ordered a penalty of three months to two years in public works against those found guilty of vandalism, public drunkenness, drug addiction, and prostitution. The law also called for the incarceration up to four years of those engaged in sex trafficking.<sup>34</sup> The FSLN imposed these harsher restrictions on immoral behavior because it wanted to combat corruption and crime in Nicaraguan society. The following year the government issued Decree No. 488 to amend the previous penalty against vandalism, drunkenness and drug addiction, and prostitution. The new edict raised the penalty to two years.<sup>35</sup> According to the Organization of American States (OAS), these laws would punish those who caused harm to the stability of the country.<sup>36</sup>

The FSLN used police action to reform prostitution and improve society as the next step toward social change. As demonstrated by the scene of the battered brothel and bloodied woman

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<sup>33</sup> Cuevas, *Prostitución en Nicaragua*, 86.

<sup>34</sup> INSSBI, *Estudio sobre la prostitución en Nicaragua*, 60.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Organization of American States (OAS), "Report on the Situation of Human Rights in the Republic of Nicaragua: Chapter III Personal Liberty," Doc. 25, June 30, 1981, <http://www.cidh.org/countryrep/Nica81eng/TOC.htm>, accessed November 2, 2017.

in the Mercado Oriental from the introduction, violence against prostitutes and brothels was widespread in the early stages of Sandinista rule. The *Policía del Orden Interno* (Internal Order Police, POI), considering the legal basis against prostitution and pressured from mass organizations to combat crime, felt compelled to act. In the spring of 1980, the police carried out a series of operations against prostitution-related crimes. On May 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1980, in what became known as “Operation Death to Delinquency,” the Sandinista police raided the Mercado Oriental in northern Managua, destroying the “Palo de Gato,” the name given to the alleyway with the largest concentration of brothels and canteens. From this raid, the police arrested over fifty women and detained them for a few days. In mid-June, the Police Department of Chinandega swept through the northwest town of Corinto (located approximately 153km northwest of Managua), incarcerating forty-five women in five days. In August, the police ransacked the Mercado Oriental again, this time arresting nine women and detaining them for three days. Five days later, the Policía raided another neighborhood in the capital city, imprisoning thirty-one women. By November, local officials in León (located about 93km northwest of Managua) detained twenty-two women without following the legal process, detaining them for three weeks. After several other similar operations took place in Chinandega and Masaya (located 135km northwest and 26km southeast of Managua respectively), the Sandinista police in Managua postponed further operations in order to discuss future action with the *Instituto Nicaragüense de Seguridad Social y Bienestar* (Institute of Social Security and Social Welfare, INSSBI). After discussion with the former Ministry of Social Welfare in late 1980, the Sandinista police ceased raiding brothels and cooperated with the INSSBI rehabilitation project.<sup>37</sup>

While the Sandinista police took decisive action toward prostitution, the Ministry of Social Welfare (later the INSSBI) was less certain on how to proceed. The initial endeavors by

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<sup>37</sup> INSSBI, *Estudio sobre la prostitución en Nicaragua*, 60-62.



the Ministry to reform prostitutes emerged as a response to the pressure caused by the police raids. Officials of the Ministry of Social Welfare visited prisons to “attend” to arrested women. These officials interviewed the inmates to gain background information on those engaged in prostitution.<sup>38</sup> It was through the surveys collected from the imprisoned women that programs to rehabilitate prostitutes originated. One of the first state-supported programs, the “Home for Training and Social Communication” program led by Father José Schendel, took place in Corinto in late 1979.<sup>39</sup> The local Christian community in Corinto established the program to decrease prostitution in the port city, coordinating with the INSSBI.<sup>40</sup> The leaders of the Corinto project wanted to rehabilitate prostitutes by teaching them skilled labor as an economic alternative to sex work. One leader of the program argued that prostitution would cease to exist when there was no demand for it, which could be done when men recognized and respected the value of women.<sup>41</sup> The Corinto program is significant because it shows the ideological influence of the Sandinistas in recreating society. This first attempt at rehabilitation sought to end the demand for prostitution by promoting the value of women and gender equality. This anti-patriarchal position demonstrates the revolution’s emphasis of raising women’s position within society.

After the initial work in Corinto, the state explored other endeavors throughout urban areas in Nicaragua in an effort to eradicate prostitution. The Sandinista directed INSSBI collaborated with other institutional efforts to reeducate prostitutes.<sup>42</sup> For instance, the Luisa

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 62-63.

<sup>39</sup> Women’s International Resource Exchange (WIRE), “Nicaraguan Women: Unlearning the Alphabet of Submission,” *WIRE* (Fall 1985), 15; and “Se crea ‘Hogar de Capacitación y Comunicación Social,’” *Barricada*, July 24, 1980, 1, no. 353, 6.

<sup>40</sup> Centro Ecueménico Antonio Valdivieso (CAV), “Testimonio: Como Si Fuera un Despertar de Algo,” *Corresponsalia Popular* (Managua, Nicaragua), March-April, 1984, 2, Box 19, File 3, Bobbye S. Ortiz Papers, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.

<sup>41</sup> WIRE, “Nicaraguan Women,” 15.

<sup>42</sup> CAV, “Testimonio,” 2.

Amanda Espinosa Association of Nicaraguan Women (AMNLAE), the women's organization associated with the Sandinistas, started a similar project for prostitutes in the city of León in 1980.<sup>43</sup> Additionally, the John XXIII Department of Research at the University of Central America (UCA) established the Julio Buitrago neighborhood project in Managua six months later, seeking a more comprehensive understanding of the problem of prostitution in the capital.<sup>44</sup> Prompted by concerns from AMNLAE, the research department interviewed 32 of the 46 prostitutes in the neighborhood, which had 3,885 residents.<sup>45</sup> The Institute argued that “the eradication of [prostitution was] a long process, where women [...participated in] their own liberation,” and that this should begin with an analysis of society to uncover the causes of the “problem” and offer alternatives.<sup>46</sup> In 1982, the INSSBI and AMNLAE opened a rehabilitation hostel for prostitutes in Corinto. Within the first year of business, the hostel aided over 80 prostitutes, offering educational and training courses for various gendered jobs, including on sewing, typing, and broom making.<sup>47</sup> Thus, the early 1980s saw an increased effort to reeducate and rehabilitate prostitutes throughout Nicaragua and reintegrate them into the economy.

By 1983, with the establishment of several projects in various cities throughout the country, the Sandinistas put forth a more concerted effort to reform prostitution in the capital.

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<sup>43</sup> WIRE, “Nicaraguan Women,” 15.

<sup>44</sup> The University of Central America founded John XXIII Department of Research as part of its social action efforts in 1961. Through the Department of Social Promotion, the John XXIII Department's mission was to foster human development in poorer sectors of Nicaraguan society. For more information see, “Instituto de Acción Social Juan XXIII,” Public Statement 2016, Inter-American Foundation, <https://www.iaf.gov/our-work/where-we-work/country-portfolios/nicaragua/2016-juan-23>.

<sup>45</sup> Universidad Centroamericana Instituto de Investigación y Acción Social Juan XXIII, “Memoria ‘primer taller de autocapacitación’ ‘Julio Buitrago,’” (Managua, Nicaragua: Universidad Centroamericana, 1982), 8.

<sup>46</sup> Universidad Centroamericana Instituto de Investigación y Acción Social Juan XXIII, “Memoria ‘primer taller de autocapacitación’ ‘Julio Buitrago,’” 8; This language resembles that of Liberation Theology, or the religious movement of the Catholic Church within Latin America that emphasized helping the poor and oppressed. See, for example, Philip Williams, *Catholic Church and Politics in Nicaragua and Costa Rica* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1989); and Calvin L. Smith, *Revolution, Revival, and Religious Conflict in Sandinista Nicaragua* (Leiden, the Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2007). Further research needs to explore the connection between Liberation Theology and women's liberation in revolutionary Nicaragua.

<sup>47</sup> Collinson and Broadbent, *Women and Revolution in Nicaragua*, 70.

The INSSBI joined with the *Centro Ecuménico Antonio Valdivieso* (Antonio Valdivieso Ecumenical Center, CAV) to create a “women’s psycho-social rehabilitation center,” to provide assistance to Managua’s prostitutes.<sup>48</sup> The INSSBI-CAV program worked with nearly 300 prostitutes during its time of operation roughly between 1983 and 1986.<sup>49</sup> The project sought to understand the reality of prostitution in Nicaragua and the shift in policies from the Somoza regime to the revolutionary government. Located in Managua, the rehabilitation center strived to convince prostitutes to give up their profession. This effort differed from the services in Corinto and León in that the INSSBI-CAV did not establish a hostel, but a drop-in care center for women to attend group therapy sessions. Its leaders of these sessions wanted to allow participants to realize their condition not as morally corrupt women, but as part of a larger social problem.<sup>50</sup> This realization would derive within the context of educational workshops and consciousness-raising developed by the project in which participants would discuss topics ranging from sexual education to gender discrimination.

The INSSBI-CAV project utilized a multi step methodological approach to reeducate prostitutes and integrate them into society. In an interview with the Women’s International Resource Exchange (an international nonprofit organization that supported women of the Third World), the director of the INSSBI-CAV program, Jacqueline Cuevas, discussed the methodology of the reeducation program.<sup>51</sup> Cuevas argued that the approach consisted of three parts. The first stage allowed the participant to consider the motivations that drove her into prostitution. The INSSBI-CAV project encouraged women to understand their position in a new

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>49</sup> Cuevas, *Prostitución en Nicaragua*, 2.

<sup>50</sup> Collinson and Broadbent, *Women and Revolution in Nicaragua*, 71; The sources concerning the INSSBI-CAV project are limiting in that they do not explain who was in charge of the program, aside from the name of the INSSBI-CAV director, Jacqueline Cuevas.

<sup>51</sup> Created in 1979, WIRE was a nonprofit organization that printed and redistributed information and analysis on women in the “Third World.” For more information see, “WIRE Catalog,” Publications, Women’s Studies Database, accessed April 3, 2017, <http://www.mith2.umd.edu/womensstudies/ReferenceRoom/Publications/wire-catalog.html>.

“just [and] egalitarian society.” The second phase taught women about the unjust social structures that were associated with certain types of societies and that created prostitution. Women’s transformation as they earned a productive job marked the third methodological step. The reeducation program based its lessons on guidelines prepared by the Vice-Ministry of Adult Education (VIMEDA) and placed women in courses according to their own levels of formal education. Introductory courses focused on literacy, while intermediate and advanced courses taught reading, writing, and arithmetic, with special training courses on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. The reeducation program offered job training over a variety of occupations ranging from attending to a plant nursery to lessons about human relations, trade unionism, and cooperativism.<sup>52</sup>

Courses offered by the reeducation programs were not solely for prostitutes. Cuevas acknowledged the connection between the INSSBI-CAV project and the Sandinista police. This was not without difficulty, as Cuevas acknowledged. “At first,” she noted, “the women identified the Revolution with the police—who had been very repressive—and even mistrusted us.”<sup>53</sup> To combat this negative connotation and change perceptions, the INSSBI offered courses to the Sandinista police in an attempt to reeducate them on the social issue of prostitution. Cuevas summarized this approach when she wrote that, “we began an intensive training course for those police who patrol neighborhoods where prostitution goes on. [...The] police are now able to analyze prostitution as a social problem” and aid in the reeducation process.<sup>54</sup> As part of this initiative, the INSSBI went out on patrol with the police a few times a week to visit still-operating brothels and invite them to join for classes.

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<sup>52</sup> WIRE, “Nicaraguan Women,” 15-16.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

### **A Revolutionary Gender Ideology: Anti-capitalism, Anti-Somoza, and Anti-patriarchy**

Capitalism, as the Institute saw it, exacerbated the conditions of prostitution, which involved trafficking, pimps, mistreatment of women, and economic exploitation. Prostitution, under a capitalist system, became an “open market” that led to the commercialization of sex. This was the case, according to INSSBI, during the Somoza regime, as the National Guard openly conducted business in the commercial sex trade. Capitalism was also tied to bourgeois (upper class) notions of patriarchy. The INSSBI believed that patriarchy was linked to economic systems and modes of production. A patriarchal society did not create the oppression of women, but rather inherited and adapted it.<sup>55</sup> Thus, prostitution was not just the evil byproduct of capitalism, but the justification for man’s domination of women. With capitalist ideology rooted in the problem of prostitution, the Sandinistas believed they needed a revolutionary process to change prostitution and overall society.<sup>56</sup>

The FSLN related the exploitation of prostitutes with capitalism and associated the rise in prostitution with the economic policies of the Somoza dynasty. In its study on prostitution, the INSSBI noted the ideological considerations for eliminating prostitution. Drawing upon Scott’s use of gender, my research illustrates how prostitution gave men the illusion of having power over another human being, one that could be bought with money. Seen in this way, the INSSBI defined prostitution not simply as an economic problem, but an ideological one; the ruling class defended prostitution for its own interests.<sup>57</sup> The Institute further explained that capitalism converted prostitution into an open commodity to further support for bourgeois domination. In the minds of the Sandinistas, capitalism exacerbated prostitution because of the disparity of wealth and extreme levels of poverty to which citizens were subjected. Within this system, the

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<sup>55</sup> INSSBI, *Estudio sobre la prostitución en Nicaragua*, 10, 17, 15.

<sup>56</sup> Cuevas, *Prostitución en Nicaragua*, 20, 31.

<sup>57</sup> INSSBI, *Estudio sobre la prostitución en Nicaragua*, 5, 46.

prostitute became part of the economic and social sector that produced the movement of money.<sup>58</sup> With such an ingrained role in the capitalist economy and macho (the domination of one sex over another) society, the Sandinistas believed that a change in cultural values and education could eliminate prostitution.

The FSLN believed that the revolutionary process itself could change prostitution through paternalistic efforts to reeducate the prostitute. The INSSBI-CAV advocated for the use of ideology, public education, the media, and state institutions, including the police, in order to deal with prostitution. The INSSBI explained that, “in the work of workshops and self-recognition made in the Reeducation Program, [prostitutes] recognize that now their [lives are] freer and that they do not suffer the same violence and abuses as before.” Economic factors created prostitution on two levels: first, women in dire economic need were forced to enter the profession; and second, the desire and subsequent market for sex created the conditions for prostitution. The study concluded that the “economic factor, although it appears as the main determinant, is, in short, only the initiator of a process that is already predetermined socially by bourgeois ideology.” Therefore, while economic need created a prostitute, it was capitalism that fostered prostitution. One of the interviewed prostitutes, highlighting the emphasis on revolutionary ideology and liberation from the capitalist system, concluded, “I obtained my freedom with the triumph of the Revolution.”<sup>59</sup> In this way, according to the Sandinistas, the Nicaraguan revolution freed the prostitute, liberating her from her economic and social position.

For the revolutionary government, the prostitute and her brothel became symbols of the former capitalist Nicaragua under the Somoza regime. As the INSSBI described, “prostitution in Nicaragua during [the] *Somocismo* was established and operated on the most open and inhuman

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<sup>58</sup> Cuevas, *Prostitución en Nicaragua*, 19, 16, 15.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 45-46, 43, 24, 20, 57. The article did not provide the name for the prostitute interviewed.

bases of exploitation.”<sup>60</sup> Because of this, the Sandinistas made an effort to distance themselves from the corruption of Somoza’s National Guard. With the triumph of the revolution, Nicaraguans targeted brothels and game houses they saw as “centers of corruption” because they flourished under the *somocismo* (the social and political movement under the Somoza dynasty). The primary reason for this association between Somoza corruption and the Nicaraguan brothel had to do with the actions of the National Guard. Many military commanders of the guard were owners or partners of business that also housed prostitution.<sup>61</sup> Prominent families that owned brothels paid money to the National Guard for protection of their operations. The depravity of the National Guard was deeply entrenched in Nicaraguan society. This dynamic reflected the urban landscape of Managua: wealthier homes paid National Guard commanders directly, while more humble houses dealt with lower ranking officers.<sup>62</sup> This was the situation the Sandinistas inherited when they overthrew the Somoza government.

In order to distance their government from the Somoza-era corruption, Sandinista leaders took several measures to change the relationship between government and prostitute. According to the INSSBI, during the revolution the Sandinista army, “aimed at weakening and attacking some sensible fibers of this: [...Somoza and the National Guard’s] lucrative businesses. These were the first actions of sandinismo [Sandinista ideology] regarding prostitution.”<sup>63</sup> INSSBI-CAV felt the need to clarify that those women who were sold into brothels or to pimps were sold *before* the triumph of the Revolution. For the Institute, one of the main steps necessary for social change was to alter the relationship between the policeman and the prostitute. Prostitutes could now denounce police officers who abused them and expect punishment to occur. Some

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>61</sup> INSSBI, *Estudio sobre la prostitución en Nicaragua*, 59.

<sup>62</sup> WIRE, “Nicaraguan Women,” 16.

<sup>63</sup> INSSBI, *Estudio sobre la prostitución en Nicaragua*, 59.

prostitutes, like those in the Camino del Oriente in central Managua, regarded police as their friends.<sup>64</sup> This process of change from the top was slow as notions of the prostitute as a morally corrupted woman ran deep. One policeman retorted, ““These women don’t do it out of necessity, they do it because they like it.””<sup>65</sup> As previously mentioned, the INSSBI-CAV center prepared seminars for policemen to change these social attitudes, often with mixed results.<sup>66</sup> The revolutionary government took efforts to eliminate the old system of brothels through legal means. After the revolutionary triumph the Sandinista government decreed prostitution illegal. Following the prohibition, the Sandinista police conducted a series of operations closing brothels, which served as the “fatal blow to the old system of prostitution, since after the operation there were no more than twenty establishments in Managua.”<sup>67</sup>

The image of the brothel represented not only capitalism and corruption, but also patriarchy. The INSSBI blamed the patriarchal order for social divisions based on sex. To put it simply, the INSSBI believed that patriarchy was at fault for the phenomenon of prostitution. The unequal relations of power between men and women manifested themselves in fields other than sexuality, including in the realms of economics, politics, and social relations.<sup>68</sup> The INSSBI maintained that the domination of men over women imposed different roles on women as mothers, domestic workers, concubines, and prostitutes.<sup>69</sup> Patriarchy created sexual typologies and different moral standards. In this regard, the INSSBI contended that “the patriarchal system has generated an entire ideology, the *macho* ideology, which consecrates the domination of one sex for another.”<sup>70</sup> This macho ideology was expressed in the economy, society, and gendered

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<sup>64</sup> Collinson and Broadbent, *Women and Revolution in Nicaragua*, 71.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>67</sup> Cuevas, *Prostitución en Nicaragua*, 47.

<sup>68</sup> INSSBI, *Estudio sobre la prostitución en Nicaragua*, 9, 7.

<sup>69</sup> Cuevas, *Prostitución en Nicaragua*, 13.

<sup>70</sup> INSSBI, *Estudio sobre la prostitución en Nicaragua*, 11-12.



morality, in the process perpetuating the myths of masculinity and femininity.<sup>71</sup> As the INSSBI clarified, when they were excluded from the workforce, women were forced to offer their body in a *machista* society.<sup>72</sup>

The prostitute, under this patriarchal macho system, became oppressed and lost control over her world. Prostitution was seen as necessary not only by men, but by the prostitutes too. The Institute found that nearly 70 percent of the prostitutes interviewed believed prostitution reduced violence and rape against married women. Testimonies such as this illustrate the dual conception of sex, namely that men had “uncontrollable” desires and women were used to satisfy them. Faced by economic necessity and a male demand, women who entered prostitution became further oppressed by the institution itself. Prostitutes could not reject clients or their requests and brothel owners restricted their mobility outside the brothel. Some prostitutes could leave the brothel freely, but there were mechanisms set in place to keep them indebted. Many prostitutes, upon entering the brothel, were compelled to sign a contract, which took the cost of clothes, food, rent, and liquor consumed by the client out of their profits.<sup>73</sup>

The prostitute became the symbol of the moral corruption of the Somoza regime, tainted by capitalistic greed and patriarchal control. As González suggests, the Sandinista revolutionary government benefitted from denouncing the Somoza regime’s acceptance of prostitution and the publicized Sandinista police operations. Her study, while fundamental for the understanding of women and politics in the *somocismo*, does not move beyond the Somoza era.<sup>74</sup> I argue that this notion of equating prostitution with capitalistic corruption was propelled and utilized by the FSLN in order to change society through reeducation. By reaching those most harmed by

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 38-39, 56-57.

<sup>74</sup> González, “From Feminism to Somocismo,” 206-207, 196.

capitalism (and Somoza), the Sandinistas believed they could fundamentally change cultural norms and society.

### **The Limits of the INSSBI-CAV**

As the decade continued and political and social instability progressed, problems with the INSSBI-CAV reeducation program began to emerge. INSSBI courses centered on altering prostitutes' self-perception but its message did not reach all citizens. A main hurdle that women leaving prostitution encountered was the attitude of the rest of society. With this realization, the INSSBI organized seminars in state schools geared toward boys to raise awareness of the double standard that existed in Nicaraguan society. Some researchers for the Institute began to question and doubt the ability of the project to eliminate prostitution. One researcher warned, “the rehabilitation [centers] may become nothing more than repair workshops where women damaged by society are put back together and overhauled before returning to the system.”<sup>75</sup> Even coordinators of the INSSBI-CAV recognized the limits of the project in 1987.

Another obstacle the INSSBI encountered was the geopolitical and institutional limits on social services produced by war. Throughout the 1980s, the United States sponsored the *Contras*, a paramilitary force consisting of former Somoza officials that fought a bloody civil war to dismantle the revolutionary government of the Sandinistas. As this conflict, known as the Contra War, got underway, the United States also recruited the *Miskitu* indigenous people to fight against the Sandinistas. The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) modeled its operations in Nicaragua after the “secret war in Laos,” in which agents trained indigenous groups to fight against nationalist socialist forces.<sup>76</sup> Up until 1983, the Nicaraguan economy experienced

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<sup>75</sup> Collinson and Broadbent, *Women and Revolution in Nicaragua*, 72.

<sup>76</sup> Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, *Blood on the Border: A Memoir of the Contra War* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2005), viii-x. For more information on United States intervention and the Contra War, see Sara Diamond, *Spiritual Warfare: The Politics of the Christian Right* (Boston: South End Press, 1989); and her *Roads to Dominion:*

growth, allowing social services to proliferate. By 1985, war with the Contras affected the economy, making it more difficult for the Sandinista government to continue supporting social transformation. The state-planned economy created by the Sandinistas depended on subsidies to sustain national production.<sup>77</sup> The Sandinistas found themselves increasingly unable to maintain this economic model. Although prostitutes only represented two percent of the female population of Managua, the worsening economic crisis from the war put greater numbers of women at risk of entering the commercial sex trade.<sup>78</sup> By the end of 1987, inflation reached over 1,300 percent. This meant that real wages in the formal economy became inadequate for subsistence, pushing more individuals to find work in the informal sector, such as prostitution. Faced with this dilemma, the Sandinistas continued subsidizing social services, including education programs. The cost of defending the country both physically and ideologically, led to further inflation and an enormous deficit.<sup>79</sup>

During the 1980s, the economic strain forced the INSSBI to limit its social services and social welfare mission. While noting its achievements, the Institute admitted the hardships it faced. The INSSBI commented that the economic situation “force us to become increasingly austere, more thrifty, more disciplined and productive in the work, redoubled efforts to drum, with the rhythm demanded by the subsistence economy and the defense of the Homeland, the

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*Right-Wing Movements and Political Power in the United States* (New York City: Guilford Press, 1995). Within the limitations of this paper, I do not have the space to discuss the significance of the Miskitu population. For more information, see Charles Hale, *Miskito Indians of Nicaragua* (London: Minority Rights Group, 1988); Carlos M. Vilas, *State, Class, and Ethnicity in Nicaragua: Capitalist Modernization and Revolutionary Change on the Atlantic Coast* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1989); Charles Hale, *Resistance and Contradiction: Miskito Indians and the Nicaraguan State, 1894-1987* (Stanford University Press, 1994); Jeffrey Gould, *To Die in this Way: Nicaraguan Indians and the Myth of Mestizaje, 1880-1965* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998); and Baron Pineda, *Shipwrecked Identities: Navigating Race on the Mosquito Coast* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2006).

<sup>77</sup> Florence Babb, *After Revolution: Mapping Gender and Cultural Politics in Neoliberal Nicaragua* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001), 57, 111. For more information on the Contra War, see Stephen Kinzer, *Blood of Brothers: Life and War in Nicaragua* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991).

<sup>78</sup> Collinson and Broadbent, *Women and Revolution in Nicaragua*, 72.

<sup>79</sup> Babb, *After Revolution*, 111.

Revolution and the Peace.”<sup>80</sup> Budget cuts affected the reeducation program, for it led to the elimination of a nursery project, which adversely affected the former prostitutes and caused a sense of disappointment.<sup>81</sup> With inflation, budget cuts, and the continuation of war, the INSSBI-CAV reeducation program for prostitutes came to a close in 1987.

### **Lasting Consequences**

From 1987 to the end of the revolution in 1990, Nicaragua lost the notion of a “revolutionary” myth and spirit promoted by both the FSLN and AMNLAE. These associations, according to one scholar, “struggled in support of the interests of all the oppressed.”<sup>82</sup> This reality became clear when the FSLN, in an effort to keep the party together, shut down AMNLAE’s efforts to further a feminist agenda. In 1989, the Sandinistas eliminated AMNLAE’s internal election process, abolished its national leadership, and imposed its own officials willing to maintain the official position on women.<sup>83</sup> The message was clear: the republic came before gender equality. No longer having the political space within the FSLN, women had to find another way to advance women’s rights. These political changes contributed to the development of a non-governmental feminist movement after the revolution.<sup>84</sup>

Economic hardship from the war, however, thwarted the integration process and limited women’s space in the economy. Florence Babb, who examines the period after the Nicaraguan revolution, traces the development of a neoliberal society and the growth of an informal economy. She argues that the neoliberal economy that emerged in the 1990s limited economic opportunities for women. Despite Sandinista efforts to integrate prostitutes into the economy, as

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<sup>80</sup> INSSBI, *Logros – ‘87* (Managua, Nicaragua: Instituto Nicaragüense de Seguridad Social y Bienestar, 1988), 15.

<sup>81</sup> WIRE, “Nicaraguan Women,” 16.

<sup>82</sup> Montoya, *Gendered Scenarios of Revolution*, 155-156.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 156.

<sup>84</sup> For more information on feminism in Nicaragua see, Karen Kampwirth, “Feminism, Antifeminism, and Electoral Politics in Postwar Nicaragua and El Salvador,” *Political Science Quarterly* 113, no. 2 (Summer 1998): 259-279; and her *Women and Guerrilla Movements: Nicaragua, El Salvador, Chiapas, Cuba* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002).

Babb explains, the economic pressures from the Contra War hindered this process. Babb suggests that the turn toward a neoliberal economy in the 1990s further erased spaces in the city for women, diminishing their ability to participate in the broader economy. Prior to 1987, the Sandinista revolution provided a greater access to the public sphere for women, but because of logistical circumstances, longstanding social values, and institutional factors such as police operations, it fell short of achieving social equality.<sup>85</sup>

Despite the Sandinista's inability to continue social services, the INSSBI-CAV project to reeducate prostitutes contributed to the discussion on women and gender. The leaders of the rehabilitation program promoted women's liberation. As Cuevas, the director of the INSSBI-CAV project noted, reeducation was a process in which women became protagonists in their own renovation.<sup>86</sup> Within a patriarchal society, the macho male considered his wife and children to be his property. However, because of the revolution and its ideology, Nicaraguans could begin the conversation on gender equality and altering women's roles. The FSLN saw the revolution as leading to the liberation of the prostitute. Recognizing the institutions that exploited her, she could now visualize a society in which she "lives a more independent and autonomous life, owns her actions and her will."<sup>87</sup> The Nicaraguan revolution held a specific interest in women. The real struggle to oblige men to understand equality had only begun.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Babb, *After Revolution*, 59, 58.

<sup>86</sup> WIRE, "Nicaraguan Women," 15.

<sup>87</sup> Cuevas, *Prostitución en Nicaragua*, 80.

<sup>88</sup> WIRE, "Nicaraguan Women," 18.

### CHAPTER 3: CONCLUSION

Prostitution offers a lens for viewing Nicaraguan society during the revolution, particularly for understanding how the Sandinistas attempted to alter social and cultural norms. The INSSBI, in particular, saw prostitution not as a moral issue, but as a social consequence of the faulty economic system of capitalism. The Institute's efforts to reform prostitution demonstrate its determination to eliminate the remaining legacy from the Somoza period. In this way, the prostitute and her brothel became symbols of that era, one dominated by capitalism, controlled by patriarchy, and disillusioned with corruption. Reeducation and social welfare programs were ways through which the Sandinistas directly attempted to change ideology and social norms. This process of reeducation and the creation of new economic opportunities altered prostitution in Nicaragua, from the *burdel* (brothel) under the Somoza dynasty to the *calle* (street) during the revolution. This shift also gave women and former prostitutes the chance to become part of the economic and public sphere. This effort to change ideology and to create a more inclusive economy for women had lasting consequences into the post-Sandinista age.

While this study fills in historiographical gaps regarding public policy toward prostitution during the Sandinista government, it illuminates many more questions for future research. Scholars would do well in providing a more comprehensive analysis of prostitution throughout the twentieth century and examine the role of the state and that of the prostitute from Sandino to Somoza and from the Sandinista to the *feminista* (feminist) movement of the late twentieth century. There are several ways to approach the topic of prostitution. During my investigation, I found evidence of male prostitution in Managua. This ignites questions about gender and sexuality that begs future exploration.<sup>89</sup> How did male prostitution work within the ideology of

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<sup>89</sup> For more information on male prostitution, see "La Prostitución: problema humano y social," in *Encuentro Universidad: estructura intelectual y desarrollo social* 3, no. 11 (1970): 53-64.

*machismo*? How does male prostitution (and potentially homosexuality) influence our understanding of masculinity within Nicaraguan society? Additionally, the historiography regarding the threat that prostitution posed to sanitary health is sparse. Nicaraguan newspapers reported a perceived increase in venereal disease during the 1970s. This topic needs consideration. Why did venereal disease seem to be on the rise? Only after examining the continuities and changes toward the institution of prostitution, can we begin to understand the complex relationship between gender and power in modern Nicaragua.

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