RELIGION AND POLITICS IN NICARAGUA: WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES A REVOLUTION MAKE?

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I. INTRODUCTION

The aim of this article is to analyse the relationship between religion and politics in Nicaragua with a special emphasis on the power relations between the Catholic Church and the State. In spite of the fact that the Republic of Nicaragua constitutionally has been, and according to the 1987 Constitution still is, a secular state since the Liberal José Santos Zelaya came to power in 1893, Church and State have used one another in their respective struggles for power. In Nicaragua, the Church-State relationship has broken down twice in the last quarter of the twentieth century: in the 1970s under Anastasio Somoza Debayle, and in the 1980s under the Sandinistas. In the late 1970s, the Catholic hierarchy gradually distanced itself from the State to become an open advocate of change. However, although it realized the need for social reform, revolution could well undermine the Church’s powerbase and position in society, and constitute a challenge to the role of the institutional hierarchy in both the spiritual and temporal spheres. Hence, the Church sought to introduce itself as a mediator, bringing the various opposing factions together for dialogue. When dialogue was no longer possible due to Somoza’s intransigence, the Catholic Church endorsed armed revolution. During the first year of the revolution (1979-80) there was practically no opposition. However, the resignation of Alfonso Robelo and Violeta Chamorro from the ruling Junta in April 1980, amid growing bourgeois disenchantment with the Sandinista National Liberation Front (Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional, FSLN) set the stage for a new phase in Church-State relations. The Church hierarchy came to play a role as political opposition to the Sandinista government. The ‘Popular Church’ threatened to split the Catholic Church in Nicaragua. The Sandinista electoral defeat in 1990 sharply altered Church-State relations in Nicaragua. The electoral victory of Chamorro in 1990 signalled a Catholic restoration or a return to the old model of

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Church-State relations in Nicaragua: an alliance with wealthy, conservative elites that could support the ecclesiastical hierarchy and its organization financially and protect the Church’s corporate interests in exchange for church blessing of the government.

Ever since the electoral defeat in 1990, Daniel Ortega’s number one priority has been to regain power. In the end, Ortega’s strategy to pave the way for his reconquest of power involved democracy-constraining pact-making. First, a political power pact with Arnoldo Alemán, which made a travesty of the nascent Nicaraguan democracy, and finally an unholy alliance with Archbishop Miguel Obando y Bravo. The latter pact was sealed by the FSLN, tightly controlled by Ortega, voting for the abolition of therapeutic abortion weeks before the November 2006 elections. In this article I will argue that the abolition of therapeutic abortion is a product of the democracy-constraining pacted character of Ortega’s strategy of regaining the presidency.

The methodological approach of the analysis is that of an interpretative case study, the aim of which is to provide an historically and comparatively grounded synthesis of the democracy-constraining pacted character of Ortega’s strategy of regaining power, of which the unholy alliance with the Catholic Church represented the successful culmination. Based on a wide range of different sources the present study attempts to trace the processes that ended with Ortega’s successful return to power by embracing the institutional interests as well as the moral policy preferences of the Catholic Church in a theoretically informed way.

With regard to the theoretical frameworks that have guided the study of religion and politics in Latin America, the old institutionalist perspective perceives the Catholic Church as just another bureaucratic organization that will act to defend its interests and privileges vis-à-vis the State. However, the perspective is unable to explain why the church hierarchy would ever challenge state authorities by siding with the political enemies of the state, as they did in Nicaragua and elsewhere in the 1970s and 1980s. An alternative ideational framework capable of explaining the emergence of the liberation theological turn therefore attributes divergent church priorities and reactions to authoritarian regimes to particular conceptions of faith and the Catholic Church’s mission and role within society that motivated hierarchy, clergy and laity alike. This ideational perspective would adequately explain the Catholic Church hierarchy’s shifts to the left or to the right as a function of the appointment of more progressive or more conservative bishops, respectively (Hagopian 2008:153). Although the institutionalist and ideational analytical frameworks had some explanatory power in authoritarian regime contexts, political scientist Frances
Hagopian contends that they are not capable of explaining the choices of religious hierarchies under conditions of religious and political pluralism in secular and democratic political regimes, and hence proposes and develops a third analytical framework to that end. Although Hagopian’s analytical framework refers to a context of religious and political pluralism in secular and democratic polities, I will also use her framework as my theoretical point of reference for the purpose of highlighting the Nicaraguan case as exceptional as a result of the devaluation of secularism and the less pluralistic character of its political system and the weakening of democracy as a consequence of the infamous Ortega-Alemán pact of 2000.

Hagopian proposes a framework to explain the responses of Latin America’s Catholic churches to new strategic dilemmas posed by religious and political pluralism in secular and democratic polities (2008:154-156). The analytical framework departs from the premise that the Catholic Church has several goals. Defending its corporate interests, maintaining the status of Catholicism as the dominant religion is undoubtedly the primary concern. A second, crucial goal is to maintain church influence over public policy concerning moral and family issues and questions of life and death. A third goal is to advance the Catholic Church’s social doctrine, to reduce material poverty and achieve social justice and peace. According to Hagopian, the dilemma for the Church stems from the fact that in democratic regimes, these goals cannot easily be pursued simultaneously. To influence policy, the Church needs allies in government. Yet, its positions on state protection for the poor and on abortion and moral and family issues do not map readily onto existing political space and do not easily match most partisan options. On the traditional left-right continuum on state intervention in the economy, the Church doctrine leans towards an equitable distribution of income and land and government provision of social welfare, often criticizing neoliberal economic policies for generating unemployment, reducing incomes, and increasing inequality. But on a second rights-morality axis, the Church opposes any policy change that would allow the public provision of sex education and contraception, or any liberalization of legislation concerning reproductive rights (abortion) that contradicts its moral doctrine. The Church finds itself relatively isolated, since most parties that are willing to defend its institutional interests and preferred moral policies do not espouse economic policies consistent with the Church’s social justice agenda, and vice versa. We will compare the evolution of the position of Ortega’s FSLN in the period leading up to the 2006 elections in light of Hagopian’s framework. Already espousing economic policies consistent with the social justice agenda of the Catholic Church, by voting in favour of criminalizing therapeutic abortions,
the FSLN also became a party willing to defend the Church’s institutional interests and preferred moral policies.

The second section of the article provides a short historical introduction to Church-State relations before Miguel Obando y Bravo was appointed Archbishop in 1970. The third section will provide an overview of how the Catholic Church broke its traditional alliance with Somoza and finally justified armed resistance against the dictator in June 1979. The fourth section describes how the Catholic Church once again reverted to a position of defensive response in the wake of the hierarchy’s confrontation with the first Sandinista government (1979-90). The fifth section outlines the consolidation of the Church’s traditional conservative position vis-à-vis the State once the Sandinistas were voted out of office in 1990. The sixth section describes the Alemán-Ortega Pact and its negative implications for Nicaraguan democracy. The seventh section describes the approachement between Ortega and Obando y Bravo, and provides an account of the origins of the present unholy alliance between the second FSLN government and the Catholic hierarchy. The final section analyses the Church’s mobilization in favour of penalizing therapeutic abortion in the weeks leading up to the 2006 elections. By pushing for a vote on the issue in the National Assembly to precede the elections, Church representatives made legislators’ re-election hostage to their vote on the bill.

II. CHURCH AND STATE BEFORE 1970: A SHORT HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION

Historically, the Catholic hierarchy in Nicaragua adopted a defensive position politically, responding to the perceived threats of liberalism and anticlericalism. This was reflected, first, in its political alliance with the Conservative Party to protect its privileges and influence in society. The defensive position came as a consequence of the fact that the Catholic Church had enjoyed almost unlimited freedom during the colonial period. After independence the Liberals sought to gain power by violently suppressing the Conservatives. Desperate for power, they even went to the extremes of allying with the filibuster William Walker to oust the Conservatives in 1855. With the expulsion of Walker from Nicaragua, the Conservatives recovered power in 1858 and ruled until 1893. With the coming to power of the Liberal President José Santos Zelaya in 1893, the Church’s privileged position came under threat (Bonpane 1980:180). A new Liberal constitution provided for separation of Church and State, the annulment of the 1862 Concordato with the Vatican, secular education, and civil marriage. After Zelaya had been forced out of power in 1909, the Conservatives returned reaffirming Church privileges. Hence, the majority of the clergy supported the 1912 US intervention and subsequent
occupation of Nicaragua (1912-25) to suppress a Liberal rebellion against the Conservatives. When the US troops returned in 1927 to fight Augusto C. Sandino, the bishops again supported US intervention because they considered Sandino a bolshevist and atheist. After Anastasio Somoza García seized power in 1936, the Catholic Church supported his government in return for continued religious instruction in the schools and the guarantee of other privileges. In practice, Catholicism was recognized as the de facto official religion, despite the legal separation of Church and State, and although public education was secularized, Church-run schools continued to flourish. Since Somoza bought off the Conservatives through the Pact of the Generals in 1950, the traditional Liberal-Conservative rivalry was rendered insignificant. The defensive response of the Catholic Church remained the same, but since the 1940s and 1950s the threat changed. Now the concern was with communism, and, to a lesser extent, the growth of Protestantism. This change was triggered by the papal encyclicals Quadresimo Anno and Rerum Novarum, which stressed the need for social change while warning against the dangers of communism. In this sense, it was a defensive response on the part of the Church which finally led it to promote social change: the need for containing communism. The Nicaraguan Catholic hierarchy could not ignore the process of renewal which was occurring within the universal Catholic Church during the 1960s. The encyclicals of Pope John XXIII emphasized the need for structural change, the human right to a decent standard of living, education and political participation in this world. This re-evaluation of the Church’s role in society became a dominant theme during the Vatican II Council of 1962-65. In 1968, the Latin American bishops held their Second General Conference in Medellin, and encouraged by the presence of Pope Paul VI, declared their commitment to the poor and oppressed. Although this process of renewal met with little enthusiasm on the part of the Nicaraguan Catholic hierarchy, a small group of clergy were eager to play a more active role in promoting social change. Initial efforts at conscientización were the organization of a comunidad ecclesial de base by the Spanish priest José de la Jara in San Pablo Apóstol, a poor barrio in Managua, and the foundation by Ernesto Cardenal of a contemplative community, Nuestra Señora de Solentiname, on a small island in Lake Nicaragua. Finally, as the result of the pressure from some progressive priests, the bishops officially accepted the principles set forth in Medellín. However, the process of renewal within the universal Church, the growing commitment of some progressive priests to social change, the miserable social conditions resulting from the economic model, and the absence of channels for meaningful political participation, although having

The appointment of Mons. Miguel Obando y Bravo as Archbishop of Managua in March 1970 served as the catalyst in the hierarchy’s acceptance of the Medellín conclusions and its eventual distancing from the Somoza regime, in accordance with the ideational explanatory framework. Symbolically, Obando sold Somoza’s gift of a Mercedes Benz and donated the proceeds to the poor (Lewellen 1989:17; Gismondi 1986:25). In March 1971, Obando announced that he would not attend the Kupia-Kumi ceremony, the pact signed by Somoza Debayle and Fernando Agüero, head of the Conservative Party, to set up a bipartisan triumvirate consisting of Agüero and two Liberals to rule Nicaragua until 1974, when a new constitution would be drawn up and elections held. The Kupia-Kumi Pact was Somoza’s ruse to keep himself in control until 1974, when he would have himself “re-elected”.

These developments coincided with a generational change in the hierarchy: of 9 bishops in 1968 only 3 remained on their posts in 1972 (Thorpe and Bennett 2000:294). The appointment of more progressive bishops is consistent with the ideational analytical framework. The pastoral of 19 March 1972, in which the bishops criticize the undemocratic, unresponsive and fraudulent character of Nicaraguan politics, reflected a clear break with the Somoza regime. Mons. Antonio García S, Bishop of Granada, was the only bishop who refused to sign the pastoral. Significantly, in the following weeks Somoza showered him with gifts (Williams 1985:353-354). The Managua earthquake on December 23, 1972 also implied a political earthquake that shattered the Somoza regime. Somoza’s control of international loans and donations for rescue and relief aid revealed the regime’s incredible levels of corruption, and marked the beginning of the private sector’s increasing alienation from Somoza’s “loaded dice”-style crony capitalism (Booth 1982:66). Somoza channelled most international aid into his own economic empire instead of using it to mitigate the private sector’s economic dire straits. Both the Church hierarchy and the private sector preferred a moderate government without Somoza as well as the FSLN: Somocismo sin Somoza. Mons. Obando y Bravo headed an initiative for national dialogue. The FSLN accepted the
proposed dialogue on the condition that Somoza step down, whereas the latter would only participate if the FSLN abandoned its armed struggle. The assassination of Pedro Joaquín Chamorro on 10 January 1978 at the hands of the Somoza regime effectively marked the beginning of the end for the possibility of a peaceful negotiated settlement (Williams 1985:358). Hence, Somoza’s growing intransigence and the increasing strength of the FSLN pushed the Church hierarchy and the private sector into a strategic alliance with the Sandinistas. During the summer of 1978, the Broad Opposition Front (Frente Amplio Opositor, FAO) was formed, including UDEL\textsuperscript{7}, the Nicaraguan Democratic Movement (Movimiento Democrático Nicaragüense, MDN – Alfonso Robelo’s business-based pro-reform group), ‘Los Doce’\textsuperscript{8}, the Agüero faction of the Conservative Party, and the Social Christian Party (PSCN). In October 1978 both Somoza and the FAO accepted an OAS attempt at a mediated settlement, but negotiations soon broke down in the face of Somoza’s intransigence and malice. The Catholic hierarchy finally realized that all peaceful means had been exhausted. In the pastoral of June 2, 1979 the hierarchy went as far as explicitly justifying armed struggle against Somoza.\textsuperscript{9} Although the pastoral arrived very late indeed, it nevertheless represented a striking occurrence, in that no other Episcopal Conference in Latin America had ever thus legitimized armed revolution.


The establishment of a Sandinista-controlled hegemonic corporatist regime (Consejo de Estado, 1979-84) ended the alliance between the FSLN and the private sector and the Church hierarchy. The Sandinista policy of promoting a ‘Popular Church’ in opposition to the Catholic hierarchy created a split within the ranks of the latter. Under the leadership of Mons. Miguel Obando y Bravo, the conservative hierarchy reverted to its defensive position, whereas priests such as Ernesto Cardenal and Miguel D’Escoto accepted positions as ministers (Culture and Foreign Affairs, respectively) in the Sandinista Government.\textsuperscript{10} Their participation in the revolutionary process became a liability to the Catholic Church hierarchy, which viewed the political involvement of the priests and their growing identification with the revolution as undermining Church stability. The priests in government acknowledged that canon law prohibits clergy from occupying positions of civil power but considered their case an exception, since Nicaragua was undergoing a process of revolution imbued by the principle of the ‘preferential option for the poor’, in keeping with the tenets of the Gospel. They claimed that from their positions in the government they could give a Christian face to the revolution and better serve the poor,
thus doing the will of God (Martin 1989). The bishops blamed the revolutionary priests for creating divisions within the Church by attempting to create a ‘Popular Church’ outside the authority of the hierarchy. However, the “Popular Church”-project eventually failed, partly due to Papal intervention. The Christian Base Communities and their merging of religion and politics (Canin 1997) had never been supported by the Nicaraguan Church hierarchy, even in the Somoza era. Thus, the progressive Church was more vulnerable and its liberationist wing more easily reined in where its conceptions of faith and mission were not shared by the bishops, as was the case in Nicaragua as opposed to Brazil, where virtually the entire Episcopal hierarchy embraced the theology of liberation (Lewellen 1989:25).

The Papal visit to Nicaragua on March 4, 1983 marked the climax in the Church hierarchy’s confrontation with the Sandinista government and the conflict within the Church. The Pope lent his support to the hierarchy and stressed the need for unity at the expense of the progressive sector, which he blamed for creating divisions within the Church. With the Church’s corporate interests and unity at stake, the Church’s social doctrine to reduce material poverty and achieve social justice by the obligation to offer an ecclesiastical option for the poor was put on the backburner. Hence, the Papal visit served to strengthen and galvanize the traditional conservative position of reasserting the power of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Archbishop Obando y Bravo’s leadership position was further strengthened by his elevation as the first ever Latin American Cardinal by the Vatican in April 1985 (Thorpe and Bennett 2000:299).

V. 1990-2006: RELIGION AND POLITICS IN THE POST-REVOLUTION

Galvanized by the Vatican, by the preponderant leadership of Cardinal Obando y Bravo and by the clergy who had sided with the counterrevolution, the Catholic Church consolidated its conservative position even further when the Sandinistas were defeated in the 1990 elections. The Sandinistas had tried to mend fences with the Catholic bishops, at one point asking Cardinal Obando y Bravo to preside over the National Reconciliation Commission. Even so, the Catholic hierarchy’s sympathy with Violeta Barrios de Chamorro and the National Opposition Union (Unión Nacional Opositora, UNO) coalition was unambiguous. Priests were accustomed to announce from the pulpits in the parishes around the country that ‘Dios es Uno’ (Dodson 1992:20). When Cardinal Obando made his appearance in public with Mrs. Chamorro, as he frequently did, he always played the role of her pastor, taking care to bless her. The day before the election La Prensa ran a front page picture of the
Cardinal blessing Mrs. Chamorro and her running mate, Virgilio Godoy. The election of Violeta Chamorro and the UNO coalition sharply altered Church-State relations in Nicaragua. It immediately led to a pronounced tilt towards state sponsorship of the Roman Catholic Church, in spite of constitutional provisions for the separation of church and state. Indeed, one can speak of a ‘Catholic restoration’. Among many prominent symbols of this restoration was the building of a new cathedral in Managua. The UNO government donated the land, the Sandinistas had made the same offer but were refused, and both President Chamorro and Managua mayor, Arnoldo Alemán, pledged US $100 000 to the cathedral project. Furthermore, a new Catholic university called *Redemptoris Mater* was founded. The lands where the Catholic University (UNICA) was to be built was a gift from the Chamorro government, which facilitated fund raising through the social security institute (Dodson 1992: 23).

A second focus of Catholic restoration manifested itself in the field of education (Kampwirth 1996:73). At the inauguration of President Chamorro, Cardinal Obando y Bravo gave a lengthy speech in which he strongly criticized and condemned education under the outgoing Sandinista government, describing it as “an education without morality and without God” (quoted in Dodson 1992:22). He laid out the central points of the Catholic tradition on which a democratic society must be based and advocated the recovery of Catholic leadership in education and the promotion of ‘values’ (Aragón 2011). Under the Sandinista government the education ministry was headed by prominent Nicaraguan Catholics, albeit progressive ones. Chamorro’s first two education ministers, said to have been handpicked by Cardinal Obando, were devout charismatics with close ties to Obando y Bravo. The Catholic restoration clearly favoured the institutional interests of the Roman Church, the interests and goals of the most conservative elements of the Catholic Church. The Nicaraguan Church essentially returned to the pre-Vatican II strategy that Ivan Vallier once characterized as the strategy of the “politicians” (Dodson 1992:26). Pope John Paul II’s second visit to Nicaragua in 1996 was a clear demonstration of his blessing of the model of Church-State relations he had wanted to inaugurate with his first visit in 1983.

The full consolidation of the *de facto* non-secular model of Church-State relations took place during the Arnoldo Alemán administration. Cardinal Obando y Bravo played a decisive role in Alemán’s 1996 electoral victory with his famous “parable of the viper”, designed to block any chance of an FSLN electoral victory.¹¹ Cardinal Obando y Bravo was not only present at Aleman’s inauguration, but came garbed in cope and miter, the most formal of liturgical ornaments. In the act, a group of priests
intoned the *Te Deum*, the melody used to crown emperors and kings, in Latin. During the Alemán presidency (1997-2002), the Catholic Church fully recovered its institutional power and the state legitimated itself through the ideological power of the Church. The hierarchy attended public celebrations and the government attended religious ceremonies. The violation of the constitutional principle of the secular State became routine. The Catholic hierarchy never criticized the corruption institutionalized by the Alemán government during its term, remaining silent even in the face of accumulating evidence (Aragón 2011). Threatened by the Sandinista revolutionary challenge of the ‘Popular Church’ in the 1980s, the strategy of the Church hierarchy after the Sandinista electoral defeat in 1990 was to ally with politically conservative elites to protect its corporate interests and implement its moral agenda.

**VI. THE ALEMÁN-ORTEGA PACT: A RETURN TO ELECTORAL CAUDILLISMO?**

Ortega’s bid to retake power first of all required maintaining an iron grip over his party. The Sandinista leader suffered severely from losing control of his legislative bench in 1993, during which a split began in the FSLN which eventually saw the ‘Sandinista Renovators’ led by former vice-president Sergio Ramírez go their own way. In May 1995, Sergio Ramírez together with other former Sandinista comandantes like Dora María Téllez, Henry Ruíz, and Gioconda Belli formed the *Movimiento Renovador Sandinista* (MRS).

Since 1995, after the most prominent of his critics left the party, Daniel Ortega has enjoyed absolute control of the FSLN, which gradually became his own personal political vehicle, together with his trusty stalwarts Lenín Cerna, Tomás Borge, and his wife Rosario Murillo. For more than twenty years, Ortega has insisted on remaining both party leader and presidential candidate. He has driven out his opponents and filled the leadership with his loyalists (Anderson and Dodd 2002:92). The formation of the MRS was the last major dissidence, however, and Ortega has since taken pains to see to it that all FSLN candidates for deputy are under his firm selection and control. Four deputies who opposed the 2000 pact were unceremoniously denied their re-election chances in 2001. During the legislative period starting January 2002, barely a whisper of dissent was heard in the 38-member FSLN bench of National Assembly deputies.

Discipline in the ranks of his party has been an essential basis for Ortega’s strategy for accumulating power. Ortega’s authoritarian control of the FSLN drove many other Sandinista leaders away in the 1990s, but it also allowed him to make a power deal with Alemán, which opened the way for the constitutional reform that finally allowed Ortega to win the
2006 elections. A second precondition was thus the series of institutional footholds achieved by the 2000 political power pact with Arnoldo Alemán. From January 1997 to June 1998, President Alemán had no need for any pact with the FSLN. With 42 Liberal deputies in the National Assembly (out of 93) and 12 from other parties that could be counted upon to support Liberal initiatives, he had sufficient backing for legislation and was a mere two votes short of the number required to amend the Constitution. But halfway through 1998, the Liberal bench went into crisis and 8 deputies left. Alemán was also toying with plans to change the Constitution so that he could be re-elected and for that he needed the support of the FSLN. In addition, by 1998, Alemán had become increasingly threatened by charges of corruption brought against him by the Comptroller General Agustín Jarquín, whose authority had been increased by amendments to the Nicaraguan Constitution in 1995 (Stahler-Sholk 2003:539). Alemán’s political solution to protect himself from prosecution and place himself beyond the reach of the law involved a political pact with the FSLN designed both to maintain the Constitutionalist Liberal Party (Partido Liberal Constitucionalista, PLC) and the FSLN’s grip on power and place their leaders beyond possible legal recourse for their abuses of power, referred to as El Pacto. Political pacts are not a new phenomenon in Nicaragua, as the Somoza governments frequently used political pacts with the opposition to secure support for the existing regime in exchange for certain limited benefits. The Pact politicized the Office of the Comptroller General of the Republic by expanding its membership from one to 5 officials of equal rank, thus depriving Jarquín of his ability to single-handedly pursue corrupt officials. In order to further protect Alemán and Ortega, whose stepdaughter Zoilamérica Narváez in 1998 publicly accused him of having sexually abused her from the age of 11 and of having repeatedly raped her since the age of 15 (Kampwirth 2011:24-25), the Pact gave automatic lifetime seats in the National Assembly to outgoing presidents and vice presidents and required a two-thirds majority vote of the National Assembly to strip a sitting president of his immunity. The Pact also gave the PLC and the FSLN increased leverage over the judiciary and the Supreme Electoral Council (CSE) by increasing the number of Nicaraguan Supreme Court justices from 12 to 16 and the number of magistrates on the CSE from 5 to 7. As a result of the Pact, the members of the Supreme Court and the CSE have been personally selected by Ortega or Alemán, and they respond to orders from their party bosses.

In addition, the Pact changed electoral laws in order to make the rise of a third party to challenge the PLC and the FSLN extremely difficult. Legal standing would only be granted to a party that presents a list of
signatures equivalent to at least 3 per cent of the last electoral roll. Last but not least, the Pact changed the electoral law to make it possible for a candidate to win the first round of presidential elections with 40 per cent or even only 35 per cent, provided the difference with the runner-up is at least 5 per cent.

With these provisions as his launch pad, Ortega relentlessly pursued ever larger spaces in Nicaragua’s institutions, passing through the following series of landmark events:

In October 2002, the FSLN unexpectedly supported the re-election of Roberto Rivas Reyes as president of the Supreme Electoral Council (CSE) in exchange for expanded quotas of power in various departments of the institution. In a prologue to this event, Ortega used his party’s influence in the Office of the Comptroller General of the Republic (CGR) to quash accusations against Rivas for corruption. The two actions induced the CSE president, formerly an ally of the Liberals, to switch political sides. As Rivas is the son of Cardinal Obando’s personal secretary, Josefa Reyes Valenzuela (Gutiérrez 2012), the two actions further served to place the Catholic Church in the FSLN’s debt. In the crowning event in the series, Ortega negotiated the replacement of 9 justices to the Supreme Court of Justice (SCJ) in June 2003, achieving parity on the body with the PLC, and the election of another Sandinista as Court president in March 2004. The latter development for the first time provided the FSLN with a working majority at the highest judicial level.

Hence, Ortega evolved a strategy for his return to power by starting from the gradual accumulation of positions in the institutions of state, passing through subsequent legal and constitutional reforms, and culminating in a triumphant election. It is thus a strategy with a fallback position, if he lost another election he would still retain important quotas of power with which to go on being the opposition’s major player.

VII. THE UNHOLY ALLIANCE BETWEEN ORTEGA AND THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

The FSLN again failed to win the 2001 presidential election, which was won by PLC-candidate Enrique Bolaños. The unusually high thresholds and onerous signature requirements reduced the field of parties from 24 in 1996 to only 3 in 2001: the PLC, the FSLN and the Conservative Party (PC). Enrique Bolaños (PLC) defeated Ortega (FSLN) by 56 to 42 per cent, with the Conservative Party (Partido Conservador, PC) getting 1.4 per cent. In the National Assembly the PLC got 53, the FSLN 38 and the PC 1 representatives (Stahler-Sholk 2003:543).

Daniel Ortega’s quest to return was not simply for power but for historical vindication.
Three successive electoral defeats did not diminish his drive to regain the presidential chair and resume his country’s redemption. The elections in 1996 and 2001 demonstrated that image makeovers alone would not succeed in raising his 40 per cent vote total to the point where he could win a straight-up contest with the PLC. Hence, it was during the administration of Enrique Bolaños that the FSLN, by then totally in the hands of Ortega, with his short-term approach to problems, understood that it had to change its strategy vis-à-vis the Catholic Church. The FSLN came to see the strength of religion in the Nicaraguan people and of the persistence, even predominance, of the conservative tradition in grassroots religiosity. They understood that, despite all the efforts in the 1980s, the traditional religious mentality would not change. Based on that evidence, they concluded that confrontation did not suit their purposes, that they had to coexist with the religious leaders and, above all, that they even had to encourage the traditional religiosity those religious leaders represented if it would help them win power.

The involvement of Cardinal Miguel Obando y Bravo in Nicaraguan politics had reached a point where he sometimes was referred to as ‘the third caudillo’. Bestowing all kinds of favours on Church personnel at various levels, the previous Alemán administration had forged close ties with the Cardinal, to the point where Obando was increasingly perceived as a Liberal by ordinary citizens. Cardinal Obando used to be Alemán’s best friend and the Catholic hierarchy was a strong supporter of his government. Obando kept on supporting Alemán even when the latter became bogged down in corruption trials. This unconditional support seriously damaged the credibility of the Catholic Church in Nicaragua, particularly between 2002 and 2004 (Gooren 2005). The Alemán administration’s corruption also touched the Catholic hierarchy and the institutions tied to it. During the Bolaños administration, the media documented the irregularities that took place in the Archdiocese’s Social Promotion Commission (Corporación de Promoción Social Arquidiocesana, COPROSA) during the period 1981-2000 when it was directed by Roberto Rivas, Cardinal Obando’s protégé, and current president of the Supreme Electoral Council (CSE) (Enríquez 2010). The best known abuse of the privilege enjoyed by this nongovernmental organization was the tax-free import into the country of hundreds of luxury vehicles for the cardinal’s inner circle, by way of COPROSA (Baltodano 2006). Sensing they were sources of corruption, the Bolaños administration initially curtailed some of the Church’s privileges, but retreated when the hierarchy complained it was being mistreated. In June 2004, signs surfaced that the government was attempting to lobby the Vatican to have Pope John Paul II accept the pro forma resignation which
Obando submitted two years earlier on reaching the Church’s official retirement age of 75. The clumsy piece of international diplomacy only served to alienate the Church further. One of the repercussions of that alienation was to pave the way for an extraordinary *rapprochement* between Obando y Bravo and Ortega.

Ortega decided to build a closer relationship with Cardinal Obando and other Catholic Church leaders in order to avoid having them as enemies, and to neutralize their influence. It was not Obando who sought out Ortega, but rather Ortega who approached him to negotiate (Aragón 2011). The relationship between Ortega and Cardinal Obando y Bravo only seemed to improve between 2004 and 2005, while Obando’s ties with Alemán steadily deteriorated. Ortega publicly begged forgiveness from Cardinal Obando and the Catholic Church for persecuting them in the 1980s. Ortega and Rosario Murillo had lived together for 27 years in an unmarried partnership, but in 2005, less than a year before the 2006 election, they were married in the Catholic Church in a special ceremony presided over by Cardinal Obando y Bravo himself (Kampwirth 2008:3). Ortega and Murillo carefully projected a public image of themselves as fervent Catholics, nursing amicable relations with the bishops Montenegro and Carballo and the new archbishop Leopoldo Brenes (Gooren 2010:55).

**VIII. THE 2006 ELECTIONS: REVISITING THERAPEUTIC ABORTION**

In 2005 Ortega effectively blocked the possibility of an open vote on who would be the FSLN presidential candidate in the 2006 elections. Herthy Lewites, the popular and charismatic former Sandinista mayor of Managua, originally sought the FSLN candidacy, but Ortega maneuvered to avoid an open primary, thus locking Lewites out. Subsequently, Ortega’s strongest rival, was attacked in a dirty campaign and finally expelled from the FSLN. Herthy Lewites then agreed to run as the candidate of the Sandinista Renewal Movement (MRS), but died suddenly of a heart attack on July 2, 2006. His eventual replacement as the candidate of the MRS, Edmundo Jarquin, never achieved a similar level of popular support (Lean 2007:830).

In the months leading up to the November elections, the rhetoric of anti-imperialism and class struggle was replaced by the rhetoric of peace and love, and the traditional Sandinista red and black was replaced with brilliant pastel colours, hot pink, in particular. Ortega performed an extreme image makeover, donned himself in white prophet-like outfits and like a successful televangelist, he often spoke of God, solidarity and reconciliation (Gooren 2010:50). In fact, many historic enemies of the FSLN were incorporated into the Sandinista electoral coalition,
*Unidad Nicaragua Triunfa* (Great Nicaragua Unified Triumphs), most prominently the vice-presidential candidate and former Contra commander Jaime Morales Carazo (Kampwirth 2008:3).

The highly political, public debate surrounding the abortion controversy in Nicaragua that led to the complete abortion ban in 2006 began in 2003 when the so-called “Rosita case” gained national and international attention. In 2003, an adult attacker raped and impregnated a nine-year-old Nicaraguan girl named Rosita on a coffee plantation in Costa Rica. Rosita’s parents, fearing for their only daughter’s life and mental health, sought a therapeutic abortion and despite the legality of their actions and the duties of the two states, faced resistance from the Costa Rican government and later from the Nicaraguan government. Eventually, this case caused a heated debate in the Nicaraguan parliament, and in 2004, the National Assembly considered removing the therapeutic exceptions to the abortion ban. However, the debate was suspended in light of the controversy and uproar it created.

In August 2006, abortion opponents took advantage of the extremely polarized November elections to push for a rescission of article 165 of the Nicaraguan Penal Code, which allowed exceptions to the more than 100-year-old general prohibition on abortion. Despite pleas to separate the therapeutic abortion debate from presidential politics, Nicaraguan legislators rekindled discussions when it became clear that the Sandinista Renewal Movement (MRS) favoured keeping therapeutic abortion on the books, whereas Ortega endorsed the penalization of therapeutic abortion in order to avoid opposition from the Catholic Church to his bid for the presidency. In support of their anti-abortion movement, church representatives gathered some 200,000 signatures which were presented to the Nicaraguan National Assembly to urge the rescission of the therapeutic abortion exception. Heavy lobbying from both Catholic and Protestant leaders culminated in an anti-abortion march by 50,000 Catholics and 20,000 Evangelicals on October 6, 2006 (Kampwirth 2008:8). The purpose of the march was to pressure the National Assembly to abolish therapeutic abortion. The Nicaraguan legislature met with church representatives in closed-door meetings. By pushing the vote on the abortion law change to precede the national elections, Church leaders made legislators’ re-elections hostage to their vote on the bill.

On October 27, 2006, the Nicaraguan legislature passed bill no. 603, which repealed article 165. The rescission of article 165 was approved by a vote of 52 to zero, 9 abstentions and 29 not present. Thus, the National Assembly ratified the penalization of therapeutic abortion, legalized in 1901 under the Liberal José Santos Zelaya regime (1894-1909). Cardinal
Obando y Bravo promptly returned the favour by pronouncing a sermon on ‘the prodigal son’ during mass a week before the 5 November elections (Gooren 2010:50). The prodigal son sermon was widely interpreted as Obando y Bravo’s blessing of Ortega’s bid for the presidency and contrasted starkly with the Cardinal’s anti-Ortega sermon right before the February 1990 elections. For good measure, Cardinal Obando y Bravo threw in a special meeting in the Metropolitan Cathedral of Managua to celebrate the occasion of Ortega’s 61rst birthday a week after his electoral victory. Later on the same day, Archbishop Leopoldo Brenes led a Eucharist mass in honour of the new president-elect (Gooren 2010:56).

The anti-abortion law implies prison sentences of 1–3 years for women who decide to take an abortion, and 1–2 years of prison for those who offer to perform an abortion. The law is lethal in the sense that between September 2006 and October 2007 there were more than 80 documented deaths of women, all poor, due to negligent healthcare or lack of access to healthcare (López Vigil 2007). The law violates these poor women’s constitutional right to life and health. In Nicaragua, teen-aged girls account for 45 per cent of all pregnancies (Padgett 2012). In 2007, during the first year of the Ortega administration, there were 115 cases of deaths due to pregnancy, or a maternal mortality rate of 82 per 100,000 live births, which was higher than the two previous years. Although not constituting proof that the increase in maternal mortality was due to the elimination of therapeutic abortion in October 2006, the data is consistent with that thesis (Kampwirth 2011:24). Human Rights Watch put the 2010 maternal mortality rate at 170 per 100,000 live births. Women’s groups denounced that in 2011, 1453 girls between 10 and 14 years of age, who had been raped, were forced to give birth due to the elimination of therapeutic abortion (Nicaragua News Bulletin, October 2, 2012).

Thus, in the elite struggle for power the interests of poor women, the principal victims of the criminalization of therapeutic abortion, continue to be sacrificed literally speaking. The blanket ban on abortion signifies a downright violation of the human rights of poor young women and is a far cry from the “preferential option for the poor”. The Supreme Court of Justice received a lot of writs of unconstitutionality (recursos de inconstitucionalidad) against the penalization of therapeutic abortion since it violated several articles in the Nicaraguan Constitution: the rights to life, health and integrity etc. These recursos were shelved by the Supreme Court of Justice (López Vigil 2007). The Supreme Court has failed to issue a ruling on the constitutionality of the law five years after it received the case (Nicaragua News Bulletin, October 2, 2012). As all the institutions are controlled and shared out in quotas among the followers of Daniel Ortega
and Arnoldo Alemán ever since their political pact, the judicial branch has turned a blind eye to this case and other violations of the constitutional precept of a secular state by the executive branch with the complicity of the ecclesiastical hierarchy (Guevara López 2008).

Then, on September 13, 2007, at a time when there was no election looming, the legislature reaffirmed the ban when it rejected a vote to legalize therapeutic abortion and voted in favour of a new penal code maintaining the blanket prohibition on abortion. Only the 3 MRS deputies in the National Assembly voted against the new penal code while 27 FSLN legislators, together with the deputies of the two liberal parties, the PLC and the ALN, voted in favour and the remaining 11 FSLN deputies did not show up or abstained from voting (Nicaragua News Bulletin, October 2, 2012).

The Sandinista representatives in the National Assembly, who had upheld therapeutic abortion in previous years, voted against it in 2006 out of fear that the party would otherwise lose the election. But there is little reason to believe that their votes affected the electoral outcome. Nationwide, none of the FSLN’s strategies, expensive advertising, the rhetoric of love and reconciliation, the electoral alliances with Contras and Somocistas, the alliance with the Catholic Church and various evangelical leaders, and the vote against therapeutic abortion, seem to have made any difference (Kampwirth 2008:10). The FSLN won without growing, i.e. it won with the votes of its traditionally loyal voters and few others, and it would have lost had the right not been divided in two. After being convicted to 20 years in prison for fraud, corruption, and money laundering, Alemán kept dominating his PLC party. Many left the party disgusted, including the former banker Montealegre, who started the new Alianza Liberal Nicaraguense (ALN). Together, PLC’s Rizo and ALN’s Montealegre won a majority of 55 per cent of all valid votes, but their feud meant that Ortega ended up winning the elections. In addition to the fact that the right was divided, election laws had changed because of the pact between Ortega and Alemán. According to the electoral law that came out of the pact, it is possible for a candidate to win the first round of the presidential elections with 40 per cent or only with 35 per cent, provided the difference with the runner-up is at least 5 per cent. As it turned out, Ortega won with 38 per cent of the votes. He won the first round of the 2006 elections with 38 per cent of all valid votes, against 28.3 per cent for the number two, Montealegre (ALN), and 27.1 per cent for the number three: Rizo (PLC) (Lean 2007:831). In short, the split among the Liberals constituted the necessary cause for Ortega’s electoral victory, whereas the
reduced threshold for winning presidential elections in the first round constituted the sufficient cause (Torres-Rivas 2007:10).

As of October 2006, Nicaragua is one of few Latin American countries, Chile, El Salvador and the Dominican Republic being the others, in which abortion is illegal without exception (Kampwirth 2008:10). According to Friedman, concerning the issue of reproductive rights, and abortion in particular, “leftwing executives seem either unable or unwilling to back a policy that deeply challenges gender roles – and religious beliefs” (Friedman 2009:428).25

In Chile, under President Michelle Bachelet (2006-2010), her Socialist Party tried to decriminalize therapeutic abortion which had been banned under the Pinochet dictatorship, but unsuccessfully since the political opposition to the measure resulted in a stalemate. The election of FMLN candidate Mauricio Funes to the presidency in El Salvador in 2009 has so far not led to any restoration of therapeutic abortion. Thus, the election of new left presidents in the countries where bans on therapeutic abortion were already in place (Chile and El Salvador) did not result in the restoration of limited abortion rights. But with the notorious exception of Nicaragua’s Daniel Ortega, none of the other leftist presidents sought to end pre-existing limited abortion rights by deliberately criminalizing therapeutic abortion as part of an explicit electoral strategy to win power (Kampwirth 2011:32, 34). Thus, Nicaragua stands out among the pink26 tide countries, as the only country where the arrival of the pink tide on her shores was contaminated by a treacherous undertow: the reactionary blanket prohibition on abortion that literally sacrificed the rights to life and health of poor women.

Under the terms of the 1987 Constitution, the presidential candidacy of incumbent Daniel Ortega in 2011 was inadmissible because he had already served the allowed maximum two terms (1984-1990; 2006-2011), and because an amendment to the 1987 Constitution passed in 1995 banned immediate re-election of the president. However, in 2009 the FSLN-controlled Supreme Court of Justice (CSJ) ruled that these restrictions violated another constitutional principle of individual equality, and therefore the right of Ortega to run for office. In the 2011 electoral campaign groups of Nicaraguan women staged protests demanding the restitution of the right to therapeutic abortion. But not a single candidate in the 6 November presidential and parliamentary elections was willing to risk their votes by backing the demands of the women. All presidential candidates pronounced themselves against abortion, including the therapeutic version. They all proclaimed themselves as ‘pro-vida’
candidates, i.e. as staunch defenders of the right to life since the moment of conception.

IX. Conclusion

Nicaragua’s tragic political history has moved in circles, as in Gabriel García Márquez’s literary prototype *Hundred Years of Solitude*. The sacrifice of therapeutic abortion in 2006 through the pact between Ortega and Obando y Bravo implies a setback and a partial return to Nicaragua’s patrimonial past with a particular reactionary twist: the abolition of therapeutic abortion took the country back to the state of affairs before the Liberal José Santos Zelaya came to power in 1893, and secularized the State constitutionally. In a flagrant violation of the secular state, in the 2006 electoral campaign Ortega endorsed the penalization of therapeutic abortion in order to avoid opposition from the Catholic Church to his bid for the presidency. The devaluation of secularism, through flagrant and continuous violation of the secular state, implied by the pact between Ortega and Obando, goes hand in hand with Nicaragua’s democratic backsliding since the pact of 2000. The Ortega-Alemán pact represented a serious limitation of political pluralism. The pact not only undermined political pluralism but nurtured impunity and corruption. The “under-the-table” character of the pact represents a frontal attack on the democratic institutions, whose politicization devalued their credibility and integrity as they were hijacked and turned into abusive instruments for guaranteeing the shady interests of the two caudillos involved. The cynical collusion between the two caudillos represents a partial return to Nicaragua’s neo-patrimonial past of electoral caudillismo. The subsequent unholy alliance between the two former arch-enemies Ortega and Cardinal Obando y Bravo, nicknamed the ‘third caudillo’, the one of the Catholic Church, is essentially just a rerun of the same tit-for-tat power game that became ‘the only game in town’ with the Ortega-Alemán pact.

According to Hagopian (2008), the strategic dilemmas posed by religious and political pluralism in secular and democratic polities often leaves the Church relatively isolated, since most parties that are willing to defend the Church’s institutional interests and preferred moral policies do not espouse economic policies consistent with its social justice agenda, and vice versa. The continuous flagrant violations of the secular state in the post-revolutionary period and the democracy-constraining limitations of political pluralism as a consequence of the infamous Ortega-Alemán pact of 2000, reduce the relevance and applicability of Hagopian’s analytical framework for explaining the power relations between Church and State in the Nicaraguan case. The pact between Ortega and Archbishop Obando y
Bravo provided a solution to these dilemmas by creating a symbiosis between the agendas of the FSLN and the Catholic Church. The willingness of Ortega to defend the Church’s institutional interests and preferred moral policies through the abolition of therapeutic abortion turned the FSLN into a ‘perfect’ strategic ally for the Catholic Church. Indeed, a match made in heaven. The abolition of therapeutic abortion is a product of the collusive character of Ortega’s political strategy of regaining the presidency.

NOTES

1 With regard to the institutionalist analytical framework, the classic work is Ivan Vallier (1970), *Catholicism, Social Control, and Modernization in Latin America*.

2 Sandino’s ties with the Mexican government sufficed to convince the Catholic hierarchy that he was an enemy of the Church. It was during this time that the Cristero Rebellion (1926–29), a violent struggle between the Catholic Church and the anti-clerical administration of Calles, took place.

3 It was not inconsequential that Pope John’s encyclicals and the Vatican Council came in the wake of the Cuban Revolution and John F. Kennedy’s Alliance for Progress, both strong reminders to the Catholic Church of the urgency of promoting social change in Latin America.

4 The most precise translation would be "consciousness raising" or a "lifting of social awareness".

5 *Comunidades eclesiales de base* are small groups of people from the same barrio who gather together to discuss daily problems in light of the Bible.

6 Mons. Miguel Obando y Bravo served as Archbishop of Managua until he was granted retirement from that position on April 1, 2005, the day before Pope John Paul II died. Leopoldo Brenes became the new Archbishop of Managua.

7 UDEL (*Unión Democrática de Liberación*), a broad opposition front formed in 1974 by the editor of *La Prensa*, Pedro Joaquín Chamorro, was composed of the Nicaraguan Socialist party (PSN), a faction of the Social Christian Party (PSCN), labour groupings (CGT and CTN), Conservatives, and the Independent Liberal Party (PLI).

8 *Los Doce* was a group of several respected professionals and two priests, Fernando Cardenal and Miguel D’Escoto, which appeared at the end of 1977. It endorsed the FSLN’s position.

9 It should be mentioned in this connection that Pope Paul’s encyclical *Populorum Progressio* of 1967 went a long way towards admitting that revolutionary uprisings could perhaps be justified against long-standing tyrannies (Thorpe & Bennett 2000:293).

10 The other ‘political priests’ were Fernando Cardenal (Ernesto’s brother), FSLN Youth Director, Edgar Parrales (OAS delegate) and Álvaro Argüello (representative to the Council of State).
In the October 1996 presidential election, Alemán and his Liberal Alliance won with 51 per cent of the vote against Ortega’s 38 per cent. Cardinal Obando y Bravo gave a sermon just hours before the polls were to be opened and after the electoral campaign had legally ended in which he likened the FSLN to a viper which would bite any unsuspecting person who picked it up.

Of the nine legendary guerrilla comandantes only two stuck with Ortega. Two died, two retired from politics and three joined the Sandinista Renewal Movement/MRS (Torres-Rivas 2007:9).

The party was officially founded on May 18, 1995, the centenary of the birth of Augusto Sandino.

The MRS and other critics of the FSLN claim that the party no longer represents the legacy of Sandino, but has degenerated into ‘orteguismo’ or ‘danielismo’ pure and simple (see Mónica Baltodano 2006).

Tomás Borge is now deceased. He died on April 30, 2012 aged 81. Together with Carlos Fonseca Amador and Sivio Mayorga, Tomás Borge was one of the three original founders of the FSLN in 1961. Daniel Ortega joined the FSLN one year later.

It has been estimated that Alemán embezzled assets from the Nicaraguan treasury to the tune of US $100 million (Telleria 2011:37).

Perhaps the most known of the pacts is the Pact of Espino Negro of 1927 between General José María Moncada, the leader of the Liberal rebels, and Conservative President Adolfo Díaz, brokered by US envoy Henry L. Stimson. According the Pact of Espino Negro, President Díaz would finish his term and the US Marines would remain in Nicaragua to maintain order, supervise the 1928 elections, and organize a non-partisan police force, which was to become known as the Nicaraguan National Guard. The rebel liberal group led by Augusto César Sandino refused to sign the Pact of Espino Negro, and started the guerrilla war against the US Marines and the Nicaraguan National Guard (1927-33). In the so-called Pact of the Generals in 1950 between Anastasio Somoza García and Emiliano Chamorro, the leader of the Conservative party, the conservatives were granted one-third of the congressional seats and judicial appointments. In 1971, Anastasio Somoza Debayle signed the Kupia-Kumi Pact with conservative party leader Fernando Agüero whereby the conservatives had their congressional quota increased to 40 per cent, and a triumvirate composed of Agüero and two Somocistas was designated to rule from 1972-1974.

The rush to consummate the Pact grew out of Daniel Ortega’s fear that the PLC would strip him of his parliamentary immunity (Núñez de Escorcia 2000).

Alemán did not count on president Enrique Bolaños, who had served as his vice-president, turning against him. In December 2002, Alemán was stripped of his parliamentary immunity, charged, tried, and placed under house arrest. But Ortega kept up his end of the bargain implied by the Ortega-Alemán Pact by releasing Alemán from his house arrest, and finally in 2009 the mutually controlled Nicaraguan Supreme Court of Justice overturned the 20-year corruption sentence against Alemán. A free man, he once more ran for president in the 2011 elections.

In an ironic twist of history, the formerly devout Catholic Arnoldo Alemán turned a Pentecostal believer when he joined the Iglesia Fraternidad Santa in 2005 (Briones 2006).
21 When Lewites was the FSLN mayor of Managua from 2000-2004, his administration was considered the most brilliant mayoralty in the capital’s history (Baltodano 2006).

22 He even adopted John Lennon’s ‘Give Peace a Chance’ as the theme song of his electoral campaign (Miller Llana 2006).

23 Cardinal Obando y Bravo’s ‘counter-blessing’ of Ortega in 1990 may have persuaded many Catholics not to vote for Ortega.

24 In the three previous elections Ortega obtained similar or higher percentages: 41 percent in 1990 against Violeta Barrios de Chamorro; 38 percent in 1996 against Arnoldo Alemán; and 42 per cent in 2001 against Enrique Bolaños.

25 However, it should be mentioned that on October 17, 2012, Uruguay’s 31-member Senate by a 17-to-14 vote approved a bill that allows women to have abortions during the first trimester of pregnancy for any reason. The bill had already been narrowly approved by a 50-49 vote on September 25, 2012 by the Chamber of Deputies. President José Mujica said he had no plans to veto the bill, as did his predecessor, fellow leftist Broad Front President Tabaré Vázquez, a doctor, who vetoed a similar law in 2008. Thus, among Latin American countries, before Uruguay, only Cuba had legalized abortions. In addition, Mexico City legalized abortion in 2007. In September 2012, the legislature of Buenos Aires narrowly approved a bill allowing women to have an abortion in the first 12 weeks of pregnancy, but Mauricio Macri, the mayor, vetoed the bill (Romero 2012).

26 Literally speaking ‘pink’ in the case of Nicaragua. In the months leading up to the November 2006 elections there was little left of FSLN’s traditional revolutionary red and black, which were replaced with an array of brilliant pastel colours, particularly hot pink. Nicaragua is the only pink tide country that is simultaneously an old left (red and black) and a new left (pink) country (Kampwirth 2011:11).

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