

**Empowered by Song: The Relationship Between *Misa Campesina* and Peasant
Involvement in Nicaragua's Revolution**

By

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ABSTRACT

**THE POWER OF SONG: THE RELATIONSHIP OF MISA CAMPESINA AND
PEASANT INVOLVEMENT IN NICARAGUA'S REVOLUTION**

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This thesis explores the relationship between the 1975 recording of *Misa Campesina* and peasant involvement in protest during the Nicaraguan revolution of 1979. It also looks at the mechanisms that were in place that caused this Mass to become a catalyst for protest and revolution. Through interviews of individuals who were involved in Ernesto Cardenal's community of Our Lady of Solentiname and close analysis of the music and text found in this Mass, this thesis carries out a qualitative assessment and gathers testimonies that reflect the emotional involvement that this Mass and this community promoted among peasants and other members of the less privileged sectors of Nicaraguan society. The evidence found that this music's capacity to articulate peasant cultural and moral values as well as its emotional appeal lie at the very foundation of what moved this community into protest.

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this Master's thesis first of all to my parents, Octavio Pérez García and María Alba Laguna Arcia in gratitude for instilling in me a great love for Nicaragua. I would also like to dedicate this work to the painters and sculptors of Solentiname who were happy to share their popular wisdom and their memories with me.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

*“No me siento autor pleno si no coautor de una obra que escribió el pueblo de Nicaragua con su sacrificio con su fe, con su fervor, con sus ideales, con sus sueños”.*¹ (Carlos Mejía Godoy)²

1.1 Overview

In 1966, a young Catholic priest arrived on the Islands of Solentiname on Lake Nicaragua, a region that, in comparison with other regions in Nicaragua, is still fairly unknown to this day. It was not long before a community formed, gathering the inhabitants of these small islands around expressions of a renewed Catholicism. Out of this experience of faith and with the essential contribution of singer and composer Carlos Mejía Godoy, a Mass was born, a musical expression encapsulating an authentically popular expression of worship. Even though this Mass was officially recorded in 1975, its creation was a process that took several months since it incorporated many of Mejía Godoy’s experiences with the communities of Nicaragua, particularly with the people of Solentiname. The *Misa Campesina* became an essential part of the weekly faith gatherings at the Church of our Lady of Solentiname, seamlessly presenting the idea of a God who was very present in the lives of the poor. Worshiping this God had concrete political and practical repercussions for peasants as well as for the Nicaraguan population in

¹ “I don’t feel like a full author but a coauthor of a work that was written by the Nicaraguan people with their sacrifice, their faith, their fervour, their ideals and their dreams”.

² Interview with the author.

general. This Mass eventually became the Mass of choice for poorer sectors in Nicaragua as well as in Central America. It continues to be played in popular circles and has been recorded by well known artists such as Miguel Bosé, Nana Mouskori, Ana Belén (Mejía Godoy 1979) and many others in Latin America and the world (K, Cardenal; 2006).

This thesis explores the following central questions: What is the relationship between the *Misa Campesina* and peasant³ involvement in protest during the Nicaraguan revolution? If this music did contribute to this group's involvement, then, what mechanisms made this happen? In the following chapters, I will provide an analysis based on theory from fields including sociology (Snow et al. 2008; Jasper 1997), political science (Gurr 1970; Rice 2012; Davies 1962), musicology (Cross 2003; Dawe 2003) and psychology (Juslin & Sloboda 2002; Fridja et al. 1989), to argue that it was through this music's emotional appeal and experience of community that peasants in Solentiname felt empowered to take action against the Somoza regime. I will argue that this music's capacity to articulate peasant cultural and moral values as well as its emotional appeal lie at the very foundation of what compelled this community into a protest movement facilitated by material hardships and the closed, repressive dictatorship of the Somoza dynasty.

1.2 Methods

The research carried out for this thesis involved a qualitative assessment of peasant's experience within the community of Our Lady of Solentiname as well as the experience of Ernesto Cardenal and composer Carlos Mejía Godoy. My analysis also includes a close

³ Following Elisabeth Wood's thought (Wood 2003), in this thesis, I will use the term "peasant" to describe any individual in Nicaragua whose livelihood is tied to working the land.

examination of the text of the *Misa Campesina*, its musical structure and the instruments used in its recording and performance. The data collected during my interviews and other sources was used to analyze the texts of the Mass, obtaining the opinion and experience of individuals who were directly involved with it from the time it was being created. Their responses were evaluated according to the theoretical framework presented in chapter one.

Interviews were carried out and recorded using an encrypted laptop between December 17, 2013 and January 15, 2014 in Managua and the Islands of San Fernando, La Venada and Mancarrón of the archipelago of Solentiname. The interviews were semi-structured and a different set of questions was prepared for the inhabitants of Solentiname as well as for Ernesto Cardenal and Carlos Mejía Godoy (Appendixes A, B and C). Having established communication with the Guevara Silva family prior to arriving, I contacted the other participants in person, visiting them in their homes because of limited access to telephones on the islands. Because of this, as well as because of the time restrictions of this project, only a total of five people were interviewed including Carlos Mejía Godoy and Ernesto Cardenal in Managua, Mrs. Elba Jiménez on The Venada Island, Mrs. María Guevara Silva on San Fernando Island and her sister, Mrs. Esperanza Guevara Silva on Mancarrón Island. I, therefore, complemented these interviews with other research that has been published in existing articles and books such as García Dueñas de Polavieja's article (2012) *Historia Oral de la Resistencia Nicaraguense al Somocismo: El Proyecto de Ernesto Cardenal en Solentiname como Paradigma de la Liberación* and Ernesto Cardenal's autobiography *Las Insulas Extrañas* (2002).

This thesis is organized in five chapters. In chapter one, I have provided a brief introduction about this recording as well as the central research question and methods used in

this project. Chapter two will provide a theoretical framework looking at social movements, emotions and music as well as a literature review. Chapter three will offer the historical and religious context out of which this Mass emerged. The case analysis will be provided in Chapter four. This chapter will explore the establishment of the community of Our Lady of Solentiname, their struggles and the arrival of Carlos Mejía Godoy among them. A close analysis of most of the songs of the *Misa Campesina* will also be provided in this chapter. Chapter five discusses the results of the analysis provided in the previous chapter, taking into consideration the arguments found in the theoretical frame in chapter one as well as areas of further study. Finally, concluding thoughts will also be provided in chapter five.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Exploring Social Movements

Scholars from a number of disciplines have undertaken the task of exploring the reasons behind why people engage and remain loyal to protest initiatives. Numerous sources indicate that people usually protest when they are unhappy with their living conditions (Snow et al. 2008; Gurr 1970; Jasper 1997). How this unhappiness is defined is important since we can look at this question from a multidisciplinary perspective including a political science perspective, a sociological perspective and a psychological perspective in order to gain a well rounded understanding. While it is a fact that not all who are unhappy engage in protest, underlying facts such as identity and belonging to a group usually determine who will or will not engage in protest.

Social movement is defined by sociologist James Jasper (1997) as the “conscious, concerted and relatively sustained efforts by organized groups of ordinary people (as opposed to, say, political parties, the military, or industrial trade groups) to change some aspect of their society by using extra institutional means” (Jasper 5). This effort can be expressed in direct ways such as through marches, rallies, etc. or indirectly through attitudes and rhetoric but it always expresses dislike, discontent, unhappiness and the desire to change existing social behaviours or structures. For Snow et al. (2008), social movements “give voice” to collectivities as they verbalize “their grievances and concerns about the rights, welfare and well-being of themselves and of others (Snow 3). Social movement allows individuals to join efforts to

organize so as to obtain those things which official organizations have not been able to obtain on their behalf. While social movement begins with discontentment, it eventually involves some type of action that seeks to make favourable changes.

Actions that can be considered to be protest, according to Jasper, include things that go beyond what we have traditionally understood as protest. In the past, we categorized as protest things such as “large public rallies and marches, occupations of symbolic or strategic sites” (5). Jasper holds that verbal and visual rhetoric, the way a group articulates their stance and the visual manner in which they present themselves can also be considered protest. He affirms that every group that engages in such verbal and visual rhetoric, creates their own version of these tactics. Protest can thus, take many forms and can come from various levels of society. It does not necessarily need to be organized by an institution or be done on a large scale for it to be considered protest. On an individual level, it can take the form of less dramatic initiatives and can be expressed in the small things of life such as the way individuals dress or carry out their duties at work. As Jasper affirms, individuals “resist or protest in many ways. They distance themselves from their organizational roles; they ignore rules they dislike; they criticize and complain. They sabotage their bosses’ projects in various degrees” (5). These activities give people an opportunity to articulate and elaborate moral convictions, what they believe to be right or wrong. They provide an opportunity for individuals to show what is important to them while working toward attaining their goals.

Among the many tools available for protestors to organize into a social movement, religion has held a privileged place (Jefferis 2009; Cristi 2001). McVeigh (2001) affirms that social movements from a broad array of political tendencies whether leftist, right wing or even

military tendencies have been linked to religion for a long time. In his study published in the article *God, Politics and Protest: Religious Belief and the Legitimization of Contentious Tactics*, McVeigh uses data representative of churchgoing Protestants in the United States to study the influence of religious belief on individual involvement in social movements. He posits that religious beliefs have the potential to support “contentious tactics” (1427) and thus facilitate protest participation. Through its use of shared meanings and symbols, religion has the potential to encourage its members to “participate in protest events if they are presented with an opportunity to do so” (1427).

Various theories from within the fields of political science and sociology have established important models for studying the question of social protest (Rice 2012). Some of these suggest that external factors such as social structures (Davies 1962) are the main cause that brings people to mobilize. Others focus on factors that are internal to the group such as resources available to individuals as well as their organizational structures, etc. Various models of analysis have developed such as the classical and resource mobilization models, the political process model and the new social movement model (Rice 19).

The political process model focuses on the role of the “broader political system in facilitating or inhibiting movement emergence” (Rice 24) while the new social movement model considers the importance of culture, meaning and identity on the development of collective action. The classical model, on the other hand, posits that underlying psychological conditions such as material hardships and economic and social inequality and the emotions that accompany them, are at the core of why people engage in protest (Rice 20). According to this model, people

protest because they are dissatisfied and because the situation they live has reached an intolerable level. For example, according to Muller & Seligson (1987), one of the most important causes for discontentment and facilitator of revolution lies in the maldistribution of income.

The importance of psychological components that facilitate the emergence of protest is further examined by James Davies (1962). In his article *Toward a Theory of Revolution*, he argues that it is the individual or group's perception of the situation they are living in that will influence their involvement in protest more than the actual objective situation. When it comes to the development of revolution, a "dissatisfied state of mind" is more powerful than the 'tangible provision of "adequate" or "inadequate" supplies of food, equality, or liberty" (Davies 6). Revolutions develop when there is ongoing disappointment or when there is a perceived threat to the fulfillment of basic physical and social needs as well as the need for "equal dignity and justice" (Davies 8). This becomes more acute when the fulfillment of these needs is possible but remains just outside of the person or the group's reach. It is the frustrated expectations that exacerbate this tendency for revolution. The focus then, according to Davies, lies in the cognitive processes, the group or individual's subjective appraisal of their situation.

The case of an individual's involvement in protest despite high risks of negative consequences for themselves raises the important question of motivation. Elisabeth Wood, for example has looked at the question of peasant involvement in the Salvadorean insurgency of the 1980's knowing that they ran a high risk of death or other negative repercussions (Wood 2003). James Jasper provides a complete analysis as he examines this issue including why people return to protest and remain loyal to it even when this involvement carries with it considerable risks for

them. He posits that people become and remain involved in protest and political activity because of three inseparable components of culture: “cognitive beliefs, emotional responses and emotional evaluations of the world” (181). These three components of culture are connected to mental constructs including identity, how the group or individual perceives him or herself, the constructs of threat, blame and responsibility, that is, who is perceived to be responsible for why things are the way they are and who should fix them.

For Jasper, culture is a social construct and is the ultimate context for the individual to interpret his or her world. It is a complex reality which we can view as the pleasures, motives, or goals that lie behind action or as the skill, habits, and tastes that form action itself (97).

Following a postmodernist approach, he argues that absolute truth does not exist since, for example, what is important for one society may not be important for another. Rather, culture is the framework for interpretation and for the individual to be able to recognize “that which is meaningful to him or her, what is of meaning to the life of their community, what resonates with who they are, be it as individuals or as members of a group” (12) or both. All groups have goals and interests that are subjective and that flow directly from their cultural interpretations.

Because culture surrounds the individual with shared beliefs and moral visions, it is the space from where goals emerge and actions and behaviours convey specific meaning and purpose within specific cultures. Culture also defines the rules we are willing to follow, break or bend. Mental constructs energize and unify the group by providing a vision for the interpretation of how each member relates to each other as well as to the outside world. Culture is what Jasper refers to as the “shared mental world”.

When it comes to emotions, Jasper suggests that individuals usually remain involved in movements that leave them with a sense of satisfaction, even if they do not attain all or any of the goals they set out to attain. Feeling satisfied is important since people usually assess the risks and personal costs of participating against the possible benefits they may obtain before getting involved (23). If people feel a sense of satisfaction, it is more likely that they will engage in protest even if there are risks involved. Protest involvement, according to Jasper, provides two primary types of satisfaction: that of belonging to a group and that of doing something meaningful and that is in line with one's values. The satisfaction of belonging to a group can help an individual to put their contribution into perspective and look at it on a bigger scale. Jasper argues that this helps them see their intervention as having greater importance and weight as it is seen as being linked to "world-historical transformations" (22), providing a sense of connection which can, in turn, help strengthen the impetus behind protest activity (22).

Besides becoming engaged in protests that leaves them with a sense of satisfaction, individuals engage in activities that take action in favour of things that are deeply important to them, things that fit their moral frameworks. Existential issues, questions of meaning, are therefore important reasons why people get involved in protests (Jasper 11). Protest gives an opportunity for individuals to raise and examine these issues, things that preoccupy them because they deeply affect them and their identities. Jasper affirms that protest "is of the few arenas where they (existential issues) are raised and examined" (2). People fight for what they believe, for what they hold to be right or wrong and protest provides for them an outlet, a way not only to express their beliefs but to take action. People's moral frameworks, the way people judge the world, have repercussions on why they organize. Understanding "why and how people organize

themselves to protest against things they dislike, we need to know what they care about, how they see their place in the world” (11).

Finally, people engage in protest activity when it is in harmony with their own personal and cultural identity. Jasper delineates three kinds of identity that affect this involvement, a personal identity, a collective identity, and a movement identity. (86) Personal identity refers to the sense of who one is, while collective identity refers to the culture lived out by the group. Movement identity is born out both of these, that is, of how the individual and the group perceive themselves as agents for social change. In Jasper’s words, “Personal identities exist on the biographical level; collective identities are part of the broader culture; and movement identities arise from the interaction between movement culture and the broader culture” (87). It is important to keep in mind that movement identity is “not simply the sum of many individuals’ identification with groups or goals, but a sense of that movement as a coherent actor with shared goals and strategies” (89). The concept of identity allows us to recognize that actions are filtered through a sense of self, “a kind of residue from past experiences” (90). When identity, be it personal, collective or movement, somehow includes political activity, involvement in protest is not seen as a cost or as unnatural but rather brings within it an inherent pleasure. Elisabeth Wood supports this perspective with her study of Salvadorean peasants who saw their involvement in the revolution as “a continuation of their insurgent identity, "naturally" arising out of earlier choices and experiences” (Wood 203). Thus, when the activity is part of the identity, individuals do not need much external prompting to be mobilized.

Jasper also points to the importance of mental constructs on protest involvement. Three of such constructs are threat, blame and responsibility which are deeply connected to the group’s

sense of security. A group or an individual's safety and security is dependant upon physical space, the environment upon which we build the predictable routines of our ordinary lives. People will do whatever has to be done in order to prevent changes in the environment that will remove that predictability and safety. Our environment could in fact, be harmful or threatening, but if it is what people are used to and feel safe with, if they have constructed it in their mind as safe, they will defend it because it is the known circumstance they are used to. Humans, Jasper holds, "are especially opposed to involuntary, uncontrollable, or unknown risks" (123). People protest and take action when this safety, perceived or real, is threatened. Threat could well be a threat to the immediate environment but could also be a threat to future security. Threat and blame fuse emotion, morals and cognition and are two "crucial building blocks of protest" (127). They facilitate the construction of perceived enemies, which in turns helps to allocate "concrete demands for redressing grievances" (107). For example, if a group perceives that their situation is caused by an intangible force such as the force of nature, people are not as likely to organize in protest than if they can allocate blame on a tangible entity such as a political leader or institution. Another aspect to keep in mind is the allocation of responsibility to fix the situation. A group may believe that the government is responsible for fixing a situation caused by natural disasters. In this case, it is likely that a group will organize to ensure the remedy to the situation (Jasper 118).

2.2 The Contribution of Protest

For Jasper protest has an extremely valuable contribution for democratic society even though the inevitable question of success emerges since often, groups accomplish "so few of

their stated goals” (379). First of all, success can mean something different to different groups, for example, for a group simply framing important issues or having society recognize the existence of these issues can be perceived as success. For some protestors, the goal of bringing about change in society may not be as important as simply opposing or making the opponent's life difficult. To illustrate this, Jasper uses the example of Mrs. MacDonald, an African American woman whose goal was to defy and harass without necessarily expecting to eliminate racism in the United States. Jasper argues that she avoided feelings of discouragement and defeat because her goal was simply opposing mainstream racist society. In Mrs. MacDonald's words: “I can't speak for everyone, but as for me, I am an old woman, I live to harass white folks” (38). In her case, the process itself was the reward and from that one could affirm that she was successful as she did indeed harass white folks.

Instead of focusing on success, Jasper believes that we should concentrate on looking at the value that protest has for society. He argues that protest “has an important contribution to democratic society since it has the potential to facilitate conversation between different moral positions” (367). Through the creation of controversy, protestors can help to establish communication across groups with different moral visions. Protest can inform society about issues that the established institutions may not wish to share and it can inspire people to “craft their lives artfully, as well as they can” (367). By tapping into existing social sensitivities, protest contributes to society by articulating “inchoate urges and sensibilities, develop them into explicit beliefs, programs, and ideologies.” 369. Jasper compares protest organizers to artists who put into concrete forms “new ways of seeing and judging the world, new ways of feeling and thinking about it”. (369). Protest does not only help protestors articulate their stance, it also

helps citizens examine their own moral and cognitive positions as citizens are confronted by moral frameworks they don't agree with. Confronting a movement they disagree with, for example, can help a citizen articulate their moral and cognitive stance. Jasper believes that social knowledge is best advanced by the clash of perspectives brought about by social movements and not by institutions (373). The value of protest lies in the power that it has to formulate moral stances and to provoke dialogue: "Protest movements work at the edge of a society's understanding of itself and its surroundings. Like artists, they take inchoate intuitions and put flesh on them, formulating and elaborating them so that they can be debated" (375).

2.3 Exploring Emotions: A Psychological Question

As the previous discussion regarding involvement in social protest has illustrated, emotions are an important concept which needs to be briefly examined as we explore the role of music in social movement involvement. Emotions are part of every aspect of social life; they accompany and make up our deepest desires, satisfactions, identities and interests (Jasper 1997). They are the motivators behind ideas, ideologies and interest both in ongoing loyalties as well as in more immediate emotional responses to events and information (Jasper 108). However, understanding emotions is a complex task since they are complex processes that take place inside the human mind. While people in general believe to have a good understanding of emotions as "powerful forces that affect our behaviour and thoughts in powerful ways" (Juslin & Sloboda 74), psychology seeks to obtain objective knowledge about emotions through scientific study from three sources of evidence "(a) self-reports; (b) expressive behaviour; and (c) physiological measurement (74).

Psychology generally endorses that an emotion involves a response that engages many levels of the human person since an emotion has a cognitive component, a feeling component, a motivational component and a motor component (Moors 2010). As Juslin and Sloboda affirm, an emotion is “a complex set of interactions among subjective and objective factors, mediated by neural/hormonal systems” (75). Emotions, seen through a scientific lens, are a sequence of events “emotions are triggered by our cognitive appraisals of significant events; these appraisals evoke strong reactions of most of our bodily systems; they bodily reactions generate subjective experiences of feeling; and the subjective experiences yield action tendencies and expressive behaviour” (Juslin & Sloboda 75). That is, an emotion emerges after a thought, an appraisal and evokes physical and psychological responses. This process, usually brings about a behaviour on the part of the individual to either avoid something negative or move toward something positive.

It is important to stress that emotions are object-focused, that is, they are directed toward their objects. For example, if I am afraid, I am focused on the thing that I am afraid of such as a lion or an aggressor that may be before me. Emotions also require the categorization of its objects; for example, if the emotion is one of fear, its object must be viewed as harmful, and if the emotion is one of envy its object must be viewed as something both desirable and not already controlled or possessed. Emotions also include attitudes toward their objects; for example, if the individual sees an injured person, his or her emotional response will depend on whether this is a source of concern, satisfaction or indifference to the individual. Finally, particular emotions are expressed in typical behaviours. For example, if I feel pity toward you, “I will try to comfort you and to change your situation for the better, and if I fear you I will fight, flee, or seek protection” (Davies 26). This behaviour is referred to as “action tendency”, the increased

probability that the individual behave in a particular manner (Fridja et al. 1989). When an individual is afraid, for example, it is more likely that he or she will avoid the cause of that fear, the event or thing that was judged to be harmful. It is considered a tendency, as it is a possibility “because emotion does not contain within it a specific outcome, but rather directs the person experiencing it towards one category of behaviours rather than another” (86)

There is ample evidence that suggests a strong connection between music and emotions (Carroll 1998; Kivy 1989). Self-reports, for example, indicate “that people experience emotions while listening to music, and that they perceive music as expressive of emotions” (Juslin and Sloboda 84), suggesting that music has the capacity to elicit the “classic ‘reaction triad’ of subjective feeling, expressive behaviour, and physiological reaction”. (85). The emotions experienced by individuals when listening to music are often reported as quite similar to the emotions that accompany life events such as a wedding, the birth of a child, etc. (Bunt & Pavlicevic 2001). These emotions still orient the individual in particular action tendencies as people have reported that the emotions felt when listening to music “have propelled them towards significant personal change” (Juslin 89).

2.4 Music, Culture and Emotions

Music has been an integral part of the experience of humanity since early civilization (Blacking 1973). Archeological evidence suggests that music has been present in the lives of early Homo Sapiens Sapiens in Europe, the Americas and Australia and that music “accompanied Homo Sapiens Sapiens out of Africa” (Cross 21). Music also continued to accompany humanity at crucial historic moments, particularly during moments marked by death and genocide (Spencer1973). Tapping into cultural meaning, music has the power to remind listeners of

eschatological elements, the belief in an afterlife or the belief in intangible things, particularly through ritual. (Bolhman 53; Brown 2007). It is often regarded as the “most directly emotional of the arts and the art most intimately involved with religious and spiritual life” (Brown 1).

Music is profoundly connected to the culture that produces it. While we cannot deny the value of listening to music from cultures to which we do not belong, it is generally argued that music must be listened to from within its culture in order for it to be fully understood. In Ian Cross’ words: “Musics only make sense as musics if we can resonate with the histories, values, conventions, institutions, and technologies that enfold them; musics can only be approached through culturally situated acts of interpretation” (Cross 19). It is only when we fully understand the context from which it has emerged that we can fully grasp its meaning, the subtleties it can offer, the emotions it may arise in an individual and the historic weight of its instrumentalization. Just as sounds, rhythms and styles are born out of their particular context as are the instruments used to play it.

Musical instruments are “formed, structured, and carved out of personal and social experience as much as they are built up from a great variety of natural and synthetic materials” (Dawe 275). Kevin Dawe argues that musical instruments “exist at an intersection of material, social and cultural worlds where they are as much constructed and fashioned by the force of minds, cultures, societies, and histories as axes, saws, drills, chisels, machines, and the ecology of wood” (275). The process of creation of a musical instrument, as well as the ability to play it, is one that incorporates “a range of psychobiological, sociopsychological, and sociocultural skills” (275). This process is born and nurtured by culture and culture orients the way in which the instrument is used in rituals and ceremonies, for example the religious

connotations that Europe attributes to playing the organ, the pathos expressed by the flamenco guitarist or “tocaor” when playing the guitar (Lorca 1998) or the sense of identity asserted by Maya indigenous people playing the marimba in Guatemala (Wolfgang 2010).

When it comes to grasping music’s emotional expressiveness, social context is also of utmost importance. It is within this context that lies the key to understanding a culture’s belief system. This system gives shape to expression of emotions since, for example, what one group or culture may see as a sad occasion, another one may see it as a joyous occasion as is the case of death. If we are not familiar with that culture’s belief system, it is impossible to see the emotional connections at their fullest. Stephen Davies (2001) affirms: “Even if music’s expressiveness implicates ‘natural’ resemblances to behaviours that are transcultural in their import, these then are structured according to historically malleable musical conventions of genre and style, so that they are no longer apparent to those who lack familiarity with the culture’s music.” (Davies 37). A community with a shared value system and cultural heritage will usually share in a particular manner of listening and responding to music. As Judith Becker (2001) suggests, an emotional response to music on behalf of an individual does not happen spontaneously, it takes place “within complex systems of thought and behaviour concerning what music means, what it is for, how it is to be perceived, and what might be appropriate kinds of expressive responses”. (137).

2.5 The Complex Connection of Music and Emotion

The relationship between music and emotions is a complex one, a relationship that has elicited the emergence of a number of theories that seek to answer questions such as whether or not music can contain emotions, or why is it that it can evoke feelings of joy, sadness, anger in

the listener. Davies (2001) explores some of theories that consider the connection of music and emotions taking into consideration music's role as a cultural symbol. He first comments on the idea that music is not a sentient being and "and neither is its relation to occurrent emotions such that it could express them" (Davies 25). Its capacity to be perceived as expressive of emotions lies in its possibility to operate as a symbol or sign which functions from an associative and conventional perspective. In this view, music carries no natural relation to an emotion but rather "comes to denote or refer to an emotion, and then to characterize it, by virtue of its place within a system" Its capacity to be perceived as expressive of emotions lies in its possibility to operate as a symbol or sign which functions from an associative and conventional perspective.

Another theory described by Davies considers that music appeals to the emotions "as a result of ad hoc, arbitrary designations and associations" (Davies 30). For example, certain musical gestures or phrases may be linked with texts that express a given emotion and that maintain that connection for a number of years (Cooke 1959). Music, according to this theory, is linked with rituals or events that may be emotionally charged within a culture or context. These ties continue over time, connecting music to the expression of particular emotions and rendering it emotionally meaningful. Davies underlines that certain aspects of music's emotional expressiveness such as the link between instruments and moods "seem to be arbitrary and conventional in ways that may depend on historical associations". (Davies 30). For example, the connection between the organ and religious music is more likely to exist because of the historical connection they have rather because of something inherently religious about the organ (Routley 1964). The same could be argued about the connection between the trumpet and royalty since trumpets were used historically to signal a call for battle.

Greek classical writings about music have been extremely influential for subsequent theorists on the topic of the relationship of music and emotion. This relationship is studied by Nicholas Cook and Nicole Dibben (2001) in their book chapter entitled *Musicological Approaches to Emotion*. They explore how, for these Greek thinkers, music fulfilled two primary functions: mimesis and catharsis. Mimesis refers to music's capacity to imitate or portray reality while catharsis refers to its capacity to purify the soul through an emotional experience and to its emotional effect on the subject (Cook & Dibben 46). Opera, for example, was associated from its birth around the 1600's with the idea of "music as mimesis" an imitation of life (Cook & Dibben 46). They affirm that "the function of music in baroque opera is to reflect or heighten the expression of emotions signified by the words and presented by means of staged action" (46). Opera can be spoken of as expressing emotions to the extent that these emotions are situated or linked with the external tangible reality alluded to in the music.

For Cook and Dibben, opera is a perfect example of how music "represents reality, just as language does". (Cook & Dibben 46). With the rise of opera, vocal music was considered to be the "paradigm case of music in general" (Cook & Dibben 47). In the case of opera, the text was seen as the most essential component which rendered music meaningful. "It was through heightened verbal signification that music itself acquired meaning; purely instrumental music by contrast had no meaning, or at best signified at second hand, functioning as more or less pale reflection of texted music" (Cook & Dibben 47). Cook and Dibben stress the subjective nature of meaning in music. Meaning is not something that lies objectively external to the listener. It is born out of the interaction of the listener and the music. It is how he or she hears it, what they hear in it. They affirm : "Another way to express this is that it is not simply a matter of hearing

emotions out of the music — that is, hearing the meanings that were always there within it — but, so to speak, of hearing them into it” (65)”. This perspective focuses less on “how the music is” (65) and pays more attention to “how it might be heard” (65).

Psychologist Abraham Maslow (Juslin & Sloboda 2001) offers yet another important perspective on the relationship between music and emotions with his peak experiences theory. The term peak experience is used to refer to those moments of euphoria and heightened emotion in the life of an individual where he or she fixes his or her complete attention on an external stimulus. Juslin and Sloboda explain it as follows:

Surveying the contents of these descriptions, he found several characteristics of generalized peak experiences, for example, total attention of the object in question, complete absorption, disorientation in time and space, transcendence of ego, and identification or even fusion of the perceiver and the perceived. Peak experience is good and desirable, because there is a complete loss of fear, anxiety, inhibition, defence, and control. Moreover, the ‘emotional reaction in the peak experience has a special flavour of wonder, of awe, of reverence, of humility and surrender before the experience as something great’, even a fear of being overwhelmed with more than one can bear. The experience may occasionally be described as sacred. (432).

Maslow’s theory suggests that music is a vehicle that best evokes this type of an experience precisely because of its capacity to awaken strong emotions and important memories. These experiences also have physiological manifestations, stimulated by the mental or cognitive processes that make it up. For example, in a study presented by Sloboda (1991), individuals who claim to have entered a peak experience describe sensations brought about by music as “shivers, tears, lump in throat, goose pimples, racing heart and others”⁴³³. This intensified emotivity accumulates motivations for action.

Throughout history, music has proven to be a powerful tool to build national identity and promote protest (Adorno 1962;). It has proven to be a particularly powerful means to mobilize

various groups as it has been the case in France during its revolution (Sweeney 2001), the United States (Friedman 2013) and, most certainly, in Nicaragua (Scruggs 1999; Borland 2002). It can be argued that music's influence on protest is connected to its capacity to serve a reference point since music has the potential to act as a "holding form" (Witkin 1974) which is as a "set of motifs that proceed, and serve as a reference point for, lines of feelings and lines of conduct over time" (Juslin 175). Holding forms can be used by actors to encapsulate an impulse, an emotion that can be returned to from time to time to evoke the memory or emotional impetus. Music has served this purpose as protestors make use of the imagery and emotions it can evoke to remind the listeners of who they are and suggest the course of action they need to follow. An example of this is the political involvement on behalf of protestants in the United States as presented by McVeigh (2001).

CHAPTER 3

MUSIC AND RELIGION IN A REVOLUTIONARY CONTEXT

3.1 Historical Context

Looking at the historical context out of which the text and the music of *Misa Campesina* emerged, we must take into consideration that the social dynamics that have governed the relationship between Nicaraguan peasants and the larger Nicaraguan society are built upon centuries of conquest and colonization. As Berryman (1984) states: “What we know as Central America is thus based on an act of conquest and domination, with thousands of Indians being killed” (Berryman 35). This domination established labour patterns whereby the elite harnessed native labour and land through the system called the *encomienda* in which they were assigned agricultural land along with the native people living in it (Berryman 35). The elites exploited natural resources using this system in order to build their capital (Heyck 1990). Records indicate that indigenous people were allowed to live in their own villages while they were forced to carry out a certain amount of work for landowners (Berryman 1984; Diamond 2013).

Nicaragua’s political history has been marked by a long and vicious enmity between its two main political parties which have usually had opposing views regarding the country’s relationship with the United States and the ongoing presence of U.S. Marines in Nicaragua (Diamond 2013; Heyck 1990; Berryman 1984). The Marines safeguarded this country’s strategic location “rivalling Panama as a potential canal site” (Berryman 51). This is a very important relationship for a country with a wealth of resources and with an economy which has been heavily based on exports such as coffee, sugar, cotton, beef, and bananas since its birth

(Berryman 34). These parties were the liberals and the conservatives. The Liberals, the “progressive wing of the Nicaraguan ruling elite” (Diamond 3) were mostly small landowners, merchants and artisans who encouraged European investment in Nicaragua and generally fostered anti-clerical attitudes, advocating for separation of church and state. The Conservatives, on the other hand, were the aristocrats, who had very close ties to Washington and who preferred that Nicaragua remain an agricultural resource for the United States. They, unlike the liberals, defended the church and its role in Nicaraguan society (Berryman 37).

Very often, Nicaraguan peasants were caught in the middle of this enmity. In 1893, for example, liberal president José Santos Zelaya, in an effort to modernize Nicaragua’s economy, established an infrastructure where “the expropriation of peasant land created a labour force” (Diamond 3). Taking the land from the peasants left them without a sustainable means to obtain food and economic stability other than working as hired agricultural workers. As Berryman describes it, the agroexport elites “acquired new lands and expanded their operations” while small peasants found themselves “with less land to cultivate” (Berryman 43). This created a deep gap between rich and poor as well as between urban nicaraguans and rural nicaraguans. By the year 1970, the bottom 50% of Nicaragua’s population had an annual per capita income of \$152 while the top 5% had an annual per capita income of \$2,478 (Berryman 42). Most of the income belonged to those in urban centres such as Managua, León and Granada (Deere & Royce; 2009).

In 1927, revolutionary leader Augusto Cesar Sandino emerged as a nationalist icon, defending the interests of the peasants and refuting U. S. interests (Diamond 6). Sandino’s view

of Nicaraguan identity emphasized the violence of colonization and was later used by the Sandinista movement to appeal to peasant insurrectionists in favour of their movement (Gobat 2005). Sandino recruited his forces primarily among peasants and plantation workers and in 1927, he led the *Ejercito Defensor de la Soberanía de Nicaragua*⁴ into the mountains, looking for U. S. Marine withdrawal. As Diamond (2013) states, Sandino “wanted an end to U. S. intervention in a sovereign Nicaragua, he was critical of the liberal and conservative parties handling of Nicaraguan politics and he was willing to support some alternative institutions to promote the country’s development” (Diamond 6). He was murdered on February 21, 1934. The evidence suggests that the Catholic church, already an important agent in Nicaraguan society, did not endorse Sandino’s resistance as it did not consider it to be a patriotic struggle (Berryman 54).

Diamond (2013) argues that three forces were at work in Nicaragua at the time of the revolution and even for decades before; the most evident ones were the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional⁵ (FSLN) and Somoza’s regime, enforced by the National Guard. Yet a third, no less powerful force, was the Nicaraguan population itself, a population made up of “peasants, workers, church activists and trade unionists” (56) which developed their own resistance and which, later, were recruited by the Sandinista movement. Among this third force, the Church was perhaps the most important agent as it had privileged access to the Nicaraguan population. This resistance developed gradually over three decades and was expressed in peasant and worker demonstrations. These demonstrations set the tone for the relationship

⁴ Defending Army of Nicaraguan Sovereignty

⁵ Sandinist Front of National Liberation

between peasants and the National Guards. Regarding this relationship, Diamond states the following:

The year following the death of Sandino, workers held a May Day demonstration in response to an economic crisis sparked by a depression-era drop in the price of coffee, the nation's key export. At the same time, peasants protested against expropriation of their land. The National Guard put down both demonstrations with force (Diamond 8).

These demonstrations of 1935 were followed by increased violence and street riots, precipitated in 1944 by social and economic pressure when "frustration with the regime led to the outbreak of strikes, demonstrations and street riots" (14). Eventually, in 1961, the Frente de Liberación Nacional begins to emerge with the meeting of leaders such as Carlos Fonseca Amador, Tomás Borge Martínez and Silvio Mayorga held in neighbouring Honduras.

The Nicaraguan working class had a lot to protest and organize about. The economic power secured by the Somoza family grew rapidly right in front of their eyes and the Somozas were generally seen by working Nicaraguans as profoundly linked to the United States and its "imperial rule" (Gobat 267). As Diamond states "The first Somoza, Tacho, came to power owning little more than a small coffee farm. When his second son, Tachito, was ousted from Nicaragua by the July 19, 1979, victory led by the Sandinista, he was worth close to \$1 billion" (35). Tacho not only owned many major companies in the cattle, ranching, mining and blood sectors, the selling of blood from Nicaraguans to U.S. medical companies, but also owned at least 10% of Nicaragua's arable land. Besides special tax breaks given to Somoza's investments, Diamond posits that it was the "ready support of the United States government" that directed and strengthened the Somoza empire (38). As this regime continued throughout the

decades, “unequal distribution of land and income continued to be the norm throughout most of the country” (Williams 352). There were no tangible efforts to improve health services, education or to improve the situation of the agrarian sector. Instead, Somoza’s government became filled with corruption.

Gobat (2005) argues that the Somoza regime’s relationship with the rural population deteriorated significantly toward the end of the 1950’s when officers of the National Guard “acquired significant amounts of land in the cotton, coffee, and beef-export industries” (273). It is argued that some officers appropriated state funds and U. S. financial aid in order to acquire this. Others simply “stole land from defenceless peasants” (273). The National Guard came to be mistrusted and the peasant no longer saw them as legitimate defenders of their interests. “National Guard officers owned much of the bus and taxi system of the country and could collect from certain taxes and auto fines.” (Berryman 56). Gobat posits that this change of the National Guard’s place in the life of Nicaraguan peasants contributed significantly to the rise of peasant movements that contributed to the eventual defeat of Somoza by the Sandinista movement.

In her book chapter *Women Cooperative Members in Nicaragua: The Struggle for Autonomy*, Martha Heriberta Valle describes the peasants’ situation during the 1970’s. She suggests that most families in rural Nicaragua had access to small plots of land and had to work as temporary labour on coffee or cotton plantations but only during the harvest season (Valle 222). Many families had to migrate toward the Atlantic coast region due to a lack of access to land in central Nicaragua. Valle describes that often “after they had cleared the forest, they would be forcefully displaced by large-scale cattle ranchers and coffee producers, who would

claim property rights, forcing peasants deeper and deeper into the forest to start the process all over again” (222). This constant migration left peasant family without access to adequate health care and education and without a stable home they could call their own.

While it was this uneven industrial structure which contributed to the discontentment with the regime among Nicaragua’s peasants and small business owners, many scholars (Kirk 1992; Diamond 2013; Williams 1985; Weber 1981) argue that it was Somoza’s mishandling of foreign aid after the 1972 earthquake which was one of the last blows to the Nicaraguan people and an important catalyst for his demise. These scholars argue that the Somoza regime used this aid to make payments to his own construction companies which did very little to rebuild Managua (39). The evidence suggests that he, in fact, used the funds to create his own bank and increase his own family fortune.

The Solentiname peasants had perhaps a harder reality than peasants from other regions in Nicaragua. Their isolated location left them without easy access to a market where they could sell firewood, eggs, and the few products they produced on the islands. The uneven landscape as well as the dry soil made agriculture a very cumbersome enterprise which did not leave them very much monetary gain. García Dueñas de Polavieja (2012) states: “También se daba una agricultura de bajo rendimiento, debido a su árido suelo y accidentada topografía que convertían el trabajo en una labor de considerable dureza⁶” (4). They also lacked electricity and construction materials to build their homes. They lived in huts made out of “cercos de vara y

⁶ There was also a low producing agriculture due to its dry land and uneven topography that turned it into a considerably difficult labour.

techos de palma”⁷. The stark difference between rich and poor, between the urban and the rural was, therefore, extremely evident in Solentiname.

3.2 Religious context

Religion, particularly Roman Catholicism, has been a key player at many levels of Nicaraguan society, beginning as early as the time of colonization. During the time of conquest and colonization, the missionary church found creative ways to embed itself into the imaginary of the indigenous population through the work of numerous religious missionary groups such as the Mercedarians, the Dominicans and the Franciscans. The success of these Spanish missionaries lies in the fact that they managed to instill the basic tenets of Catholicism on the indigenous groups while establishing similarities with their own religious beliefs. As John Kirk (1992) affirms: “The imaginative and successful hybrid of festivities, beliefs, and ceremonies still survives in the deeply rooted popular religiosity encountered throughout Central America” (Kirk 8) and Nicaragua is certainly not an exception. Missionaries focused their instruction on the children of caciques, thus ensuring the respect of future leadership (Kirk 9). Kirk argues that the quick development of Catholicism strengthened Spanish political control and legitimized the “cruel nature of the colonization process” (10) and believes that, from this perspective, “Catholic evangelization was thus an exceptionally effective tool” (10).

The rights of the indigenous people began to be forgotten once Church leaders realized that collaboration with colonial authorities was a sure way to serve their own interest. “After all, it was easier to preach resignation to the natives and engage in popular religious fiestas than to

⁷ Stick fences and roofs made out of palm branches.

stand with them against the brutality (and the power) of the Spanish settlers” (Kirk 13). This relationship was endorsed by an agreement between the Holy See and the Nicaraguan government in 1862 which made Catholicism Nicaragua’s State religion and guaranteed the teaching of Catholic doctrine in public schools, among other privileges (Kirk 21), securing a powerful social and political position for the Church. Throughout the nineteenth century the Church’s change in political alignment has been a strategic one (Williams 1985) and her wealth fluctuated depending which political party or leader was in power (Kirk 1992). Kirk states the following regarding this dynamic:

During this time the Church was actively involved in political activities that largely revolved around protecting its vested spiritual and tangible interests. It consistently sought to expand its influence, making pacts with political actors when it was in the Church's best interest to do so, and opposing those who sought to infringe on their rights and privileges. More importantly, the Church was itself an important political actor, often removed from the sacristy and actively involved in matters that frequently transcended its purely spiritual mission (Kirk 23).

The hierarchy was key in keeping Nicaragua’s lower classes dormant in the face of economic injustice. Archbishop Lezcano’s sermons from late 1930’s, for example, convey a message of resignation to the poor. They were told that they should be proud of being poor because that is God’s will and protesting against God’s will may have negative repercussions upon their entrance into heaven (Kirk 39). “For them, poverty in this life was something to rejoice about (and indeed aspire to) because it would lead to greater rewards in the next” (Kirk 38).

The official Church, however, remained silent regarding the U. S. military presence in Nicaragua as well as regarding the National Guard’s abuses of power. It did, on the other hand, make it very clear that they opposed Sandino and his followers (Kirk 29). Williams argues that,

in order to secure privileges and continued religious instruction in the schools “the bishops maintained almost total complicity with the government of Anastasio Somoza Garcia, who took power in 1936” (Williams 345). This alliance continued during the 1940s and 1950s as a way to preserve the Church’s influence on society. The benefits included that the Church maintained a privileged position and that priests and bishops were often “rewarded with gifts and favours for their 'good services'” (Williams 347). The bishop’s pastoral letter of this period showed a hierarchy adamant against communism and ready to “accept anything about Somoza's style of government--provided that he was not a communist” (Kirk 36).

In 1970, the appointment of Miguel Obando y Bravo as the Archbishop of Managua brought about a change in the Church’s relationship with Somoza (Williams 52). John Kirk describes him as follows

In comparison with his complacent predecessors who quietly accepted the excesses of Somocismo, Miguel Obando y Bravo was quite striking: of mixed Indian and mulatto background and sensitive to socioeconomic disparities, he rejected Somoza's attempts to co-opt him, and during his tenure as bishop he became the most outspoken opponent of the appalling human rights record of the dictatorship. (John Kirk 59).

Somoza’s corruption could no longer be ignored, specially after the Managua earthquake and Mons. Obando y Bravo began to speak up. In a sermon in December, 1973, a year after the Managua earthquake, Obando y Bravo alludes to this corruption while aligning the hierarchical Church on the side of the poor.

Obando's speech stressed the need to construct not only new buildings, but a new morality, and that this could only be accomplished through peace, but not a peace imposed by repression. He also called for a new society with more equitable distribution, labour organization, and promotion of the humble classes (Williams 354).

Finally, in 1979, shortly before the Sandinista victory over Somoza, Mons. Obando y Bravo, only after exhausting all peaceful means, finally supported armed conflict (Williams 361). From a Catholic theological perspective, armed intervention is allowed when a serious injustice is taking place and when the armed struggle will cause less harm than that injustice (Berryman 80) and in the case of Nicaragua, the dictatorship had exceeded the levels that the Church was willing to tolerate.

3.2.1 Vatican II: Opening of the Windows

The stage for a profound change within the Catholic church as well as its relationship with the world was set in Latin America by the historic Vatican II Eccumenical Council, held in Rome from 1962 to 1965 and the conference of Latin American Bishops (CELAM) held in Medellín in 1968. The Second Vatican Council has been described as an “opening of the windows” for the Church so as to allow for fresh air to get in (Berryman 26). A series of documents were the product of years of dialogue and reflections among Church leaders where reform was invited in areas such as the liturgy, religious freedom, biblical studies and the Church’s relationship with the modern world. Perhaps one of the most important changes that Vatican II brought about was in the Church’s theology of grace. Prior to Vatican II, it was generally held that the church’s mission was to keep humanity under a state of grace, a state of holiness and blessing. Humanity, without the church and her ministers, was a *massa damnata*⁸ since there was no salvation outside of the church (Berryman 26). On a practical level, this gave

⁸ Cursed race

church officials a privileged place since they were the administrators of the means to obtain that state of grace. Vatican II, however, changed this view since it held that God's grace was everywhere and that poverty "was not so much the effect of 'backwardness' as of exploitation and dependence" (Berryman 27).

The documents that emerged out of Vatican II show a church concerned with people's every day realities, particularly the poor. As the opening words of the *Pastoral Constitution Gaudium et Spes* articulate it: "The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ" (Gaudium et Spes 1). In this document, there is a general acknowledgement that humanity's history is not foreign to the church's concern as are not issues of economic and social inequality. It held that the church could not be at peace if, in the midst of abundance of "wealth, resources and economic power" a large proportion of humanity "are still tormented by hunger and poverty" (Gaudium et Spes 4). This document calls for help to be extended to rural workers who may experience difficulties in agriculture so as to "introduce the necessary development and renewal and also obtain a fair income" (Gaudium et Spes 66).

3.2.2 CELAM: A New Method

The CELAM conference, held in Medellín was the Latin American bishops' attempt to adapt Vatican II to the specific Latin American reality. This conference made important contributions in the area of theology but, perhaps more importantly, in the area of methodology for pastoral meetings and theological reflection. As Berryman argues, this conference diverged

from the usual method of starting with doctrine and then moving down to its application. It rather started with a reflection on the concrete reality of Latin America: “the bishops used a threefold structure of reality/reflection/pastoral consequences both in the overall order of the documents (human promotion/evangelization/the church and its structures) and, internally, in each document” (Berryman 27). This became known as the “Medellín method,” which was adopted by pastoral meetings and grassroots church groups as they got together to discuss their reality in light of scriptures (Berryman 27). The Nicaraguan Church, which until then had been more like an elite group with little contact with the people and their community life (García Monroy 91), was deeply challenged as this conference endorsed the preferential option for the poor, arguing that the poor should be allowed to be the authors of their own development (Berryman 28). Change, however, came only gradually and after much polarization within the church (Kirk 1992).

3.2.3 Liberation Theology: Suffering with the Poor

Out of this unique Vatican II and Medellín experience emerged a most significant yet controversial theology for Nicaragua and Latin America: Liberation theology (Gutierrez 1973; Boff 1989). This theology no longer ignored the daily sufferings of the poor but placed them right at the centre (García Monroy 90). Among the most significant contributions of Liberation theology was a refusal of the idea that spiritual and the temporal realities were separate. It endorsed that the church was not above politics because the kingdom of God was not completely beyond history (Berryman 28). It also promoted the use of Christian Base Communities, groups of people that gathered to discuss their lived experience in light of scriptures. Rowland (2008)

sees this commitment to the poor and marginalized as a “determining moment for theology rather than the agenda of detachment and reflection within the academy” (Rowland 4).

This theology, however, has never been officially adopted by the magisterium of the church as it is linked to Marxism and some of its basic tenets are in disagreement with the church’s official teaching. John Paul II, for example, argued that it is not the role of the church to “improve man’s economic status rather than cultivate and save souls” (Lynch 269). In the document *Instruction on Certain Aspects of the Theology of Liberation*, published by the Vatican in 1984, theologians are reminded that the Christ did indeed come to liberate humanity, but from the spiritual bondage of sin and that it is not the Church’s role to become involved in political matters.

3.2.4 The Popular Church

Inspired by the documents of Vatican II and those of the Medellin Conference of Catholic Bishops, communities in poor areas began to meet and discuss the every day reality of Nicaragua. Two examples of such Christian Base Communities were the one started by Father José de la Jara on the outskirts of Managua in 1966 (Berryman 60), and the community of Solentiname (Cardenal 2002), started in the same year. These communities’ gatherings were done according to the “Medellín Method” what Berryman calls “Socratic dialogues” where people discussed scriptures but using their real challenges as a starting point. These dialogues awakened in the community a new perspective and a call to action to address local issues which included water shortages, lack of transportation and lack of access to land. In Nicaragua, these concerned communities were often the “breeding ground for recruits” for the FSLN as many of

the peasants emerged out of these church groups and joined the guerrilla movements (Diamond 60). Out of these two communities, the Solentiname community stands out.

The Solentiname community was founded by priest Ernesto Cardenal in 1966 on an Island on Lake Nicaragua. Cardenal, who had been ordained a Catholic priest slightly later in life than most men of his time, was born in Granada in 1925. By the time he arrived in Nicaragua, his search for a spiritual life had led him on an international journey. He spent a few years in a Trappist monastery in the United States where he was a novice under the tutelage of Thomas Merton. He later studied theology in Mexico, finalized his priestly formation in Colombia, and was ordained in Nicaragua in 1965 (Cardenal 2012). His initial intention when he arrived in Solentiname was to establish an isolated contemplative community but, slowly, he discovered that peasants living around the area he had purchased kept looking for him for leadership and guidance (Cardenal 2002). A vibrant community formed around engaging weekly Gospel discussions and soon the peasants became aware of the unjust living conditions that surrounded them (Kirk 69). Many of these discussions were recorded and later transcribed by Cardenal and published under the title *The Gospel in Solentiname*, a book described by John Kirk (1992) as an “anthology of religious-political reflections” (69). A number of members of this community were later heavily involved with the FSLN as fighters.

Out of this community, a number of artistic expressions came about. Many of its members learned the primitivist style of painting and sculpture from Cardenal as a way of sustenance since the land was not conducive for large scale agriculture (Cardenal 2003). Others used their musical talents to add to their religious gatherings and in 1968, some members

contributed to the creation of the *Misa Popular* (Popular Mass), a forerunner of the *Misa Campesina* composed primarily by well known musician Carlos Mejía Godoy. This popular Mass made use of the popular nicaraguan rhythms that the peasants would be familiar with. Its lyrics showed “that Christ was --like them-- a poor worker” (Kirk 70) but it was not long before the hierarchy banned the use of this mass and later the *Misa Campesina* since it considered that overly humanizing Christ was disrespectful and sacrilegious as well as politically dangerous (Kirk 70).

CHAPTER 4

THE COMMUNITY OF SOLENTINAME

*4.1 The Community**4.1.1 Outside of Progress*

The archipelago of Solentiname is made up of 36 islands, the largest of which is Mancarrón where Ernesto Cardenal established his community. This group of islands is located in the Southeast area of Lake Nicaragua between 10 and 30 kilometres from the port city of San Carlos. The natural beauty surrounding these islands is characterized by lush rain forest, birds such as herons, parrots and golden orioles or oropéndolas, among others (Cardenal 2002; Dueñas García de Polavieja 2012). Its name is derived from the nahuatl word “Celin-tenametl” which means place for many guests (Cardenal 128).

Before the birth of the community of Our Lady of Solentiname, this place was, in Ernesto Cardenal’s words: “fuera de las rutas del progreso, y fuera de las rutas del transporte, y fuera de la historia, y hubiera estado fuera de la geografía si esto hubiera sido posible”⁹ (Cardenal 94). Its inhabitants had always been scattered on the islands, without any formal leadership or organization. From the beginning this was a people that lived in a deep relationship with the land and the lake from where they tried to complement their diet, although inadequately. Mrs. María Guevara Silva states: “Solo teníamos el lugar para vivir, pero como pajaritos más de la isla”¹⁰ (Interview with the author). She stresses that, while they had the basic things to live, they

⁹ Outside of the road of progress and outside of the roads of transportation, and outside of history, and it would have been outside of geography if this had been possible.

¹⁰ We only had a place to live but as if we were birds on the island.

lacked important things such as a basic education, as well as access to health and transportation services badly needed in such a remote island.

In 1966, Cardenal arrived on Mancarrón accompanied by William Agudelo and seminarian Carlos Alberto Restrepo, searching for the solitude that would allow him to lead the contemplative life he dreamed of during his time at the Trappist monastery in the United States (Cardenal 81). Yet, he was soon visited by local peasants who were either curious or excited about the arrival of a priest in their midst. Cardenal narrates this encounters as follows: “Creo que la primera visita que tuvimos fue Marcelino, que llegó con su machete a ver quienes éramos. Tenía su finca muy cerca; no le interesaba lo religioso, pero con nosotros cambió completamente y se volvió uno de los mejores comentaristas del Evangelio durante la misa”¹¹ (105). Mrs. Elba Jiménez who is now 75 years old and has lived all her life in Solentiname, remembers her first encounters with Cardenal quite well:

Yo cuando Ernesto vino, yo comencé a conocerlo cuando el primeritamento vino allí a la iglesia. Era una iglesia que había antes y entonces yo lo comencé a conocer. El era delgado. Me acuerdo yo que yo llegué un día. El era delgado, rasurado...ya fué que seguido se puso mas hermoso. Y ahora hace ya tanto años¹² (Interview with the author).

He was generally well received and eventually found himself filling an important void in the area of leadership for the inhabitants of these islands.

¹¹ I think that the first visit we had was that of Marcelino who arrived with his machete to see who we were. His farm was close by; he was not interested in religion but with us he changed completely and became one of the best commentators of the Gospel during the Mass.

¹² When Ernesto came, I began to get to know him when he first arrived in the church. It was a church that was there before and I began to get to know him then. He was slender. I remember that I arrived one day. He was slender and clean shaved. It was later that he got stronger. Many years have past since then.

While Solentiname was, and still is, a paradise-like place, surrounded by water and the green canopy of tropical trees, not everyone would describe it as a paradise. Olivia Guevara, a local peasant who lived in Solentiname at the time of Cardenal's arrival, described this place to him as a place that was abandoned by the grace of God (Cardenal 167). Before she began to paint the natural surroundings of these islands in the primitivist style cultivated by Cardenal and other painters, she felt more like she was in a prison than on an island. "El verdor de Solentiname, dice la Olivia, que le producía mucha angustia. Esa vegetación la oprimía porque lo que para el visitante parece bello, para ella había sido una vida de miseria¹³" (Cardenal 167). For this woman, the everyday hardships of living on an island located far from Nicaraguan society prevented her from enjoying the natural space in which she lived.

This awareness of their reality was not limited to their environment but also their social and political reality, and their interaction with the former. Mrs. Elba Jimenez, who currently lives on the Venada Island, also entered a different relationship with the environment once she learned to paint in the primitivist style. She learned to paint the reality around her. She describes her paintings as follows:

Aquí tenemos un paisaje es decir pero es un paisaje que es la realidad que tenemos allí. Eso es decir parte de los Guatusos de Papaturro que tenemos allí, donde están los animales porque esos son los animales que tenemos aquí. Tenemos que también nosotros reflejar al mismo tiempo lo que miramos. Lo que miramos y reflejarlo en el lienzo¹⁴.

¹³ Olivia says that Solentiname's greenery used to cause her anxiety. That vegetation oppressed her because, what was beautiful for visitors, for her had been a life of misery.

¹⁴ Over there we have the scenery but, that is a scenery that is the reality that we have. That is part of the Guatusos and Papaturro that we have over there, where the animals are, because those are the animals that we have here. We also have to reflect, at the same time, what we see. We have to reflect what we see on the canvas.

In this way, painting allowed them, and continues to allow them to this day, the possibility of paying close attention to their surroundings, to care for them, and to reproduce their environment as they see and interpret it.

García Dueñas de Polavieja, in his 2008 interviews with locals, shows that they considered that the poverty of Solentiname was caused by its physical isolation and lack of interest by the government (García Dueñas de Polavieja 4). This lack of interest left them vulnerable, even without the few benefits of social services that other regions of Nicaragua had. As Cardenal expressed, the only time politicians would show any interest on the islands was at the time of campaigning before elections (Cardenal 166). This lack of interest left them without adequate transportation on a group of islands where the inhabitants were quite scattered; their diet was, therefore, less than optimal. Agriculture was not very successful since these are volcanic islands with irregular landscapes (García Dueñas de Polavieja 5) and their diet was primarily based on fish from the lake.

In the 1960s, the trip to San Carlos, the closest city, to buy necessary things such as firewood, other food and medicine, took 10 hours on a row boat. There was no health centre on any of the islands and there were high rates of infant mortality as well as a high rates of illiteracy since there were no schools or high schools on the islands (García Dueñas de Polavieja 4). Mrs. María Guevara Silva speaks of their struggles with transportation as follows: “Incluso, el transporte para ir a comprar nuestros productos a San Carlos era demasiado costoso y tampoco lo

teníamos pues. Entonces estábamos como sobreviviendo en una isla solos¹⁵” (María Guevara). Without social assistance of any kind, the Solentiname inhabitants were surviving on the islands on their own.

Cardenal’s contemplative community was unlike any other since soon they were joined by William Agudelo’s girlfriend (who later became his wife), their two children, as well as young people and families from the islands (García Dueñas de Polavieja 5). Mrs. Olivia Silva also joined the community, inspired by the love and kindness that she saw emanated by “El Poeta”, the Poet, as they affectionately call Cardenal even to this day (García Dueñas de Polavieja 6). Many other locals were hired to help the community to build the community’s home and restore the abandoned catholic church on Mancarrón Island. Cardenal and his companions had to live the same hardships and physical labour that the island peasants lived. They also worked “con hacha y machete¹⁶” (García Dueñas de Polavieja 5) in order to clear the land and establish their living area. Overall, they lived a simple, spiritual and hard working life style, just like that of the peasants of the area (García 6).

4.1. 2 A New Way of Doing Liturgy

From the beginning, Cardenal began his pastoral work in Solentiname modelled after the ecclesial base community of San Pablo in the outskirts of Managua, which was guided by the Spanish priest Father José De la Jara. In his autobiography, Cardenal describes De la Jara as follows:

¹⁵ Even transportation to go and purchase our products in San Carlos was too costly and we didn’t have it either. It was then, as if we were surviving on an island alone.

¹⁶ With axe and machete.

Era un sacerdote español, párroco de una barrio pobre donde tenía un movimiento que se llamaba “La Familia de Dios”, una especie de comunidad de matrimonios. Sus reuniones eran muy alegres, con muchos cantos, verdaderos ágapes en sus casas, y era admirable como comentaban el evangelio en esas reuniones y en la iglesia, aplicándolo a la realidad de ellos, a los problemas del barrio y a la situación política y social¹⁷ (Cardenal 197).

Fr. De la Jara’s approach to pastoral work inspired Cardenal since it was a style that followed the spirit of Vatican II and Medellín and remained in close contact with the reality of the poor.

Cardenal learned from Father De la Jara a new way to lead Sunday Mass, not preaching a sermon but allowing for a dialogue on the gospel by the community, thus creating an environment of trust and participation (Cardenal 198).

Cardenal’s Masses were very unorthodox, strikingly different from the previous church experiences of the inhabitants of Solentiname as Mrs. María Guevara explains: “Nosotros antes de que Ernesto viviera aquí teníamos otra forma de ver la Iglesia, otra manera de ver los sacerdotes cómo predicaban”¹⁸. She describes her experience with the church prior to the arrival of Cardenal in Solentiname as one marked by silence, distance and a lack of participation: “Ir a una misa era algo muy silencioso y no teníamos nosotros como cristianos, no podíamos participar en nada de la Misa. Solamente si teníamos que comulgar y a comulgar nada más”¹⁹.

Unlike traditional priests, Cardenal’s preaching, did not always limit itself to teaching about the

¹⁷ He was a Spanish priest, parish director of a poor neighbourhood where he had a movement called “The Family of God”, a sort of community of married couples. Their meetings were very lively, with many songs, gatherings in their homes and it was admirable how they commented on the Gospel in those meetings and in the Church, applying it to their reality, the neighbourhood problems and to the political and social situation.

¹⁸ Before Ernesto lived here, we had another way of seeing the Church, another way of seeing how priests preached.

¹⁹ Going to Mass was something very quiet and, as Christians, we could not participate in anything of the Mass. Only if we had to receive communion, we received it and that was it.

faith. He considered that regular, mundane things had to be addressed before people could be receptive to the Gospel. In his memoirs, for example, he relates how, during the first Mass he celebrated for the inhabitants of Solentiname, he preached about the best place to build a latrine so as to prevent people from getting sick. He comments that he did this because, before teaching catechism to the children, he needed to ensure he actually had healthy children to teach (Cardenal 108). Thus, the new Masses of the community were a new experience in the full sense of the word where people not only participated fully but where they experienced that their faith and their everyday life were deeply intertwined.

The Masses in the community of Our Lady of Solentiname always began with singing accompanied by guitars. Cardenal describes that those participating sat on traditional indigenous carpets, burned incense on an archeological stone found in one of the islands and were allowed to smoke during Mass if they wished to do so. After the Mass, the people gathered for lunch where everyone took part preparing the food. Mrs. Esperanza Guevara Silva narrates the following:

Y pues empezamos a tener netamente la misa. El se sintió que había que hacerla con almuerzo ya que la comunidad era de largo, la comunidad venimos aquí. Entonces con un almuerzo. El puso, seguro como para educarnos un poco, y que la comunidad cooperara que trajéramos lo que íbamos a comer ese día. Pero realmente casi la gente nunca lo trajo. Muy pocos traíamos. Lo que si se cooperaba bastante era con la mano de obra de la cocina, el almuerzo²⁰ (Interview with the author).

²⁰ So, then, we started having the Mass itself. He felt that it had to be done with a lunch since the community came from far, the community that came here. So we had lunch. He asked, probably to educate us a bit, that the community contribute by bringing what we were going to eat that day. But hardly anyone brought it. Few of us brought it. What everyone did help with was with the making of lunch.

The food was shared in the midst of singing and guitars, “Verdaderamente una comunión²¹” (Cardenal 199). This fostered a true sense of communion among each other. Mrs. María Guevara Silva goes on to explain: “Pero claro, hablando de las misas de Ernesto como sacerdote, fue un cambio total. Fue como que llegamos a una fiesta y nos dijeron ‘pasen adelante, vengan a servirse, veamos qué vamos a hacer’, como que entramos a una gran asamblea donde todos teníamos que participar”²² (interview with the author). Mrs. Elba Jiménez also remembers these gatherings with affection: “Y todos nos reuníamos allí en la iglesia y después que ya después terminaba sus misas, el evangelio, se hablaba al mismo tiempo de los almuerzos que hacíamos pues, y entonces que íbamos al almuerzo que íbamos a almorzar”²³ (Interview with the author).

4.1.3 Concientización

Mrs. Esperanza Guevara Silva, daughter of Mrs. Olivia Silva, believes that the weekly Mass celebrated with Cardenal proved to be an important factor in their process of “concientización”, the process of becoming politically aware. She affirms that the first conviction that emerged out of their participation in the mass was that they lived in an unjust society, far from resembling any traits of true christianity. For them, the mass allowed for a questioning of themselves regarding what they could do to change that reality. She states: “En

²¹ Truly a communion.

²² But of course, talking about Ernesto’s Masses as a priest, it was a total change. It was as if we had arrived at a party and someone said: “Come in, come and serve yourselves, let’s see what we are going to go”. It was as if we had joined a great assembly where everyone had to participate.

²³ We all used to gather in the Church and after, once he finished his Masses, we used to have lunch.

cada evangelio descubríás que había injusticia y que el primero que había dado su vida por una justicia en la tierra era Cristo. Eso se descubrió, para algunos jóvenes fue muy inquietante”²⁴ (Interview with the author). Thus, for many of the young men and women of the community, the Gospel was troubling because it posed them with a call to action.

This new awareness proved to be unsettling for everyone in the community. Fernando Cardenal, brother of Ernesto, suggests that his brother did not agitate the masses, so to speak, but rather fostered awareness, “conciencia” regarding the situation of Nicaragua (García Dueñas de Polavieja 12). As Mrs. Esperanza Guevara Silva mentions, once they were questioned by their own reality, a response began to gestate. She sees the involvement in the revolution by many members of the Solentiname community as directly related to this process as we can see in her comments: “Entonces lo que se sabe es que estás en una sociedad injusta ¿Qué haces para que no sea eso? y eso fue lo que nos llevo 10 años después a participar con el derrumbe de la dictadura”²⁵ (interview with the author). She also argues that it was the weekly gathering for the Mass where they grew in awareness: “y realmente la Misa jugó un gran papel. Fue la Misa. el poeta nunca se sentó con nosotros a decir qué ven, que nada, si no a analizar el evangelio todos los domingos y que se podía hacer”²⁶.

²⁴ You came to know, through each Gospel that there was injustice, and that the first one who had give his life because of an injustice on this earth was Christ. That was discovered and it was very unsettling for some young people.

²⁵ So, we knew that this was an unjust society. What do you do so that it is not? This is what brought us to participate 10 years later in the demise of the dictatorship.

²⁶ And the Mass played a big role. It was the Mass. The Poet never sat down with us to ask “what do you see?” or anything but to analyze the Gosple every Sunday. What could you do?

For Cardenal, the process of “concientización” and radicalization happened as a result of living in close contact with the peasant’s reality. This experience allowed him to identify his belief in Christ with the poor. He recalls in his autobiography: “Y el contacto con la pobreza de los campesinos en Solentiname, y la realidad nacional cada vez peor, también contribuyeron a que yo y nuestra pequeña comunidad nos fuéramos politizando y radicalizando”²⁷ (Cardenal 206). His political convictions and his faith began to mingle, and he expressed this to those around him. He describes a radio interview during the time of lent where he compared the sufferings of Christ with the suffering of the people and political prisoners in the following words:

Todos los viernes de cuaresma había una gran procesión del Via Crucis, con un Cristo cargando la cruz. Yo dije en la radio que ese no era Cristo, que el verdadero Cristo era el pueblo que estaba sufriendo; y hable entre otras cosas de los presos, y dije que tal vez a esa misma hora Cristo estaba siendo torturado o asesinado en una cárcel²⁸ (Cardenal 203).

Mrs. María Guevara Silva also remembers this process of “concientización” and commitment that happened once they felt that they were part of their faith celebration. She describes their celebration of the Mass as one which had tangible repercussions in their daily lives:

Nos hizo comprometernos como jóvenes a la comunidad, en ver por la gente de la comunidad, por los enfermos, por apoyar a la gente mas pobrecita, por ayudarlos a

²⁷ And the contact with the poverty of Solentiname’s peasants as well as the national reality which was getting worse, also contributed to me and the community becoming politicized and radicalized.

²⁸ Every Friday in Lent there was a big procession of the Way of the Cross, with Christ carrying the cross. I said on the radio that that was not Christ, that the true Christ was the people that was suffering. I spoke among other things, of prisoners, and I said that, perhaps, at that time, Christ was being tortured or murdered in a prison.

construir sus casas, por estar pendientes de los almuerzos comunitarios, buenos, nos quitó el rosario pero nos puso a hacer algo más²⁹.

Mrs. Guevara Silva describes that once they added this element of action to their faith, they also became aware of the things they were missing as members of the nicaraguan society:

Después poco a poco fuimos tomando en cuenta y nos dimos cuenta de qué no teníamos nosotros. Como que vivíamos en un estado que nadie sabía nada de nosotros, y como que no teníamos derecho a nada, que no teníamos escuela, no teníamos salud, no teníamos transporte, bueno, que no teníamos nada prácticamente³⁰.

They came to understand that their rights as members of Nicaraguan society were not being taken into consideration and that this omission was the cause of many of their hardships.

García Dueñas de Polavieja sees the process of awareness and politicization as a natural process arising from reflecting on a liberating view of the Gospel. He also sees the involvement of many of the young men from Solentiname in the attack of the San Carlos military headquarters as coming directly from this process of concientización. “Este proyecto actuó como estímulo, simbólico y fáctico, a la insurrección, cuya chispa final comenzó en 1977, justo a raíz del ataque armado al cuartel de San Carlos, ataque protagonizado por los chavalos de la comuna

²⁹ He made us commit ourselves as young people to the community, to be concerned with the people of the community, with the sick, to support the poorest, to help the build their houses, to be attentive to the community lunches. Well, he took away from us the rosary but gave us something else to do.

³⁰ After, little by little, we gradually realized what we did not have. It was as if we lived in a state where nobody know anything about us and as if we did not have rights to anything, we had no school, we had no health, we had no transportation, well, we had practically nothing.

de Ernesto Cardenal en Solentiname”³¹ (15). This new reading of the Gospel, one deeply connected to the community, a community that suffered and lacked many basic things, proved to be unsettling and brought many to become involved, despite the risks, in bringing about the change they needed.

4.1. 4 Music at the Heart of the Community

Music held a privileged place in the community of our Lady of Solentiname. Mrs. María Guevara Silva believes that this project of community and, later, of revolution could not have been done without music: “Entonces la música fue importantísima. Sin música no podríamos haber estado. No se podría haber llevado a la par todo eso”³² (María Guevara Silva). Her sister, Miriam Guevara Silva recalls that the community used to listen to the songs of musicians who were at that point representatives of the Nueva Canción movement in Latin America, a movement which started in the 1950s and sought to bring about political change by recovering national identity through the use of folk sounds and rhythms (Tumas-Serna 144). They were listening to artists such as Alí Primera, Joan Manuel Serrat, Quilapayún and Carlos Mejía Godoy, among others. They also listened to artists such as Silvio Rodríguez and Pablo Milanés through the clandestine broadcasting of Radio Habana from Cuba and they sang these artists’ songs in their social gatherings (García Dueñas de Polavieja 14).

³¹ This project acted as a stimulus both symbolically and factual, for the insurrection. Its final spark started in 1977, precisely after the armed attack on San Carlos’ military base, an attack led by the boys of Ernesto Cardenal’s commune in Solentiname.

³² Music was then, very important. We could not have been without music. We could not have carried out all of this.

Mrs. María Guevara Silva describes the unique relationship they had with the instruments used during their gatherings:

Los jóvenes les gustaba tocar guitarra y tocaban. Entonces las guitarras se hacían aquí no más. Todos los instrumentos se inventaban. Y este, se hacían tambores de piel de las vacas, de los terneros para usar en la Misa pero también para usar como jóvenes, en los grupos juveniles. Había un tambor que hicieron los muchachos de piel de ganado y lo pintaron muy bonito en negro y al rededor le pintaron pajaritos y pescados como una artesanía era aquello y tocaba muy bien. El otro se inventaba maracas y también eran pintadas con pinturas y otro una guitarra y también tenía flores y aves la guitarra³³.

The instruments they used were not foreign to these young people. They were precious to them because they were made and decorated by their own hands, using images and styles that were highly valued in Solentiname. They were cultural expressions of the world that surrounded them, the natural environment that was their home.

Guitar accompaniment was essential since the early worship gatherings of the community. William Agudelo, who arrived with Cardenal in 1966, was musically inclined and very good at playing the guitar. Mrs. Esperanza Guevara Silva describes how much they liked the sung parts of the mass led by Agudelo. About this great musician, she says the following: “El era bueno a la guitarra. El tocaba la misa nos gustaba mucho”³⁴ (Interview with the author). The Mass that was played at the beginning was that born out of the community of Fr. José De la Jara, entitled *Misa Popular Nicaragüense*. Cardenal explains that around this time, a number of

³³ The young people liked to play the guitar and they played. Drums were made with cow and calf skins to use at Mass but also to use as young people at the youth group. There was a drum that they boys made out of cattle skin and they painted it beautifully in black and they painted birds and fish around it. It looked like a piece of art and it played well. Someone else came up with maracas and they also painted them. Someone else made a guitar and it also had flowers and birds.

³⁴ He was good at the guitar. He played the Mass and we liked it very much.

national Masses were being recorded in many countries. He describes Fr. De la Jara's *Misa Popular* as very good, but the Nicaraguan Mass par excellence became Carlos Mejía Godoy's *Misa Campesina* (255). This recording of the *Misa Popular* is often cited as the precursor of the *Misa Campesina* (Gordillo 2013). Mejía Godoy affirms that while its texts do reflect certain liberation theology overtones, the songs still remain within the permitted boundaries approved by the official Church (Interview with the author).

The mid 1960s was a time period when many visitors, usually young people both from Nicaragua as well as from abroad, arrived in Solentiname. As Mrs. María Guevara Silva tells us: "Aquí venían los jóvenes, hasta 60 jóvenes de Managua a conocer la vida que se tenía aquí"³⁵. Among those young people was Nicaraguan musician Carlos Mejía Godoy who came to Solentiname many times to become immersed in the reality of this community. His music was already well known and well liked in Nicaragua as Cardenal affirms "Siempre gustó mucho. A la gente mucho le gusta la música y la música de Carlos es una música que mucho gusta. El pueblo de Nicaragua la entiende, la disfruta mucho, la capta muy bien"³⁶ (Interview with the author). Out of these visits the *Misa Campesina* was born (Cardenal 255).

In an interview with the author, Carlos Mejía Godoy describes the very intimate process out of which this Mass emerged. He speaks of this process as one that developed out of a very profound experience with the various cultures and realities of Nicaragua. While the most well

³⁵ Young people used to come here, up to 60 young people from Managua to get to know the life we had here.

³⁶ It was always well liked. People like music very much and Carlos' music is a music that is liked very much. The people of Nicaragua understand it. They enjoy it very much; they understand it well.

known and perhaps most important experience for him was that of Solentiname, he describes that this Mass also took shape from his experience in other places of Nicaragua. “Entonces me voy a Solentiname, me voy a la experiencia de la pastoral del norte, me voy a los barrios de Managua y me voy a la Costa Atlántica”³⁷ (Mejía Godoy). This lived experience with the Nicaraguan poor was key for the formation of Carlos as a musician and as the main writer of this Mass.

Mejía Godoy brought to the *Misa Campesina* a vast knowledge of Nicaraguan music and Catholic theology. He was Born in Somoto, Madriz in 1943 to a family of musicians who were committed to Nicaraguan tradition and folklore (Interview with the author). Prior to embarking on this project, he obtained a better grasp of Nicaraguan identity and the challenges experienced by the working class through his travels around the various unique regions of the country. He describes his early theological formation as follows:

Yo vengo de una formación cristiana ortodoxa, católica, no? y además de eso, yo estuve estudiando tres años de sacerdocio católico en un seminario de aquí de Nicaragua. Ese seminario, esa etapa en el seminario me acercó mucho más a la Iglesia de dentro, porque estar en un seminario supone contacto humano con el sacerdote, con los miembros de esta iglesia tradicional³⁸ (Interview with the author).

The seminary experience set the foundation of his knowledge of traditional Church teaching and the dynamics of the hierarchy. It also gave him an opportunity to relate to the official Church

³⁷ So, I go to Solentiname, I go to the experience of the Pastoral of the North, I go to the neighbourhoods of Managua and I go to the Atlantic Coast.

³⁸ I come from a Christian, Catholic Orthodox formation and, besides that, I studied three years to become Catholic Priest at a Seminary here in Nicaragua. That seminary, that stage at the seminary allowed me to get much closer to the inside of the Church, because being at a seminary brings about human contact with the priest, with members of this traditional Church.

which was strongly linked to the Somoza regime during the 1960s. He was able to become fully familiar with the orthodox Church and to understand its interconnectivity with political power.

According to Mejía Godoy, the “fresh air of a more committed Church” (interview with the author) begins to flow with the arrival of Church documents such as *Pacem in Terris*, written by Pope Leon XIIIV in 1963, and *Popolorum Progressio* by Pope Paul VI in 1967. These documents raised an awareness of social progress and development and the place of the Church within society, allowing for a climate of renewal. Later on, with the Vatican II Council, an opening of the Church allowed for a deeper concern for the poor. Mejía Godoy expresses it in this way:

Surgen en America Latina sobre todo y en los países del tercer mundo gracias a esta apertura de la Iglesia hacia un compromiso digamos mas integral con los necesitados, con los pobres, surge la llamada teología de liberación que produce toda una oleada de sacerdotes y de religiosas que fueron tan comprometidos que fueron martirizados³⁹ (Interview with the author).

At this point in his life, Mejía Godoy, “ese muchacho de treinta y tantos años que está saliendo del seminario”⁴⁰ (Mejía Godoy), encounters a new Catholic Church, embodied most concretely in the Solentiname experience. He feels an affinity with it and makes it his own: “‘vaya’ digo yo, ‘este si es mi cristianismo, esto es mío’”⁴¹ (Mejía Godoy). He then sets down to the task of

³⁹ There is an emergence in Latin America specially and in third world countries, thanks to the opening of the Church toward a, let’s say, more wholesome commitment with the needy, with the poor, the so called Liberation Theology emerges which produces a wave of priests and religious that were so committed that they were martyred.

⁴⁰ That thirty-something year old young man that is coming out of the seminary.

⁴¹ “Well”, I say, “this is my Christianity, this is mine”.

creating the most complete and authentically Nicaraguan musical expression of this new theology of the poor.

The *Misa Campesina* was not the first Mass which implemented the new ideas and new theologies that emerged after Vatican II. The above mentioned *Misa Popular* came out of Fr. José de la Jara's San Pablo community in 1968 and its texts show a way of seeing the person of Christ according to liberation theology, particularly in its view of Jesus as one who comes from the people and suffers with the people (Vigil & Torella 1988). However, as Vigil and Torellas suggest, this Mass lacks allusion to social conflict (5). It was, however, a Mass that was dear to the heart of the people and that opened the way for the *Misa Campesina* to be possible. Vatican II's opened window also allowed for the creation of Argentina's *Misa Criolla* by composer Ariel Ramírez, regarded by Adam Bernstein (2010) and others as "a stunning artistic achievement". This Mass, recorded originally in 1965, is considered one of the first Masses recorded in the vernacular, that is, not in Latin, incorporating one of the first liturgical changes of Vatican II. While the texts of this work remain faithful to the original liturgical texts, this Mass' contribution lies in its incorporation of indigenous instruments and rhythms of the Andean region.

Mejía Godoy affirms that he was aware of the existence of such recordings but that he chose not to listen to them prior to becoming involved in the process of creating the *Misa Campesina*. He states the following:

Una de las cosas que yo preferí en esa época fue no oír nada. No por orgullo, no por arrogancia, si no porque, o sea, si oigo la criolla, me voy a dejar influenciar. Bendito Dios

que no las escuché. Las escuché después. Y allí digo, “parece que se me pasó la mano”. Yo creía que todas las misas tenían un lenguaje propio”⁴² (Interview with the author).

This “lenguaje propio”, or language of its own, is perhaps the first salient characteristic of the *Misa Campesina*, a particularly Nicaraguan way of speaking which, unlike other existing Masses, deviated significantly from liturgically accepted texts.

The authentically Nicaraguan way of speaking, captured in this Mass was possible only because of the way this Mass was born. Mejía Godoy attests that he had to turn to the people for wisdom: “Tenía que romper ese esquema para no repetir los mismos textos. ¿Entonces dónde esta mi aporte literario y musical, entonces? Yo tenía que buscar precisamente en esta gente sencilla la palabra viva para incorporarla a la misa”⁴³ (Mejía Godoy). Mejía Godoy sees his role in the creation of this Mass as that of an artisan who incorporates the wisdom of the countryside and of the peasants of Nicaragua: “Toda esa sabiduría que yo encontré en el campo y enriqueció durante mi vida entera, trato de volcarla en la *Misa Campesina*”⁴⁴ (Mejía Godoy). This was the wisdom he gathered from his visit to Solentiname, the time spent in the slums of Managua as well as his visit to the Atlantic coast.

⁴² One of the things that I chose to do at that time was not to listen to anything. It was not out of pride or arrange but because, so to speak, if I listen to the Criole Mass, I will become influenced. Blessed be God that I did not listen to them. I listened to them later. It was then that I said: “It seems like I went overboard.” I used to believe that all the Masses had their own language.

⁴³ I had to break away from that frame so as not to repeat the same texts. Then, where is my literary and musical contribution? I had to precisely look for the living word among those simple people in order to incorporate it to the Mass.

⁴⁴ All of that wisdom that I found on the countryside and enriched my entire life, I try to pour it into the Peasant Mass.

Mrs. Esperanza Guevara Silva remembers Mejía Godoy's visits. She recalls seeing him intently taking notes and asking questions "Después años después, en el año 76 creo que vino Carlos Mejía a trabajar una misa campesina mas directa, ésa la trabajó completamente aquí, aquí la inauguró"⁴⁵ (Interview with the author). This was a "Misa Taller", a musical workshop so to speak as this musician invited others to contribute not only their musical knowledge but their knowledge of Nicaraguan culture and reality. The weekly Masses with the peasant's commentary on the Gospel (Cardenal 1977) as well as their festive Sunday lunches were the source of wisdom for the creation of the text of the Mass. For Mejía Godoy, the people of Solentiname were "verdaderos prodigios de imaginación, de síntesis, de sabiduría, de intuición y al mismo tiempo de religiosidad, de fervor"⁴⁶ (Interview with the author). He insists that he had to pay close attention to everything that was around him so as not to miss the wisdom that flowed from the people, hence his constant note-taking observed by Mrs. Esperanza Guevara Silva. He had to remain attentive since: "A veces una señora que anda repartiendo un café dice una frase y ésa es la frase que hemos andado buscando porque no andamos buscando alta literatura si no sensibilidad popular"⁴⁷ (Interview with the author).

Ernesto Cardenal and his brother Fernando, a Jesuit priest, were Mejía Godoy's theological consultants, providing him with information regarding the original texts of the Mass (Cardenal 255). Esperanza Guevara remembers the following about this process: "Igual el poeta

⁴⁵ Years later, I think it was the year 76, I believe that Carlos Mejía came to work a more direct peasant Mass, that one was completely worked here, he played it here for the first time.

⁴⁶ True prodigies of imagination, synthesis, wisdom, intuition and, at the same time, of religiosity and fervor.

⁴⁷ Sometimes a woman who is serving coffee says a phrase and that is the phrase we have been looking for because we are not looking for high literature but popular sensitivity.

participaba en las correcciones de Carlos. Carlos le preguntaba que qué sería mejor. Digamos, Carlos llevaba varias opciones al poeta, quiere decir esto, esto, entonces Ernesto le decía está bien, o mejor esta otra versión. Ernesto ayudó”⁴⁸ (Interview with the author). Cardinal considers that the solid theological connection shared between Mejía Godoy and the community constituted the strong pillar upon which the Mass was built. He states the following: “Solentiname se puede decir que le inspiró la Misa a Carlos Mejía. Y como nosotros teníamos una teología avanzada, una teología revolucionaria, y también era la de él, en eso estábamos identificados”⁴⁹ (Interview with the author). In this manner, the people’s wisdom was complemented by the solid theological formation of these two priests who, although trained in official Church teaching, were heavily influenced by liberation theology.

From the beginning, Mejía Godoy wanted this to be the creation of a collective of artists from whom he could gather information and knowledge. He describes the process as follows:

Yo invité a varios cantores a que participaran en la misa. Yo quería hacer una misa taller, una misa por eso se llama taller de sonido popular. Dice la misa, Carlos Mejía Godoy y el taller de sonido popular. ¿Qué significa? que éramos un grupo de jóvenes a los que se supone yo les podía sacar información como les saque a los campesinos para ya estructurar la misa musicalmente hablando, los versos y la melodía⁵⁰. (Interview with the author).

⁴⁸ At the same time, the poet took part in Carlos’ corrections. Carlos would ask him what would be better. Let’s say that Carlos used to bring a number of options to the poet: “This is what it means”, Ernesto used to say: “This is good”, or “this other version is better”. Ernesto helped.

⁴⁹ We could say that Solentiname inspired the Mass to Carlos Mejía Godoy and since we had an advanced theology, a revolutionary theology, we were identified in that.

⁵⁰ I invited a number of singers to take part of the Mass. I wanted to make it a mass-workshop, that is why it’s called the Popular Sound Workshop. The mass says: Carlos Mejía Godoy and the Popular Sound Workshop. What does that mean? That we were a group of young people that supposedly I could take information from as I did with the peasants so as to structure the Mass musically speaking, the verses and the melody.

He goes on to describe how most of those who participated in this “taller” turned out to be more singers than composers. But out all those who came to assist him, the greatest contribution was made by an agricultural worker known as “El Guadalupano”:

Hay un cantor que se llama Pablo Martínez Téllez de origen humildísimo, era cortador de algodón, había pasado por todos los oficios. Y descubrí ese talento increíble y le digo “Pablito, no fregés, vení ayudame a hacer la misa” y el vino a la comarca Nejapa donde yo vivía⁵¹ (Mejía Godoy).

El Guadalupano brought to the *Misa Campesina* his life long struggles with poverty and hard labour as well as his commitment to protest music in Nicaragua. He wrote what many consider one of the most beautiful songs of this Mass, the meditation song also known as “El Canto de los Pájaros”⁵². *El Nuevo Diario* journalist, Joaquín Torres (2004), writes about how this song was created, as narrated by Téllez. ““¿Y qué querés que haga Carlos?”, le pregunté. Y Carlos me respondió: ‘no sé hombre, hacete una canción para pedirle a Dios que nos ayude porque no aguantamos la situación con este Somoza jodido’”⁵³. After one day of working on the piece, “El Guadalupano” had the song ready, with its text and mazurca rhythms⁵⁴ (Torres 2004).

⁵¹ There is a singer by the name of Pablo Martínez Téllez of very humble origins, he was a cotton picker, he had had every occupation. And I discovered that incredible talent and said to him: “Pablito, don’t be bad, come and help me do the Mass.” And he came to the Nejapa neighbourhood where I lived.

⁵² The song of the birds.

⁵³ And what do you want me to do Carlos? I asked. And Carlos answered me: “I don’t know man, write yourself a song asking God to help us because we cannot stand the situation with this damn Somoza.

⁵⁴ Music from Matagalpa and Jinotega, influenced by Polish music.

4.1. 5 Church and Government Response

The *Misa Campesina*, by its very creation makes a strong political statement both to the official Church as well as to Somoza's government since it is written from the perspective of the poor, a sector that had been mostly excluded from the attention of both entities. This Mass challenged the status quo and was therefore, banned by the Church as well as by the government. The Roman Curia, for example, stated that the *Misa Campesina* did not meet the requirements of the liturgy because it changed the official text required in the Gloria, the Creed, the Sanctus and the Agnus Dei as it is specified in the document *Liturgicae Instaurationes* (1970). This same document instructs that musical instruments used in liturgy "should prompt devotion and not be too loud" (3). The "banda chichera"⁵⁵ that can be heard in the Gloria of the *Misa Campesina*, for example, would likely not fall within these parameters since this music is characterized by loud instruments such as the tuba, drums and trumpets. Because of its distinct political overtones in favour of the working class, this Mass was also disliked by Somoza's government. Mejía Godoy narrates how the first time this Mass was to be played in the "Open 3" barrio in Managua, the National Guard scattered the crowd. The Mass was later sung for the first time in Solentiname (García Zeledón 2001), far from the National Guard's reach.

4.2 Analysis

4.2.1 Showcasing Nicaraguanidad

For Mejía Godoy the *Misa Campesina* was an excuse to showcase Nicaraguan identity in all its aspects (Interview with the author). He attained this not only through the text, the choice

⁵⁵ Musicians that play at popular feasts.

of words used in the songs, but also through the musical styles and the instruments used in its recording and in its weekly performance. This way, he accomplished a Mass that could truly be understood by the people; in Cardenal's words: this is a Mass "profundamente sentida por el pueblo"⁵⁶ (interview with the author). The Mass is made up of 10 songs, nine of them in Spanish and one of them entitled "Miskito Lawana", replaces the "Agnus Dei" (Lamb of God) and is a musical expression of the Atlantic Coast language and culture. The songs include all the music that would normally accompany a celebration of the Mass within a Catholic liturgy. They, however, deviate significantly from the prescribed liturgical norms endorsed by official Church documents. One of the most frowned upon components of this Mass is that it replaces the Responsorial Psalm with the "Canto de Meditación" and the "Agnus Dei" with the "Miskito Lawana", something that nobody, besides the Church magisterium, has the authority to do.

For this Mass to be a true showcase of Nicaraguan culture and identity, it had to reflect the country's profoundly diverse composition, one which blends within itself elements from the Atlantic coast, black, Spanish and indigenous backgrounds (Cuadra 1969). Mejía Godoy had this in mind as we can see in the following excerpt from his interview with the author:

Por eso cuando yo escribo la Misa, no puedo soslayar la realidad de que somos un país multilingüe, multi racial, y multiétnico y por eso incorporo en vez del Agnus Dei incorporo Miskito Lawana como un canto nacido de esa experiencia vital de la Costa Atlántica. Y los diferentes ritmos del Norte y el Pacífico están representados todos, por ejemplo: El Son de Pascua, la Mazurca, el Vals, La Polka, El Son Nica, el Son de Toro todos del pacífico y del

⁵⁶ Deeply felt by the people.

Norte y el Son Miskito que representa, digamos, como la presencia de la Costa Atlántica en la Misa Campesina.⁵⁷ (Carlos Mejía)

Seeing the *Misa Campesina* as a mosaic of Nicaraguan culture, in this section, I would like to provide an analysis of the songs in this mass, with particular attention to the “Entrance Song”, the “Kyrie”, the “Gloria”, and the “Meditation Song”.

4.2. 2 Entrance Song: In Conversation with the God of the Poor

The opening song of the Mass situates us in a dialogue with the God of the poor where the speaker is precisely the community of the poor (Vigil & Torellas 10). This conversation is one of trust and familiarity as we can see in the very first word that is sung: “Vos”. It is not “Tú” or “Usted”, but the “Vos” which is most common in Nicaragua when one addresses others who are of a similar status.

Musically speaking, this is a “son de pascua” a festive rhythm coming from the Segovia region of Nicaragua (Zeledón 2001). Mrs. María Guevara Silva remembers how they used to sing this song while gathering outside the church in order to process in and celebrate the Sunday Mass: “Porque eso lo cantábamos antes en la entrada de la Iglesia, ahí se paraba todo el grupo y luego entrábamos cantando esa canción y era como alegre como que estábamos llegando a la

⁵⁷ When I write the Mass, I cannot ignore that we are a multi lingual, multi racial and multi ethnic country and that’s why I incorporate the Miskito Lawana instead of the Agnus Dei as a song that is born out of the vital experience of the Atlantic Coast. And the different rhythms from the North and the pacific are all represented there, for example: Pascua Son, Mazurca, Vals, Polka, Nica Son, Bull Fight Son, all from the Pacific and the North and the Miskito Lawana Son represents the presence of the Atlantic Coast in the Peasant Mass.

fiesta. Entraba Ernesto con todos nosotros y cantando “El Dios de los Pobres”⁵⁸ (Interview with the author). This entrance song sets the tone for the celebration, one of joy, dialogue and worship of a God who is easy to approach.

The refrain that is repeated between verses reads as follows: “Vos sos el Dios de los pobres, el Dios humano y sencillo, el Dios que suda en el calle; el Dios de rostro curtido; por eso es que te hablo yo, así como habla mi pueblo, porque sos el Dios obrero, el Cristo trabajador”⁵⁹ (Vigil & Torellas 12). These lyrics establish how the people see God, echoing the revelation given to Moses in the burning bush where God defines himself as he who is: “I am who I am” (*New International Bible*; Exodus 3:14). Here, instead of God, it is the community that speaks to define who God is: “Vos sós”, you are. For this community, God is humble and simple and also has a face stained by the sun and dust as do the agricultural workers of Nicaragua. God is the working God, close to the people. This is why God can understand and the people “dare” speak to him in the simple terms they use to speak to each other, without the protocols and formalities that surrounded the religion they had known until then.

The verses continue this definition of who God is by making a daring affirmation, that God is working alongside the people who struggle in the countryside as well as in the cities:

“Vos vas de la mano con mi gente, luchás en el campo y la ciudad, hacés fila allá en el

⁵⁸ Because we used to sing that at the entrance of the Church, the entire group used to stand there and then we would come in singing that song and it was so filled with happiness, as if we were arriving at a party. Ernesto used to come in with all of us, singing “The God of the Poor”.

⁵⁹ You are the God of the poor, the humble and human God, the God who sweats on the street, the God with a stained face. This is why I speak to you, the way my people speak, because you are a working God, the worker Christ.

campamento para que te paguen tu jornal”⁶⁰. These images would have been most familiar to the people singing this Mass in the slums of Managua as well as in the remote rural areas of Solentiname for whom earning a living involved a great deal of physical hardships. God, as can be noted in verse three, also carries out humble jobs such as selling lottery, working at the corner store and God is not ashamed of these occupations. The verses continue beyond physical hardships to include the delights of everyday living in Nicaragua such as enjoying a “raspado” at the park. For this community, God is also there, eating a snow cone with them and asking for more syrup in it.

This opening song makes use of imagery that would be easily recalled by Nicaraguans as can be noted in verse three: “yo te he visto en las gasolineras chequeando las llantas de un camión y hasta patroleando carreteras con guantes de cuero y overol”⁶¹. God can be found at a gas station, as a truck driver or a traffic officer. These images, part of every day life in Nicaragua, reinforce the idea that God is close, unlike the God presented by the pre-vatican II Church. Cardenal sees these verses of the opening song as a bold affirmation as he states in his autobiography:

Lo mas osado de esta misa es que habla de un Dios que suda en la calle, que hace fila para que se la pague el jornal, que ha sido visto vendiendo lotería, y en las gasolineras chequeando las llantas de un camión, y patroleando carreteras con guantes de cuero y overol. Esto puede parecer herético y aún blasfemo, pero Carlos Mejía que estuvo en un

⁶⁰ You go hand in hand with my people, you struggle in the fields and the city. You line up at camp in order to be paid for your day.

⁶¹ I have seen you at the gas stations checking the tires on a truck and on patrol on the highways with leather gloves and overalls.

seminario estudiando para cura sabe qué es el dogma central de la ortodoxia cristiana; un Dios hombre, y hombre trabajador (Cardenal 256)⁶².

Here Cardenal makes a statement of trust in Mejía Godoy's theological reflection, a reflection which Cardenal himself counselled, was built upon his seminary formation, and was later honed in direct relationship with the community of Solentiname. Cardenal sees that this idea of God as a hard working man is faithful to the central message of christianity.

Mrs. María Guevara Silva sees a commitment in these lyrics, a commitment that links her faith with the simplest and most vulnerable people in Nicaragua. She states that these lyrics expose the problem of Nicaragua's population by comparing this population to Christ:

Siempre se está poniendo él como la persona más sencilla más preocupada o más pobre. Se pone como el más pobre, pero es decir, se da el valor también. Y me parece a mi que siempre los pobres señalándose que eran como lo más desprotegido. Parece que, me da a mi la idea que fue que eso hizo que la gente buscara su verdadera posición como persona. Porque dice: "vos sos el dios de los pobres, el que va en la calle". Dio una sinceridad, dio sencillez, dio fuerzas y se comparó a la persona nicaragüense como la persona más sencilla, más humilde y más fuerte⁶³ (Maria Guevara).

⁶² The most daring thing of this Mass is that it speaks of a God who sweats on the street, that lines up to be paid his day wages, who has been seen selling lottery and at the gas station checking the tires on a truck and on patrol on a highway wearing leather gloves and overalls. This may seem heretical and even blasphemous, but Carlos Mejía who was at a seminary studying to be a priest knows what is the central dogma of Christian Orthodoxy; a God man, and a working man.

⁶³ He is always presented as the most simple, most worried or poorest person. He is presented as the poorest but, he is also valued. It seems to me like the poor are presented as being the most vulnerable. It think that this made people look for their own positioning as a person. Because it says: "You are the "God of the poor, the one who goes on the street". It gave honesty, simplicity and strength and the Nicaraguan person was compared to the humblest, most simple and strongest person.

God, in the person of Christ, becomes the smallest, the least protected person, giving greater dignity to the most vulnerable sectors of Nicaraguan society: the poor, the person on the street, the man or the woman who sells lottery. Guevara Silva sees this as invitation for the vulnerable to find their place as persons because they are simple, humble and strong.

4.2.3 Kyrie: Asking for a Biased God

The “Kyrie” of the *Misa Campesina*, introduces both the concept of class struggle as well as musical elements that would be very familiar to a Nicaraguan audience. This is the first song where Mejía Godoy added instrumental segments of popular Nicaraguan songs in the middle of it. In this case it is the well known “Perra Renca⁶⁴” (Zeledon 2001) which can be heard. Within the Catholic liturgy, The “Kyrie”, or “Lord Have Mercy” is sung during the penitential rite of the Mass and, according to Church documents, must always respect the official text as follows: “Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy, Lord have mercy” (Vigil & Torellas 30) or in Latin: “Kyrie eleison, Christe eleison, Kyrie eleison”. Cardenal and Mejía Godoy explored the original meaning of the Greek text in order to come up with the lyrics that we find in the *Misa Campesina*. This was part of their theological reflection:

Por ejemplo explicando ciertas palabras que ya perdieron su sentido original y deben retraducirse como "Señor, ten piedad", que en la antigua misa era en griego, Kyrie eleison: en la Biblia "piedad" quería decir compasión con el oprimido (mientras "impío" era el

⁶⁴ The title of this song can be loosely translated as “The dog with a bad leg”. A recording of it can be found in <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3ct5KMXHmIM>

opresor) y su sentido era el de la palabra actual "solidaridad". Así Carlos Mejía lo tradujo: "Señor, solidarízate con nosotros"⁶⁵ (Cardenal 255).

Their interpretation does not stop at that point of asking for solidarity on behalf of Christ. There is a first allusion to the conflict of classes here, and the oppressor is described with poignant images as crushing and devouring the poor. The penitential rite asks Christ to take sides, the side of those who are thirsty for peace: "Cristo, Cristo Jesús, Solidarízate! no con la clase opresora que exprime y devora a la comunidad sino con el oprimido con el pueblo mío sediento de paz"⁶⁶ (Vigil). Christ must not take the side of the oppressor but the side of the poor.

4.2.4 The "Gloria": Singing in the Style of the Popular Feasts

The Gloria, traditionally a hymn that echoes the voices of the angels described in the Gospels as breaking forth in praise at the birth of Christ (Luke 2:14), is prescribed by the Church to remain loyal to the text: "Glory be to God on high, and peace on earth to men of good will" (Young 1884). Yet, Mejía Godoy and those who assisted him in the writing of this Mass had other ideas, incorporating very festive Nicaraguan sounds and songs as well as its geography and addressing praise to Christ instead of the God the Father. If indeed the Gloria is an echo of the angels breaking forth in song, this hymn ought to be an explosion of sound and festivities as Mejía Godoy affirms: "Incluso en el Gloria ves toda una banda chichera con toda la sonoridad de las fiestas populares Nicaragüenses. Porque creo que el gloria es el canto más jubiloso, es el

⁶⁵ For example, explaining certain words that have already lost its original meaning and must be translated such as "Lord have mercy", which in the old Mass was in Greek, "Kyrie Eleison". In the Bible, "pity" meant compassion with the oppressed (while "wicked" was the oppressor) and its meaning was that of the word "solidarity". Thus, Carlos Mejía translated it: "Lord, build solidarity with us".

⁶⁶ Christ, Christ Jesus, build solidarity with us! Not with the oppressing class which oppresses and devours the community but with the oppressed, with my people, thirsty for peace.

estallido. Entonces ahí meto el son de Toros”⁶⁷ (Mejía Godoy). Mejía Godoy includes a type of musical band that Nicaraguans associated with popular feasts, the greatest expression of celebration and festive noise.

Popular songs make their appearance here as an expression of Nicaraguan jubilation, tapping into the imaginary and the memory of the people. The first notes that we hear as the song begins are from the popular song “Mama Ramona”⁶⁸ and later, as the song changes its rhythm later on, we hear Justo Santos’ most famous “Mora Limpia” (Zeledón 2001)⁶⁹. In this Gloria, text and music join to express that the people sing in “Son de Toros”, the rhythms heard during bull fights and popular feasts: “Con el más alegre son de mi pueblo vengo a cantar este Gloria a Cristo que en son de toros me gusta más” (Mejía Godoy)⁷⁰. The people can rejoice because, as the text indicates, it is the rhythm that is best liked by Nicaraguans.

Peasant Nicaraguans are explicitly included in this feast, in this breaking into song with the “Gloria” because this piece mentions the geographical areas where they live and makes use of instruments and dances they are familiar with. After the reason for the presence of the music of popular feasts is given, the song takes us on a journey through rural Nicaragua as each one of these places sings God’s praise: “Gloria a Dios en Xiuna, Jalapa y Cosigüina, en Solentiname,

⁶⁷ Actually, in the Gloria you see an entire chichera band, with all the sound of Nicaraguan popular feasts. Because I believe that the Gloria is the most jubilant song, it is a breaking forth, this is why I include the Bullfight Son.

⁶⁸ For a marimba version of this song visit: <http://cdn.rlp.com.ni/Marimba/TradicionalMamaRamona.mp3>

⁶⁹ The original recording of this piece can be found in <http://youtu.be/mRSBJPTGuQU>

⁷⁰ A sample of a popular feast can be found in <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EpsKDkmR7Ew>

Diriomo y Ticuantepe. Gloria a Dios en Tisma, Waslala y Yalagüina, en Totogalpa, Moyogalpa y Santa Cruz”. The musical instruments native to these regions are also mentioned one by one: “Hoy te glorificamos, Señor, con las marimbas, con los violines de ñámbar, sonajas y atabaques, con chirimillas, quijongos y sambumbias⁷¹, con las danzas nativas de Subtiava y Monimbó”⁷². The festive sounds mentioned and included musically, are also included in the text, creating a song that includes all of Nicaragua’s festive expressions.

Finally, the “Gloria” takes a sudden political turn. In the last verse of the “Gloria”, praise is no longer addressed to Christ but to those who follow the Gospel. “Gloria al que sigue la luz del Evangelio, al que denuncia sin miedo la injusticia. Gloria al que sufre la cárcel y el destierro y da su vida combatiendo al opresor”⁷³. Those who were imprisoned for political reasons and those sent into exile, two common occurrences before and during the revolution, are suddenly placed on a par with Christ, particularly if they give their life for the truth to come forth. This can be seen as an invitation for the community and for those singing to imitate their actions and not be discouraged. This song is then, a joyous expression of praise which includes the poor as well as a reminder to those cast out of Nicaraguan society because of political conflicts not to lose heart.

⁷¹ These instruments come from the indigenous traditions.

⁷² Today we glorify you, Lord, with the marimbas, with violines de ñámbar, shakers and atabaques, with chirimillas, quijongos and sambumbias, with the native dances of Subtiava and Monimbó.

⁷³ Glory to the one who follows the light of the Gospel, to the one who denounces injustice without fear. Glory to the one who suffers prison and exile and gives his life fighting the oppressor.

4.2.5 The Meditation Song: Praising the Leader

“Más me gusta la final, la del pajarillo, los chocoyos. Me relaciona más con la naturaleza, bastante con la naturaleza”⁷⁴ (Esperanza Guevara Silva). With these words, Mrs. Guevara Silva tells me which is her favourite song from the Mass: the “Meditation Song”. From a liturgical perspective, this song commits a transgression since it was destined to replace the Responsorial Psalm during the liturgy of the Word, the first part of the Mass (Vigil & Torellas), yet it has proven to be one of the favourites because of the tenderness of its sound and its text. Mejía Godoy also comments: “Pero la verdad es que para mi el canto mas bello de la Misa es uno que no compuse yo que es el canto de los pájaros”⁷⁵ (Interview with the Author). For María Guevara Silva, this song is an expression of joy as the songs speak of the struggles but also happiness: “Y también hablan de la alegría por ejemplo de los pajaritos, del canto de las aves”⁷⁶ (Interview with the author).

This meditation song was written by a man of very humble origins, Pablo Téllez, “El Guadalupeño”, who experienced first hand the many struggles of peasant Nicaraguans and who would have been most familiar with the sounds and images of the Nicaraguan countryside. He paints an image filled with details, precious details from nature, describing the rural sunrise: “Antes que nazca el día los pájaros del monte nos dan sus melodías, los güises y zenzontles; el picotear sonoro de un carpintero se oye que en la punta de un árbol su casa construye donde va a

⁷⁴ I like the last one, the one about the birds and the chocoyos. It relates me more to nature, a lot with nature.

⁷⁵ But the truth is that for me, the most beautiful song of the Mass is one I did not compose, the song of the birds.

⁷⁶ They also talk about the joy, for example, of the birds, the songs of the birds.

vivir, y un gorrioncillo salta de una rama a otra muy cerca de allí”⁷⁷. Mejía Godoy describes how, after asking Téllez to write this song in the morning, he came to him by the evening and Téllez sang the full song to him. In one day he captured the spirit of Mejía Godoy’s request as he expresses filled with enthusiasm: “¡Ji! que bárbaro!”⁷⁸ Osea, captó la idea que yo le dí, hacer una asamblea como de pájaros para cantarle al creador. Y para mi ese es el canto más bello”⁷⁹ (Mejía Godoy). Later in the song, a list of native birds called by their Nicaraguan name is given as each is invited to sing God’s praise: “Canten pijules, zanates y pocoyos, vengan los chichiltotes, los saltapiñuelas y el alcarabán; que cante el colibrí, canarios y chocoyos, juntos con el macuá canten felices todos”⁸⁰. This song begins as a call for praise in harmony with the rural landscape, preparing the listener for its call to action.

A sudden change in rhythm moves from the slow balad of the introduction into the Son Nica⁸¹ and the text describes peasants coming down from the mountains to join in praise: “Mil campesinos unidos te cantamos, bajamos de los cerros con nuestras alforjas repletas de amor, por ser el pencón, el guía y justiciero, por ser el tayacán de mi pueblo entero”⁸². Two key

⁷⁷ Before the day is born, the birds of the mountain give us their melodies, the güises and the zenzontles. The sonorous tapping of the woodpecker is heard who builds the home where he will live on top of a tree, and a sparrow hops from branch to branch very close to that.

⁷⁸ This expression can be loosely translated as follows: “Wow, he is amazing!”

⁷⁹ That is, he captured the idea that I gave him, to make an assembly of birds to sing to the creator. And for me that is the most beautiful song.

⁸⁰ Sing pijules, zanates and pocoyos, come chichiltotes, saltapiñuelas and alcarabán; let the hummingbird sing as well as canaries and parakeets, along with the macuá, let them all sing happily.

⁸¹ The most characteristic musical style of Nicaragua developed by Camilo Zapata.

⁸² A thousand peasants sing to you in unity, we come down from the mountains with our alforjas filled with love, because you are the strong man, the guide and seeker of justice, because you are our leader, the leader of my entire people.

Nicaraguan words are used here, words which are slang and which could be considered by some, specially the Church hierarchy, disrespectful or bad: “pencón” and “tayacán”. Mejía Godoy explains his choice of words as follows:

Igualmente otras partes de la misa por ejemplo utilizo la palabra “Tayacán” que significa “jefe”. El que va adelante es el tayacán. Entonces hubo gente que dice: “No, como vas a creer una palabra que “oye vos, que sos el tayacán vení para acá”. ¿Qué es el problema? Vos sós el jefe, vos sós el líder, vos sós el man como dicen en lenguaje popular, el hombre. “Veni para acá, resolvemos este problema”⁸³ (Carlos Mejía).

Choosing to call Christ “tayacán” encapsulates one of the central messages of this Mass, that Christ can be addressed by the people in their own language because he is close to them, and that he is the leader who will guide them in their struggle against oppression.

Mrs. María Guevara comments on the other word used, “pencón”, as follows:

Yo he notado que todas las canciones de la Misa Campesina señala al nicaragüense como sencillo, como humilde, como pobre, como fuerte. Uno habla, dice que, hasta da una mala palabra que nosotros la creemos como mala palabra pero dice: “El pencón” que quiere decir, que vos sós el que podés... vos el pencón, vos sós el que podés, entonces es como decir, que con vos podemos hacer todo⁸⁴ (Interview with the author).

⁸³ Similarly, other parts of the Mass, for example, use the word “tayacán” which means boss. He who goes ahead of us is the tayacán. So, some people say “No, how can you believe that such a word that you use like: “Hey you! you who are the boss, come over here. What’s the problem? You are the boss, you are the leader, you are the man, as they say in popular language. Come over here and solve this problem”.

⁸⁴ I have noticed that in all the songs from the Peasant Mass, the Nicaraguan person is portrayed as someone simple, humble, poor, strong. One even says a bad word, we see it as a bad word: “El Pencón”, that means that you are the one who can, you, el pencón, you are the one who can. So it’s like saying that with you, we can do anything.

This word is particularly empowering for Nicaraguans since in popular language, “pencón” is used to describe a strong, hardworking man, capable of fighting for the people. God, the strong man who is on the side of the poor can be trusted to fight on their behalf and bring down the powerful. “Nos dio el poder como decir de penquear a todo mundo al que no, a Somoza que era el más poderoso”⁸⁵ (Maria Guevara). Christ, who rebelled against the injustices of humanity is to be praised and imitated. He is the one who brings about justice, the strong man and the guide, the leader of the people.

4.2.6 Creed and Offertory: A Class Struggle

The “Creed” and the “Offertory” of this Mass, sung after the reading of the Gospel, incorporate Marxist language in a more concrete way. Here the class struggle is felt and the focus rests on the working class coming to the celebration of the Eucharist to make an offering to their God. In the “Creed”, the act of faith, God is described as a member of the working class, as an architect and engineer but also an artisan, a carpenter, a tradesman. Pilate, Christ’s judge, is described as a soulless imperialist, echoing the language used by the Sandinista to refer to the United States, and Christ himself is addressed as “compañero”, comrade, the New Man that can bring about liberation, resonating with José Martí’s ideas incorporated in *Nuestra América* (Martí 1977). Christ is, finally, resurrected in each raised arm that defends the people from those who dominate and exploit it and can be found anywhere “porque estás vivo en el rancho, en la fábrica, en la escuela, creo en tu lucha sin tregua, creo en tu resurrección”⁸⁶.

⁸⁵ He gave us the power, so to speak, to beat everybody up, Somoza who was the most powerful.

⁸⁶ Because you are alive in the ranch, at the factory, at school, I believe in your fight without rest, I believe in your resurrection.

The “Offertory Song”, in a similar way, gives voice to the working class and the peasants as they approach the altar of the Eucharist to offer that which is produced by their own hands and through their occupations. The offerings, placed on the altar, are not unknown to them since they are those products from the land they would be most familiar with such as: “los chilincocos y almendros que montaña adentro nuestra tierra dio, los caimitos bien morados, los mangos pintados de luna y de sol, los pipianes, los ayotes, la miel de jicote, la chicha de coyol”⁸⁷. The peasants bring the wealth of the land in all its ripeness. Their occupations are listed in the last verse of the hymn where working Nicaraguans, who labour since early dawn are represented as praising God from their place of work including the plough, the truck and the scaffold. God can be found there as well because there is dignity in their professions.

Perhaps the most casual address on behalf of the people takes place in the “Sanctus”, another hymn that the Church asks be sung faithfully to the original texts. It is to be sung just before the prayer of consecration on the bread and wine and is a praise to God as the Lord of power and might whose glory fills heaven and earth (Young 1884). The “Sanctus” in this Mass does not stay focused on the heavens but on earth as it praises the God who treats everyone evenly and justly using the language of peasant: “Vos sos el Dios parejo. No andás con carambadas. Vos sos Hombre de ñeques, el mero tayacán”⁸⁸. Mejía Godoy believes that the power of this Mass lies in this, that peasant Nicaraguans can understand it and make it their own because it is their own language:

⁸⁷ The chilincocos and almonds that, from deep within the mountains our lands produced, the purple camitos, the mangoes coloured by the moon and the sun, the squashes the honey from jicotes, chicha and coyol.

⁸⁸ You are the even God. You don't fool around. You are a man of strength, the leader itself.

Que el campesino cuando oye la Misa no siente que le están diciendo algo que no conoce. Le están hablando en el lenguaje por ejemplo: en el canto del santo: vos sos el Dios parejo, no andas con carambadas, vos sos hombre de ñeque, el mero tayacán. ¿Qué le vas a traducir al campesino que le vas a decir si esas son sus palabras?⁸⁹ (Mejía Godoy).

4.2.7 Communion and Dismissal: A Committed Return to Regular Life

The commitment that is generated from the theological content of the songs up to this point is expressed more fully in the “Communion” and the “Dismissal” songs. Here the joy of praise is linked to everyday action. After reflecting that God is with the community, that God works alongside the poor and gives inherent dignity to the occupations of the working class, the Mass calls for concrete actions in daily life. Once again, through the use of a natural environment familiar to the people and deeply connected to the Solentiname experience, Mejía Godoy describes the gathering around for communion. Here, the voice of the people describes the table of the Eucharist as a plantation of corn, an essential element in the Nicaraguan diet and economy, the most likely work place for peasants: “Vamos a la milpa, a la milpa del Señor. Jesucristo invita a su cosecha de amor; brillan los maizales a la luz del sol, vamos a la milpa de la comunión”⁹⁰. Nature once again, joins in the celebration felt by the community as the verses describe the fish found in Lake Nicaragua, naming them by their common names: “Los pescaditos del lago nos quieren acompañar y brincan alborozados como engalichados de fraternidad: laguneros y robalos, el guapote y el gasear, las mojaras, las guabinas y hasta las

⁸⁹ When the peasant hears the Mass he does not feel as if he is being told something he doesn't know. He is being addressed in his language, for example: the Sanctus: “you are an even God, you do not fool around, you are a man of righteousness, the leader itself”. What would you need to translate here if those are his words?

⁹⁰ Let's go to the cornfield, the cornfield of our Lord. Jesus Christ invites us to his harvest of love. The corn shines with the sunlight. Let's go to the cornfield of communion.

sardinas parecen cantar”⁹¹. But this joy, this experience of communion and worship brings with it a serious commitment as it is expressed in the final verse: “La comunión no es un mito intrascendente y vanal, es compromiso y vivencia, toma de conciencia de la cristiandad, es comulgar con la lucha de la colectividad, es decir yo soy cristiano, y conmigo hermano, vos podes contar”⁹². Going to Mass and receiving communion is far from being the disconnected experience that Mrs. María Guevara Silva describes as being part of their life before Cardenal’s arrival in Mancarrón. Participating in this communion is a commitment with their community and their country.

This significant and joyous experience of the Mass comes to an end but the participant is reminded here, through song, that everyday life is inextricably connected with it. The peasant, the agricultural worker, expresses a resolution as he and she articulate the sadness that saying goodbye to his community causes. The closing song states that gathering in fraternal communion is a beautiful thing and mentions individual people of the community by name and they are described as joyous in the midst of this celebration: “Qué cosa más bonita contemplar a la Chenta Calero con sus cuatro chigüines y Gaspar, su alegre compañero. De aquí puedo mirar al pescador Presentación Ortiz con toda su familia cantando feliz”⁹³. This happiness, sings the peasant, will overflow into life and will be the reason for him to carry out his work with more

⁹¹ The little fish of the lake want to accompany us and they jump overjoyed as if they were filled with fraternity: laguneros y robalos, guapote y gasear, mojarras, guabinas and even the sardines seem to sing.

⁹² Communion is not an intranscendental or vain myth, it is commitment and living, a becoming aware of Christianity, it is to say I am a Christian and you can count on me my brother.

⁹³ There is nothing as beautiful as seeing Chenta Calero with her four children and Gaspar, her happy companion. From here I can see Presentación Ortiz, the fisherman, singing happily with his entire family.

dedication: “ahora que regreso a mi lugar repleto de alegría voy a limpiar mi huerta con más devoción”⁹⁴. Finally, the last verse is an invitation to join hands in defending and strengthening the community: “Juntemos nuestras manos para hacer una muralla fuerte que defienda por siempre la comunidad”⁹⁵. It is a final commitment to safeguard the community against anything that may threaten it from the outside.

⁹⁴ Now that i go back to my place packed with joy, I am going to clean my garden with more devotion.

⁹⁵ Let’s join hands to make a strong wall to always defend the community.

CHAPTER 5:

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. Discussion

5.1.1 Theoretical Considerations

When we approach the *Misa Campesina* for the purpose of analysis, we must do so from within the specific Nicaraguan and Solentiname experience if we wish to understand it as fully as possible (Cross 2003). This music is profoundly connected to Nicaragua's political, religious and cultural contexts and it was born out of people's frustrations and hardships and their cognitive appraisals of them as well as their faith and hope for better things to come. It also incorporates instruments, sounds, and words which are treasured parts of popular culture and which fully resonate with the listener only if he or she has taken part of Nicaragua's festive popular celebrations. Only when we approach this music with those details in mind can we attempt to carry out a "situated act of interpretation" (Cross 19).

The process of creation of the guitars and percussion instruments mentioned in the interviews is one, as argued by Dawe (2003) so intimately born and nurtured by Nicaraguan culture, and more specifically by the culture and environment surrounding Solentiname. Not only were the materials used to make them native to Solentiname's natural environment such as the wood and the drum skins, but the images used to decorate them. Mrs. María Guevara Silva describes the guitars, maracas and the drums as being decorated by the locals with images of flowers and trees native to the islands. In this way, not only the sounds emanating from these

instruments but also the process of making them was an expression of Nicaraguan popular culture. This is significant since this Mass eliminated the use of the European created organ in order to have the accompaniment of Nicaraguan guitars and percussion instruments.

With this context in mind, we can understand the appeal that this music had at the time of its birth on its audience's emotions. Here we have a Mass that removed all the foreign expressions of faith and worship, including instruments, language, musical styles and rhythms and replaces them with of expression of "Nicaraguanidad", as Mejía Godoy refers to Nicaraguan identity. This allowed the Nicaragua's working class and peasants to feel identified with it, to be emotionally moved and to tend to display specific behaviours around the revolution. This music emerged out of the humblest sectors of the Nicaraguan population with a system of meaning that was fully familiar to its audience.

Diamond (2013) proposed the idea that there were three forces at play in Nicaraguan society in the period between 1960 and 1979. All of them contributed to the events that led to the revolution. What he called the third force was precisely what constituted the social movement behind this time of change. That third sector, caught between the Sandinista and Somoza, was made up of the ordinary people described by sociologist James Jasper (1998). These "peasants, workers, church activists and unionists" (Diamond 56), such as those in the Solentiname and San Pablo communities, were involved in the "conscious, concerted and relatively sustained effort" (Jasper 5) to raise awareness regarding the precarious situation of less affluent sectors of Nicaraguan society. Their faith, expressed so eloquently in the singing that accompanied their worship, played a vital role in this sustained effort.

This sector, the working class in Nicaragua, verbalized what Snow et al. (2008) calls “grievances and concerns about the rights, welfare and well-being of themselves and of others”. (Snow et al. 3). They protested against Somoza’s economic power and his corruption (Gobat 2005), the unequal distribution of land and income (Williams 1985) and the lack of improvement on health services and education, particularly in rural regions. They verbalized what they saw as an unjust system that did not value their contribution and that did not show concern for their basic human needs. The Solentiname community, for example, made their voice heard so as to no longer be outside of the path of progress, transportation and history (Cardenal 2002). They did this through song as well as through concrete involvement in the revolution.

As noted in the theoretical framework, the classical model of social movements posits that people engage in protest when the psychological reaction coming from oppressive situations and physical or economic hardships reaches an intolerable level. Perhaps these feelings are best expressed by Mrs. Olivia Guevara, as quoted by Cardenal in his autobiography (2002). For her, the hardships of life, the lack of access to health services, food, education on Solentiname made her feel as if she were in a prison.

For James Davies, revolutions begin to take shape when a group perceives a threat to the fulfilment of their basic physical and social needs. It is the cognitive appraisal of their reality that matters most. In the case of Solentiname, this cognitive appraisal was initiated by the experience of their faith gatherings since it was there that the process of “concientización” took place. Here they began to see that their needs as human beings and as members of Nicaraguan

society were not being met and that, in fact, they were being oppressed and “devoured” by the ruling class, as the “Kyrie” expressed.

In the case of the Ecclesial Base Communities, the best expression of the popular Church of Nicaragua, it is evident that the beliefs shared by them facilitated their involvement in protest and in the revolution as McVeigh et al. discuss in their case study regarding Protestant involvement in United States politics. The particular approach to faith lived by these communities, built upon a renewed concern for the poor, placed their cry for justice at its centre. The theology that informed their worship reminded them that their faith was not outside of the realm of politics because God was not completely beyond human history. His kingdom was not some future, intangible place to reach. It was rather here and now because there was no separation between the spiritual and the tangible worlds.

This seamless connection of faith and protest and faith and politics, is evident in the lyrics of the Mass that the Solentiname community and, later, the poorer sectors of Nicaragua of experienced. In the “Gloria”, for example, we see that the same praise given to God, belongs also to those who suffer imprisonment and exile because of their fight against oppression. This praise is also echoed in the “Meditation Song” where worship is offered to Christ precisely because he was a revolutionary who fought day and night against humanity’s injustice. These beliefs, as well as the weekly reflections on the Gospel, were what Mrs. Esperanza Guevara Silva called the “unsettling” message that led young men such as “Elbis, Laureano, Alejandro, Bosco, Felipe...” to become involved in the takeover of the San Carlos Military base in 1977 (García Zeledón 2001).

The sense of satisfaction which, according to Jasper, is needed to ensure an individual's ongoing involvement in protest can also be seen in the Solentiname case since individuals were surrounded by a caring community and were reminded that their actions were part of a larger picture. Belonging to this politicized faith community was a source of support, protection and positive feelings in Solentiname as Mrs. María Guevara Silva's testimony affirms. They were compelled to help the poorest and weakest members in whatever way was possible. The joy found in belonging to the community is best echoed in the closing song of the Mass where the community sings that the fraternal gathering of a people that fights together is truly a joyous occasion. This song also reminds the individual that their actions, the work they carry out every day, are part of a greater cause and that in unity lies their strength as a community.

The issue of threat and blame, discussed by Jasper is clearly evident in the *Misa Campesina* as well as in the testimony given by members of the Solentiname community. Here is a community that had no health and food security and that, later, experienced also threats to their physical security by the National Guard. Cardenal narrates, for example, how their homes in Solentiname were burnt by the National Guard once the community earned a reputation for being a rebellious, communist group (Cardenal 2002). When it comes to their physical environment, the "Creed" of the Mass attests that the damage to the forests is not caused by natural disasters or by God but rather by a "criminal axe", the work of exploitative landowners who carelessly use it for their own benefit. The "Kyrie", on the other hand, states that the social exclusion lived by the community of the poor is caused by the "oppressing class". This class is identified as the ones to blame for their situation. In a joking manner, Carlos Mejía Godoy, as quoted by Journalist Joaquín Torres (2002) puts Somoza as the cause behind the situation. Torres

writes that when Mejía Godoy asked Pablo Téllez to write the Meditation Song, he said: “Hacete una canción para pedirle a Dios que nos ayude porque no aguantamos la situación con este Somoza jodido”⁹⁶. This song was to be a request to God to fix the situation caused by Somoza. The community believed that the dictator and his government were ultimately held responsible to correct the situation they caused, the situation that left this and other communities outside of the realm of progress.

5.1.2 Motivating Emotions

If we affirm with James Jasper that emotions are the motivators behind ideologies as well as ongoing and immediate loyalties, then we must also be able to argue that emotions played an important role for the members of the Solentiname community as well as for peasants and working Nicaraguans during the process of revolution. I argue that, when we evaluate the comments made by those who were involved in the community of Our Lady of Solentiname, we can notice the presence of two primary underlying emotions: joy and indignation. The joy displayed flows from the sense of community they experienced, and the indignation flows from the awareness of the unjust conditions of Nicaraguan society. These emotions involved the categorization of their object as desirable or not desirable and set in motion the corresponding action tendencies suggested by Fridja et al. (1989).

All the testimonies of those interviewed for this project, as well as those testimonies found in existing literature, speak in a most positive way about the experience of community and their fraternal gatherings. Mrs. Esperanza Guevara Silva, for example, speaks of the Mass as

⁹⁶ Make yourself a song to ask God to help us because we can no longer stand the situation with this damned Somoza.

being most beautiful, “una Misa lindísima”. She also speaks of the feeling of trust that allowed the participants to articulate their reflections on the Gospel. Mrs. María Guevara Silva tells of how good they felt as young people helping others and doing good in favour of the poorest members of their community. She also speaks of the joy reflected in the songs they sung, particularly in the “Meditation Song” which reflected the natural joy of the birds around them. This joy, as it has been mentioned above, is most noticeable in the verses of the closing song, a song that expresses the nostalgia felt by the community at the moment of leaving the Mass because of how happy they have felt when celebrating together.

This sense of community and these gatherings filled with sharing and joy are categorized as something good since there is nothing more beautiful than this, as the closing song states: “No hay cosa mas bonita que mirar a un pueblo reunido que lucha cuando quiere mejorar porque está decidido”⁹⁷. Individuals would generally tend to move toward an experience such as this one, an object that elicits the positive emotion of joy. In fact, members of this community did gravitate toward it and offered what they could so as to build and strengthen their community with actions such as their Sunday lunches where everyone contributed either with food or by preparing it, for example. Members also assisted Cardenal to repair the old church as well as to protect the physical safety of the community once the perceived threat became tangible and the National Guard burnt the community homes in retaliation for the San Carlos military post incident (Cardenal 2002).

⁹⁷ There is nothing as beautiful as seeing a people gathered, that fights because it wants to improve, because it is determined.

The second emotion that can be deduced from the testimonies from Solentiname is indignation caused by becoming aware of the unjust immediate situation in which they found themselves as well as the national reality of Nicaragua (Cardenal 206). This is the unsettling realization that Mrs. Esperanza Guevara Silva speaks of, becoming aware of the fact that they lived in an unjust society, a society that lacked true Christian values. This indignation is directed at those in a position of power such as the oppressing class the “imperialist” leaders personified in the Pontius Pilate portrayed in the “Creed”.

This oppressive entity, concretized in the person of Somoza and his U.S. endorsed government, were the object of the indignation of both individuals and the community as a whole. Mrs. Esperanza Guevara Silva, for example, expresses this as follows: “Entonces lo que se sabe es que estas en una sociedad injusta, ¿Qué haces para que no sea eso y eso fue lo que nos llevo 10 años después a participar con el derrumbe de la dictadura?”⁹⁸. The dictatorship was then, for her, the object to be removed. Mrs. María Guevara Silva, when speaking about the word “pencón” found in the Meditation Song, expresses the following: “nos dio el poder como decir de penquear a todo mundo al que no, a Somoza que era el más poderoso”⁹⁹. According to her, recognizing Christ as the leader and strong man gave them the courage to fight against him who was the most powerful entity in Nicaragua.

Fridja et al. posit that when encountering an object that produces negative emotions such as anger and indignation, it is a general tendency for individuals to either act so as to protect

⁹⁸ So, what you know is that you live in an unjust society. What do you do so that it is not like that and that is what brought us 10 years later to participate in the overthrow of the dictatorship.

⁹⁹ He gave us the power, so to speak, to beat everybody up, Somoza who was the most powerful.

themselves and their community or to attack in self defence. These were the action tendencies toward which the community of Solentiname gravitated as is expressed in the various testimonies available to us. Mrs. Esperanza Guevara Silva shares how the young men of the community eventually took arms and became involved in concrete actions which attacked the Somoza regime during the take over of the San Carlos military base. Somoza was identified as the undesirable object from which they needed to defend their community since he posed a real threat to their safety and well-being. He was the source of threat and blame which had to be eliminated.

Considering the Greek idea that music has the capacity to imitate reality through mimesis as well as to purify the soul through catharsis (Cook and Dibbens 46), we can argue that this mass does indeed carry out both functions as it makes reference to the hardships of real life and offers the community a purifying experience of faith, capable of bringing about cognitive, emotional and behavioural change for each participant. In the case of this Mass, we can observe that the process of mimesis and catharsis work together to describe reality while allowing the listener or participant a cathartic experience.

We must also consider how the political, religious and cultural contexts as well as the musical expressions found in this Mass interact with the listener for the creation of meaning. Cook and Dibben (2001) remind us that meaning does not lie outside of the listener because it comes from the listener's interaction with music. Since this is a subjective experience, we must turn to the community's testimony to explore this. Mrs. Maria Guevara Silva perhaps expresses this meaning best. This music meant courage for them, the determination to act against Somoza

and in favour of the community “nos dio el poder como decir de penquear a todo mundo”¹⁰⁰ (Interview with the author). Mrs. Esperanza suggests that this music and this new faith experience meant change and the ability to relate to Christianity for the first time: “Realmente, es que lo identifica a uno y Nicaragua tuvo ese grado de identificarse con la realidad el cristianismo real”¹⁰¹. For Mejía Godoy, this Mass meant the ability to proudly show what it was to be Nicaraguan, seen for the first time from the perspective of the poor. For Ernesto Cardenal, as quoted by Zeledón (2001), this mass meant the possibility to express the opposition to the oppressors of workers “Esta, es una misa contra los opresores, los que impiden que se reparta en comunión fraterna los frutos de la naturaleza y del trabajo”¹⁰². In conclusion, it meant an expression of a new found awareness, an open possibility for a different way of seeing things, and a tool for change to take place.

Abraham Maslow’s theory of peak experiences (Juslin & Sloboda 2001) gives us a final perspective of the relationship between the *Misa Campesina* and emotions. He argues that music is capable of evoking experiences of heightened emotion, awe and reverence, moments when the individual is completely absorbed and identified by the object. These are sacred moments when the person can surrender in reverence to something bigger than him or herself and feel strengthened to carry out particular actions.

¹⁰⁰ He gave us the power, so to speak, to beat everybody up.

¹⁰¹ Truly, it is what identifies us and Nicaragua had a degree of identifying itself with real Christianity.

¹⁰² This is a Mass against oppressors, those who prevent the fraternal sharing in communion of the fruits of nature and work.

The *Misa Campesina*, through its use of sound, text and instrumentation tapped into the emotions and imaginary of Nicaraguan peasants. The Mass begins and ends on a celebratory note, rejoicing over God's presence with the people in their daily struggles and joys. Following this introduction, it takes the community on an emotional journey where it articulates its faith and its request for God to rectify oppression. It recreates the magnificent environment of the countryside. Finally, it ends on a highly emotional, joyous moment, describing the time of dismissal, a time filled with laughter, good resolutions and fraternal union. It is likely that the community left these weekly gatherings feeling strengthened and filled with hope that the unjust Nicaraguan society in which they lived could certainly be changed. They were absorbed by the object, the message of a God and a Church that were truly interested in the improvement of their well-being and that made a commitment to stand at their side to accomplish it.

5.1.3 Contribution

While, as I have argued previously, this Mass influenced the young people in Solentiname to become involved in the armed struggle against Somoza, its contribution and accomplishments go beyond military action. Its creation is in itself an act of protest which made an important statement to Nicaraguan society. Jasper posits that the value of protest lies in its capacity to articulate moral positions and facilitate dialogue. It is true that the magisterium of the Church never accepted the *Misa Campesina* as an approved musical expression to be played in its liturgies, however, this Mass' legacy lies in its capacity to question and instigate a conversation which never had taken place. The Church and political entities were confronted by the peasant reality, a reality filled with injustice, inequality and exclusion. The peasants stood proud with music that they helped develop and which was an expression of their own identity.

The *Misa Campesina*'s legacy lies also in its transgression of how liturgical music is supposed to sound and how it is supposed to be carried out. It does this by using folk practices, styles, instruments and different lyrics that showcase Nicaraguan identity and therefore, the identity of the people. This broadly shared and recognizable practice helped to build and sustain community through shared emotions, particularly the emotion of joy. Just as this Mass was fed by a theology from below, we have a musical practice from below that is transgressive and that legitimizes the musical practices of Nicaraguan peasants.

Carlos Mejía Godoy affirmed in the interview carried out for this thesis, that this Mass broke down national borders and that it has been translated in six languages. Its capacity to build community is noticed internationally since it is sung by communities in Mexico, Venezuela, El Salvador and Guatemala, among other countries. We can only conclude that this Mass speaks in one way or another to these countries and these communities. It must resonate with their experience of injustice or inequality to some degree even though its language and rhythms are so deeply Nicaraguan. Examining this question is beyond the scope of this project but further research in this area would be of great interest. It is also important to note that, the findings presented in this thesis come from a situation of revolution when emotions ran particularly high in Nicaragua. They may or may not be generalizable to all social movements.

5.2 Conclusion

The *Misa Campesina* was an act of protest by its very existence while also being a strong catalyst for protest activity on behalf of Nicaragua's less affluent sectors. Through this Mass, they voiced the discontentment of living in a society filled with inequality, lack of access to basic human needs and in which they were caught in between the interest of Church and political

parties. This Mass, first of all, defied Catholic liturgical norms by adapting the changes of Vatican II and taking them beyond the official Church's norms. Because the *Misa Campesina* is a most complete expression of Nicaraguan culture, of popular wisdom and musical celebration, it had the capacity to appeal to the emotions of Nicaragua's working class, particularly agricultural workers. This Mass incorporated instruments, sounds and rhythms from the major regions of Nicaragua, including the Pacific, the North and the Atlantic Coast. As a primary author, Carlos Mejía Godoy gathered the popular wisdom he found all through Nicaragua to compile the lyrics that are sung during various liturgical moments of this Mass. By recruiting singers and consulting on theological content, he was able to produce a text that reflected the heart of liberation theology in a language familiar with the humblest members of Nicaraguan society.

Through the power of its music and text, these songs evoked emotions of joy and indignation as people gathered to celebrate in worship. These emotions moved the person toward nurturing the community and away from Somoza and his government. The individuals and the community were also encourage to fight, as Mrs. María Guevara so eloquently states, they had the courage "de penquear a todo mundo"¹⁰³, especially Somoza who they identified as the one to blame, the most threatening and powerful man. This Mass recreates a peak experience for its participants who are able to join a joyous experience of community and faith, an experience where they can fix their attention and become identified with the God of the poor, the God whose worship is deeply intertwined with daily life and with the ongoing struggle against injustice.

¹⁰³ To beat everybody up.

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Appendixes

Appendix A: Interview Questions for Ernesto Cardenal

1. How did the creation of the *Misa Campesina* come about?
2. What role did this music have in the community celebrations?
3. Do you think that the community dynamics would have been different without this music?
4. When you think of the *Misa Campesina*, what song or phrase comes to mind first?
5. What would you say is the greatest contribution of the *Misa Campesina*?

Appendix B: Interview Questions for Carlos Mejía Godoy

1. How did you become involved with the community of Solentiname?
2. How is the *Misa Campesina* different from other popular Masses?
3. What musical styles did you use when you created this Mass? Why?
4. Did you write this Mass thinking of particular musical instruments?
5. Which is your favourite song from the Mass?
6. What would you say is the greatest contribution of the *Misa Campesina*?

Appendix C: Interview Questions for Community Members

1. How long have you lived in Solentiname/the area of Río San Juan
2. Tell me a little about your experience in the community of Our Lady of Solentiname
3. How did this experience change your relationship with the Catholic Church?
4. How did this experience change your relationship with Nicaraguan society?

5. If you think specifically about the celebrations of the Mass, what role did music play in the community celebrations?
6. When someone speaks of the *Misa Campesina*, what song comes to mind first?
7. Do you remember the first time you heard the *Misa Campesina*? Do you remember how you felt?
8. Would you say that the *Misa Campesina* had an effect on the revolution?