

THE POLITICAL CULTURE OF ORDER AND ANARCHY:
REMEMBRANCE AND IMAGINATIVE POWER IN CENTRAL AMERICA

by

Consuelo Cruz Sequeira

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ABSTRACT

This work explains Central America's post-colonial oscillation between civil war and dictatorship in terms of the region's political culture and institutions. In this sense, the work explores the creation of an "uncivil society". Moreover, to the extent that this exploration inexorably takes us back to the colonial foundations of the region, it demonstrates the "enduring primacy of origins", in reference to Central American resistance to paradigmatic shifts.

But this work is also an argument about political culture as a source of institutional innovation -- an argument which links political ideology and practices not only to the recurrence of civil war and dictatorship but also to the emergence of democratic exceptions.

Accordingly, the study follows a tripartite plan. First, it advances theoretical arguments about political culture and its relation to practices and institutions. Secondly, it makes a set of substantive claims about the causes and dynamics of uncivility in Central America. Finally, it shows how the isthmus' most uncivil society -- Nicaragua in the 19th century -- came close to transforming its political culture and hence its system of governance; and it explains why this system suffered the institutional reversal that made democracy the exception rather than the rule. In explaining the latter, the work examines the "historiographical link" between past and present; and concludes that the conceptual framework of ex-post accounts is as crucial as that which guides political actors in the moment. For historiography not only engraves in memory a collective self-understanding and concomitant notions of the possible, but also merges with tradition, which in turn holds the key both to recurrent socio-political dilemmas and to their imaginative solution.

The theme that runs through the entire work is the interplay between cultural and institutional origins, on the one hand; and cultural and institutional innovative and regressive shifts, on the other. This dynamic continues to play itself out in the contemporary political ideologies, practices, and institutions of Spanish American countries. Today, collective identity-formation, with its attendant tactics and norms, is both a process structured by political culture and institutions, and an immanent source of structural change. The resultant ideologies and practices have important political consequences, for they foment and shape group suspicion and trust-building; alliances and pacts; notions of "historical necessity" and attendant institutional arrangements; methods of mass mobilization and related normative assessments; and dominant views of "the rules of the game", as well as arguments for "justifiable breaches" of those rules.

Thesis supervisor: Professor Myron Weiner

To my grandparents, Julio and Adela,
 who showed me the past;
to my parents, who told me about the future;
 and to my brothers and sisters,
who searched with me for a bridge between the two.

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CHAPTER 1

Worldview in Action and Institutions: Politics, Regimes and States

If the past is any guide, many of the new democratic and semidemocratic regimes [in Asia, Africa, and Latin America] are likely to fail. Indeed, a number appear to be perched precariously on the precipice of new breakdowns into one-party or military rule or even chaos.

-- Diamond, Linz, and Lipset (1989).¹

Introduction

This is a study of the historical formation of political culture and its relation to political practice and structure. The work takes as its case colonial and post-colonial Central America, and makes three claims. The first is that the political stability of the colonial regime, as well as the anarchic and violent politics of the post-colonial era, reflected underlying patterns and shifts in the region's political culture. The second is that 19th-century exceptions to civil war and dictatorship -- that is, viable governments based on consensus -- were possible at all because of cultural breakthroughs that both drew on tradition and adapted it to the task of institution-building. The third is that the way Central Americans practice and apprehend politics today still reflects the cultural components of older political practices and institutions. Thus, to understand the origins of contemporary political violence, ephemeral democracies, and the insubstantial nature of states in the region, we must

first understand the political-cultural struggles, stalemates, and innovations of the past.

These claims are grounded in an analysis of the region's political history and in theoretical contentions about political culture itself. Together, they show that Central American politics have been inextricably entwined with the identity-formation of corporate groups, clans and localities. This process of identity-formation in turn is inseparable from the groups' shared symbolic discourse and their competing socio-political narratives. It is in these related aspects of political culture and struggle that we must search, on the one hand, for the origins of the mistrust and violence that preclude positive-sum settlements; and on the other, for the causes of exceptional ruptures that allow for trust-building among foes. Delink politics and culture, and neither the outcome of efforts at state-construction nor the viability and character of particular regimes can be adequately explained.

Indeed, to look for the political and cultural origins of mistrust and -- exceptionally -- trust-building in Central America, is to investigate a recurrence that has haunted Spanish American nations through history: the repeated breakdown and reconstitution of socio-political order. Conversely, to examine the interruption of this vicious cycle is to explore the complexities of political innovation. Neither, however, can be done without an approach that treats continuity and rupture not as opposites, but as entwined

aspects of political practice and structure. Hence the centrality of culture.

Culture links the individual to social context both during the quotidian moments of life and at momentous turning points. For culture is the worldview and the vast array of beliefs and symbolic resources that enable us both to go on with our social routine and to reassess profoundly the meaning and value of our social lives. Put another way, culture is in our memory and in our imagination; it shapes collective remembrance and pervades our inventiveness. To the extent that culture is made up of a system of beliefs, it can persuade us that nothing can or should be done to change our circumstances. To the extent that it is made up of symbolic resources, it provides us with transformative ideas and means.

Worldview, systems of belief, and symbolic resources are historically formed and socially embedded. They are shaped by the past experiences and struggles of a collectivity, operate through the agency of individuals as members of that collectivity, and are enshrined in the norms and icons that are in turn contested in new competitive rounds and battles. The origins of Spanish American political culture, for instance, can be traced to the sixteenth century, when the relationship between the crown and the New World made discourse and narrative central to identity-formation, politics and society.

From the start, monarchs dreaded the emergence of a colonial feudal class, and in the hopes of administering their new possessions wisely but firmly, encouraged the flow of "intelligence" from the colonies. In response, conquerors and colonists composed narrative accounts which, structured by "notarial rhetoric" and "addressed to a higher authority", served as potent instruments for appeal, petition, reply, and exculpation: in short, for the "enfranchisement" both of the writer and the territories.² These accounts, moreover, were integrated into the works of official historians according to a set of rules given them by a centralist crown which went so far as to create the position of senior chronicler -- narrator of the "State's version of history".³

Abstracting from the Central American case, I argue that culture exercises its faculty of structuration through society's primary discourse: an ideological lingua franca that enables us to contest the particulars of our worldview precisely because it provides us with a shared understanding of its fundamentals. In colonial Central America, for instance, conquerors and colonists drew on the discourse of good and evil to apprehend their experiences and justify their deeds. Accumulated in the Iberian peninsula during the long centuries of the Reconquista, this discourse organized social reality as a battleground for the two eternal forces of the Christian universe, and pit the faithful against the infidel. This discourse of good and evil, as we shall see, underwent

modification in the post-colonial period, but did not change fundamentally.

Discourse, however, is more than the restrictive system which Michel Foucault sees as designed to control, exclude and punish.⁴ It is also the vocabulary of our socio-political narratives, which are in turn endowed with structuration faculties but also with transformative power. To the extent that narratives must be embedded in a primary discourse, they structure our lives because in telling the story of ourselves as political beings who operate in a given social system, we shape our public identity and impose upon ourselves a code of conduct. We both define our personae and set limits on our degrees of freedom. Thus, colonial narratives, by making antagonists into direct expressions of good and evil, engendered two archetypical identities. One embodied the virtues of self-abnegation: obedience, fidelity, truthfulness, and charity. The other embodied perfidy, deceptiveness, and avarice. Moreover, in their competition over recognition from the crown, Central Americans strove to prove themselves the former and their rivals the latter.

But to the extent that narratives involve different people as protagonists, unravel varying plots and deploy the prowess of unequal talents, their outcomes and consequences are far from predetermined. Thus, in the quest for recognition from the crown, one colonial narrative account often prevailed over its rival, or at a minimum attained greater credence,

which is to say that one antagonist was able to prove more effectively than the other the meritorious deeds that in turn reaped the rewards owed to those who served Crown and Church. Put another way, one of the "identities" lasted beyond its textual existence, while the other perished at the hands of the State.

If discourse and narrative shape identity, identity shapes the tactics and strategies we deploy in competition and struggle. For this reason, political practice is at base the dynamic cultural nexus between actors and their context. In competition and in struggle, the stakes we cherish and the means we choose reflect at once our particular concerns and an assessment of social values, constraints and opportunities. Because fidelity to the king was constitutive of a colonial virtuous identity, for example, colonial "cabildos" (municipal governments) engaged in complex political practices that preserved their image intact while allowing them to depart from the royal will.

But if culture produces artifacts, it is never itself a finished product. It helps shape institutions without becoming one. The practices of colonial cabildos, for instance, increased their de facto autonomy while preserving their reputation for fidelity, but they also precluded the development of a coherent, legitimating ideology supportive of that autonomy. Meanwhile, the legitimacy of the crown remained unchallenged even as that institution grew increasingly weak

in fact.

Thus, it is in practice that we can observe enacted our intuitive awareness that culture makes us and that we make culture. And it is particular practices that are institutionalized, each with systemic consequences of its own. The colonial de-linking of authority and power in practice, for example, carried over into the post-colonial period, rendering national central governments unstable as they tried to assert control over localities which (even as they proclaimed their ardent wish for a unified and strong nation-state), were defiant of any ruler other than their own. Indeed, shared practices which under the administration of monarchical Spain had served to conciliate the demands of virtuous identity with those of self-seeking interest, now merely engendered suspicion, contempt and rancor among competitors and rivals.

These passions -- no longer regulated by royal arbitration -- infused the micro-politics of individual localities, and fueled their persistent rivalry on the "national stage". Temporary cessation of these practices proved crucial to the success of rare, cooperative attempts at state-building. Cessation, however, was a delicate and complicated process that required the invention of new codes of conduct and public rituals. To be sustained, these in turn required the recrafting of an older socio-political discourse that imparted meaning to sentiments and deeds. Ultimately,

19th-century Central Americans failed in this fundamental task. But as I show, in trying, they left behind not only crucial elements of the political culture which to this day underlies their most difficult collective dilemmas, but also invaluable clues for their resolution.

I. Accounts of Spanish American Politics and Cultural Theories

The arguments presented above in schematic form diverge from the extant explanations of Spanish American politics, and the evidence gathered in this study points to the need for a revision of available cultural theories of politics. What follows is a review of the prevailing arguments about both.

a. Spanish American Politics and Political Development

Violence, whether in civil strife or in coercive governance, has been the salient characteristic of Spanish American politics. On this point, the area's historiography converged with its folklore long ago. From the early decades of the nineteenth century to the third quarter of the twentieth, one country after another seemed to oscillate between two dreadful extremes. One was civil war and its attendant threat of societal disintegration. The other was dictatorship: socio-political conflict held in check by the fierce control of rulers whose legitimacy was, at best,

repudiated by a significant part of the population.

There were, to be sure, exceptions; some more outstanding than others. In South America, for example, Chile was widely perceived as being endowed with a strong democratic tradition, while Costa Rica was its analogue on the isthmus. Other cases were less visible, notably Nicaragua, which though particularly intractable even by Central American standards, enjoyed thirty years of political democracy from the 1860's to the 1890's. Exceptions, however, could not obscure the fact that they remained just that: exceptions. Civil war, dictatorial rule, and institutional breakdown remained the thread connecting the histories of Spanish American countries with markedly different patterns of economic development and external relations.⁵

This diversity notwithstanding, the Modernization, Dependencia, Bureaucratic-Authoritarian and Corporatist approaches sought to explain politics and institutions either as a consequence of socio-economic change, or as a response to its exigencies.⁶ In other words, and somewhat ironically, they looked for the key to the region's political uniformities in the very socio-economic factors that made its countries distinct.

Culturalists, in contrast, did focus on the countries' shared Iberian traditions, but failed to specify the ways in which these took the form of political practice. Thus Claudio Veliz, one of the most sophisticated exponents of this view,

concluded that the political history of Spanish America, with all its social, ideological and institutional upheaval and violence, can be read as the reflection of a centralist tradition which, despite "liberal pauses", will always reassert itself.⁷ Another influential culturalist, Richard Morse, argued that this history was at base a clash between the "neo-medieval" outlook and institutions of colonial Spanish America, and the novel aspirations of the postcolonial era.⁸ But Morse's argument also failed to demonstrate the practices that dynamically link ideology and institutions over time.

Finally, though state-centered approaches by the early 1980's no longer assumed predetermined relationships between socio-economic processes and politics, they either concentrated on extant states or explored isolated attempts to create new ones.⁹ Consequently, they left untouched the problem of recurrence -- of violent conflict, institutional breakdown, and dictatorial regimes. This pattern of recurrence, however, also brought back the exceptions that had first emerged between the later decades of the 19th century and the early ones in the 20th: in the 1980's, it brought back political democracy to countries that had lost it. This democratization was explained as a transition process,¹⁰ but its causes were left unaddressed.¹¹ By the end of that decade, recurrence presented us once again with the need to explain political uniformity amidst socio-economic diversity, even if

this time uniformity was welcome: one country after another turned to democracy in the late twentieth century.

But no sooner had we begun to search for explanations for this welcome change, than reports from the field about the difficulties of democratic consolidation warned of the past's continued hold on society and politics. Analysts who paid serious attention to political culture -- notably Diamond, Linz, and Lipset -- assumed a tentative position. They posited that cultural shifts in favor of democracy were taking place as a reaction to authoritarian regimes, but they also cautioned us about the precariousness of the new democratic and semidemocratic regimes.¹²

And indeed, like its most astute observers, Latin American politics seemed of two minds as the 1980's came to a close. Venezuela and Guatemala teetered between constitutional and unconstitutional rule. Peru succumbed to the latter. Panama's elections were aborted. The Colombian state was under siege from drug-lords who controlled entire localities and threatened the Federal judiciary. And Nicaragua, after a historic display in the exercise of electoral democracy, gradually crept back to the edge of civil war. Like social science, that country once again faces the past because it has postponed resolving in practice the questions that are difficult to answer even in theory.

To set aside such questions -- why violent politics? why civil war and dictatorship? why democracy at the least

expected moments? -- is to repeat old mistakes. It is to leave these countries to their tragic cycles and social science to chase after them in circles.

b. Political-Cultural Analysis

For a long time -- from the century of Weber, Durkheim and Marx to ours in the days of Parsons -- social science located political culture in the realm of values, beliefs and sentiments. These constitutive elements of culture were seen as analytically elusive; their significance could be determined only by proving their causal connection to "objective" structures, such as the "material base", and to "rational" behavior -- say, voting. A major shift has since taken place under the persuasive force of theoreticians who argue that culture is a "symbolic, expressive, and behavioral phenomenon" that is itself "observable" in "language, ritual, and systems of classification".¹³

Indeed, the argument that culture is part of the stuff from which we construct society is now a plausible one. In Peter Berger's work, for example, human beings create institutions out of shared symbols in an effort to establish a stable order of meaning, for it is institutions that provide the regulation and control not immanent in man. Mary Douglas, too, equates society with the presence of order; but she looks for its sources in the moral boundaries that demarcate identity and permissible behavior, and views rituals as the

means whereby people make social reality. Michel Foucault, in contrast, perceives society not in terms of boundaries but relations of power; and human beings and social systems as immersed in the language -- the "code of knowledge" -- of their epoch.¹⁴ Clifford Geertz in turn sees us as suspended in "webs of meaning" which we ourselves weave; and our actions as "texts" with a symbolic content to be interpreted.¹⁵

These cultural analyses can take us a long way toward explaining not only how socio-political order is possible at all, but also the differences between types of societies and political systems. The preservation of authority in a hierarchical system, for instance, has been linked to worldview and ritual by Geertz, who has argued convincingly that the 19th-century Negara was a theater-state bent on approximating the imagined ideal of a divine ranking-order. Accordingly, statecraft was vitally dependent on social, aesthetic, and natural symbols, which were in turn compelling because they simultaneously drew on shared meanings and evoked competitive struggles based on display.¹⁶

Conversely, at the opposite end of the spectrum from the elaborate Negara, Pierre Clastres has found that the interplay between discourse and role-playing in so-called primitive societies abolishes hierarchy. Thus, if power was at once defined and concentrated by the Negara and its "cult", in primitive society it is defined and then dispersed. The tribal source of power is located in eloquence and technical

competence -- the preconditions for chieftanship. But the group by playing "deaf", for example, drains all actual power from the chief, annihilating in the process the origins of the state.¹⁷

These accounts of social and power relations, however, contain a flaw which is critical precisely because it stems from their strength: so persuasive are they in the hands of masterful exponents that while we are in their thrall, we tend to forget that collectivities are as much about conflict as they are about order. More radical than stable competition and more profound than sheer power struggles, conflict goes to the core of socio-political order. For conflict draws its destructive elements from the very source that gives order its elements of structuration: culture. Symbolic power and symbolic violence, as Pierre Bourdieu has shown, are crucial to the maintenance of bonds of domination.¹⁸ But the breaking and remaking of these bonds also entails symbolic strategies which are deployed on behalf of clashing interests.¹⁹

If strategies, not rules, hold the key to the cultural analysis of human behavior, then we need not conceive of individuals either as simple creatures of obedience or as gods unconstrained in the construction of their own worldviews. For strategy, on the one hand, is assembled within a given social structure; and on the other, it expresses the strategist's particular interests, which are in turn inextricable from his structural position.²⁰

Thus we can begin to address the causal role of culture in the construction and transformation of socio-political order. Culture, Ann Swidler has argued, matters not because it shapes the values according to which we organize our actions. Rather, culture is of consequence because it provides the resources we use to build our strategies. Simply put, in order to organize our approach to life's opportunities and challenges, we must select from our society's "repertoire" of symbols, rituals, stories, and worldviews. Hence the tenacity of practices even in the face of the self-evident fact that people are not "cultural dopes" but competent "users of culture".²¹

For Swidler, however, an explanatory framework that turns on strategies requires two models, one that obtains during "settled" periods, another during "unsettled" times. In the former, culture influences behavior because it provides the resources with which we put together "lines of action". In the latter, "explicit ideologies" rule over action, but structural opportunities for action determine the fate of competing ideologies.²²

This "double-model", which seeks to provide causal explanations based on cultural analysis, also contains a flaw. It is simply this: the reasons for the emergence of competing ideologies, and -- not unrelatedly -- for the transition from "settled" to "unsettled" times, are left unexplained. Indeed, we lose sight of the fundamental connection between culture,

on the one hand, and structural disruption and reconstitution, on the other.

II. History and Culture in Politics: An Alternative Account of Practice and Structure in Central America

Tracing the cultural sources of socio-political order by no means settles the classical discussion of how society is possible at all, but it does enrich it. Focusing on the cultural aspects of strife does not exhaust the topic of conflict but it does make it more manageable. And identifying the cultural components of tactical approaches and strategies does not capture the workings of political practice entirely, but it enables us to conceive of political practitioners as complex beings, at once socialized and unpredictable.

Thus, following Geertz, I link meaning to social structure. People, to be sure, do not rise in the morning to ponder their society's central system of beliefs and its degree of justice. But in their interaction with one another, members of a society are bound to enter into conflicts, small and large, which force them to assess the quality of their world. This they can only do with reference to a worldview and the purpose it confers upon their lives.

In order to understand the ways in which people as individuals within a collectivity proceed once they have made this assessment, as well as the systemic consequences of their choices, I also build on the work of Clastres, and connect the deployment of representational skills and capabilities to the

distribution of power.

And with Bourdieu and Swidler, I depart from the premise that a social being -- a "user of culture" -- is an agent both of cultural structuration and individual spontaneity. Fellows in a shared system of meaning can still be mutually intriguing precisely because their strategies, though sufficiently generic to fit systemic constraints and possibilities, are also the artifacts of their distinct styles and temperaments.

In this study, however, I join at all times the process of identity-formation to political practice. Given the centrality of identity to competition and struggle, not just strategies but also rules come into play. We are who we are because, guided by worldviews, we exact through the injunctions of those guides and the power of our methods, certain kinds of behavior from ourselves and from others.

In other words, we conceptualize and execute plans, but we also live by codes. We are normative schemers. Through the canons of discourse, structure grips us: ideology shapes our identity, which in turn influences practice. But in practice, narrative serves as a vehicle for individual spontaneity, setting in motion competitive processes and struggles whose outcomes are often unpredictable.

This view of the political self is not incompatible with the rational actor that is often the protagonist of modern political economy. Individuals do seek to maximize utility, and they do employ the "best means at their disposal" in the

pursuit of their goals.²³ However, I contend that actors' preferences and means are determined not through the calculations that flow from atomized selfishness, but through the calculations that attend our embedded egoism. Our rationality is at the service of our political-cultural identity.

Conversely, though I embrace the communitarians' proposition that we derive our identity and sense of belonging from our narratives of communal tradition and aspiration, I also contend that we deploy those same narratives against one another. Alasdair MacIntyre, for example, who speaks of the "narrative phenomenon of embedding", sees tradition as a "context" for rationality, and posits that tradition is either "sustained" or "corrupted" by the "exercise or lack of exercise of the relevant virtues".²⁴ In contrast, I maintain that tradition is simultaneously a source of cohesion and conflict precisely because our narratives are also vehicles for the political contestations of claimants to virtuous identity.

In sum, as I show in this study, when looking at political beings in operation, we are invariably faced with a complex interaction of activities that social science has traditionally separated analytically: the communication of meaning, the enforcement of normative sanctions, and the deployment of power.²⁵ In practice none can make sense or be effective when de-linked from the others. And together, as we

shall see, they rarely leave socio-political structure untouched.

1. Theoretical and Empirical Foundations

This work blends an interpretative approach and causal analysis into a single explanatory framework that accounts, at the theoretical level, both for persistence and discontinuity in political culture and practice. At a more concrete level, however, I present historical evidence drawn from colonial and post-colonial Central America in support of theoretical arguments about political culture and the latter's relation to practice and institutions in the region. I draw on a wide variety of secondary sources and primary materials, including first-person chronicles, and previously un-mined letters to the king from individuals and cabildos (municipal governments), Royal decrees, "certificates of racial purity", sermons, eulogies, cabildo minutes and decrees, broadsides, pamphlets, newspapers, presidential addresses, diaries, and personal correspondence.²⁶

a. Worldview, Identity and Practice

Our chronological point of departure is the sixteenth century, when imperial Spain and colonial Spanish America submitted to a vision that successfully blurred the spiritual and temporal aspirations of incessant conquest and colonization. This vision, to paraphrase Waldo Frank, held

that the world was to become part of the Spanish state, and that the Spanish state was part of the Corpus Christi. Fully developed under Charles V, who was himself literally the "head" of that state and as such boldly declared Spanish to be the language of God, this vision was nothing less than the regnant metaphor of empire.

At once mystical and political, this metaphor ruled over the imagination of Spaniards and colonials alike. Before their eyes, Spain's Reconquista from the "infidel" -- a protracted task whose successful completion was still fresh in memory in the early decades of the sixteenth century -- now extended itself into the forward-looking, trans-oceanic mission to the New World. The emperor himself was at the service of this vision. As head of empire, he was expected to coordinate the motions of his ever-expanding "body", a duty as delicate as it was enormous. On the one hand, the emperor depended on the daring of his captains and footsoldiers to carry out his vision. But on the other, as they grew powerful and wealthy they were likely to seek autonomy, thus posing for the crown the classic challenge of feudal lords. Moreover, if the emperor was to control them, he needed "intelligence", which could only be provided by his subjects overseas. Yet how to discern truth from falsehood if those self-same subjects were the object of every monarch's fear and suspicion?

Remembrance evoked mistrust even as imagination called forth a future that could only be built on faith. To strike a

balance between these contradictory forces, the metropolis established a complicated, inquisitorial bureaucracy in the colonies. Officials and notaries, conquerors, colonists, and friars all became royal informants. Political competition itself turned on one activity: scribbling. Linking discourse and institutional analyses, Chapter 2 demonstrates how 16th-century Central Americans responded to the king's inquisitiveness with competing narratives which, drafted in the discourse of good and evil, depicted the clash between the champions of church and crown, on one side, versus their foes on the other: Spaniards against Indians who resisted subjugation; and "virtuous" Spaniards against compatriots who "revealed" themselves as villains.

These narratives were central to political competition because they were, in principle, credible. The veracity of particular accounts was always in dispute. But the fundamental conflict, as represented in a typical account, was more than plausible; it was accepted as truth. Thus, to persuade the monarch and his Council that a royal favorite was a traitor, required great effort and skill from a colonial writer. But it was not even necessary to persuade them that in the New World the forces of loyalty and treachery were locked in savage battle. For the suspicious monarch and his vigilant councilmen, like the narrators themselves, saw the world in terms of good and evil. Indeed, even the identity of the Christian monarch had certain constitutive virtues which

legitimated the sovereign's role as head of the body politic. Compassion and responsiveness were two such virtues.²⁷

Stated more generally, every epoch has a vision. And even when we seek to deceive, our deeds pay homage to our visions. If we see the world in manichean terms, then we are doomed to struggle, until we transform our consciousness. But profound transformation, as Richard Rorty has argued, requires us to make qualitative leaps of understanding, which in turn demand that we invent new metaphors.²⁸ If a metaphor strikes a public chord, it is no mere private quirk. It then becomes a link between personal and collective narratives, and thus, a link between personal and collective identities. For absent narrative, there is no context of meaning for the self, or for the collective identity to which the self belongs. Absent narrative, recollection of both the old and the new becomes a task equally impossible for a group with a long record of cohesion (if we could fathom such a group without its own self-conscious story) as for a youngster trying to memorize nonsensical information by rote. In short, as Charles Taylor posits, because the self is endowed with "temporal depth", "self-understanding incorporates narrative".²⁹

It is in the self as member of a collective identity that the unintended, as much as the planned aspects of social activity finally come to rest -- either to be remembered or to be forgotten; to be assimilated, or to do battle. And taking stock of surprises once they come to pass, living with the

supicion that the unforeseen awaits in the future, and disregarding both when necessary, all require that people tell stories -- in new and old ways -- about themselves, as individuals and as groups.

People, however, cannot craft narratives de novo. Rather, they draw on society's primary discourse -- its ideological lingua franca. It is this discourse that both allows us to understand and to handle situations. As Kenneth Burke claimed, people make sense of reality partly through a system of "grammar" which defines particular circumstances; and approach reality "rhetorically" -- that is, with an intent to persuade. Language, in short, is more than a conveyor of information.³⁰ It is at once a biased guide and an instrument of transformation.

Both the structuration and transformative faculties of language come together in socio-political narratives. Because we each draw on society's primary discourse to craft the narrative that presents us to the world as a self-contained persona and as a part of something greater than ourselves, we are agents of structuration. As we construct and defend our own distinct identity, we become the product of the collectivity's ideology because the virtues and vices constitutive of all identity are embedded in the discourse of that ideology. But we also become, to varying degrees, skillful manipulators of ideology, because through life's vicissitudes, identity influences the self's choice of tactics

in the face of challenges and opportunities.

To be effective, a tactical approach must leave untouched that which is valued or unassailable while in the process removing obstacles and resolving conflicts. In short, it must create the necessary degrees of freedom for opportunistic maneuver at the lowest cost possible to the self. And if the identity of the self is inextricable from the biographical and cultural narratives that give it shape, then narratives too are indispensable to the self as tactician. Tactics, in sum, are at once cultural and political, and therefore they are both recurrent and contingent. They are shared practices which, like democratic elections, work in predictable ways but have unpredictable outcomes.

Chapter 3 argues, for example, that Central American colonials engaged in the practice I call "dramaturgical obedience". Legalistic, ritualistic and even liturgical at times, dramaturgical obedience was an enacted narrative which enabled practitioners to affirm their fidelity to the monarch while departing from the royal will. Stated differently, dramaturgical obedience preserved the self-abnegating identity of practitioners while in pursuit of self-seeking objectives. And as we will see, from the 16th to the 19th centuries, colonial and post-colonial Central Americans developed variants of this practice to fit historical changes.

Narratives, then, go beyond words and texts to include ceremonies and rituals. And as with textual narratives,

members of a collectivity do construct their ceremonies and rituals by drawing on the signs and schemes -- the discourse -- of their worldview. But the ceremonies and rituals are enacted stories that symbolize and justify beliefs, emotions and deeds. In so doing they become not only affirmations of commitment to a worldview but also, in principle, opportunities for defiance. Put another way, when observants of ritual publicly bow to a worldview, they also take a stand against its opponents. In this sense, rituals are a political demonstration staged by the "establishment".

As affirmations of commitment, enacted stories can serve radically different social systems. They can be as central to the perpetuation of Geertz' elaborately hierarchical state as they are to Clastres' state-less tribes. If in the former ceremony and ritual serve a state that is obsessed with status, in the latter, they serve a society that annihilates the state. Thus, as Brenneis and Myers have noted, though political discourse varies in style and significance in egalitarian and hierarchial communities, it is important in both types of systems, because it transcends "persuasion and display", and calls forth "specific visions of the social world".³¹

The practice of dramaturgical obedience, however, shows that socio-political narratives -- textual and enacted -- can serve radically different systems, but can also simultaneously uphold a society's vision and undermine its systemic

foundations. In Central America, dramaturgical obedience enshrined the dominant ideology, never explicitly challenging the worldview inherent in the discourse of good and evil or the power relations prescribed by that worldview. Indeed, until the very end of the colonial regime, the illusion reigned that the "sovereign" was omnipotent -- an illusion sustained by the ways in which dramaturgical obedience constantly conciliated between a centralist state and its faithful overseas subjects, who for various reasons and at different times deemed it necessary to depart from the royal will.

b. Practice, Identity and Structure

But if the practice of dramaturgical obedience helped entrench the dominant ideology, it also shifted de facto power relations. Because this shift occurred in imperceptible degrees, however, its cumulative effect becomes clear only in retrospect and after careful analysis of those relations. In the sixteenth century, for instance, the Spanish crown moved to abolish the taking of Indian "war-slaves". The move was successful in principle. But even as the crown succeeded, it proved vulnerable to requests for exemptions from Central American "cabildos" (municipal governments). Such requests were viable at all because colonials waged "just wars" on the basis of ceremonial compliance with the "requerimiento", a legal document whose reading "offered" Indians the choice:

convert or fight. In other words, this early variant of dramaturgical obedience enabled colonials to obtain exemption from royal decrees without posing a threat to royal authority.

Specifically, appellants made the case that the Indians of the region were "indomitable and obstinate". For their part, self-declared absolutist monarchs reversed themselves and granted the appellants favors without diminishing the crown's legitimacy. Such reversals, however, immediately evoked the angry opposition of religious orders, leading in turn to further retreats on the part of the monarchs (who were also Christian emperors). The result was a pattern of royal oscillation in response to pressure from below.

Practice, then, can transform power relations even as it leaves core ideology intact. Chapter 3 demonstrates how this erosion of the center's de facto power and the corresponding increase of de facto power in colonial municipal governments was not attended by a transfer of legitimacy from the former to the latter. This was because dramaturgical obedience was at once an affirmation of the extant ideology and a way out of ideological constraints. As long as fidelity to the king remained constitutive of the virtuous identity, for example, cabildos professed allegiance to the crown even as they defied the royal will, thus preserving their own identities as "self-abnegating" subjects while in pursuit of localist interests.

The crown continued to live with dramaturgical obedience

as best it could, now and then launching investigations into particular instances at the behest of other colonials who were either jealous or incensed, but never moving to abolish the practice. Dramaturgical obedience, from the sovereign's perspective, struck a working compromise between its centralist and absolutist intent and the need for autonomous action on the part of subjects. The crown, in short, tolerated the practice not as if it were veiled disobedience, but rather as a demonstration of utilitarian devotion.

Given this implicit accord between crown and subjects, there could be no explicit connection between legitimacy and the localities' autonomous power. Rather, an explicit connection was made between legitimacy and appearances. The logic of the accord did not state: "you may pursue independent goals because you have the right". Rather, it stated: "show your fidelity to the crown, and the crown shall accept your selfish pursuits". In other words, in the construction and defense of the virtuous identity, meaning, norms and power came to form a coherent whole. Hence the ongoing, keen competition among colonials to preserve and enhance their image as diligent, loyal subjects while in the process of conquest and colonization.

But Chapter 4 shows that as the conquest and colonization phase came to an end, Central Americans could no longer claim the meritorious deeds which, in the traditional discourse of good and evil, would have proven them worthy of royal

recognition. There were no more territories to conquer, no more souls to save. Adaptation was required. So, as the chapter also shows, in the 17th and 18th centuries, colonials modified the discourse of good and evil by making "notability" -- literally, social visibility -- the primary indication of moral worth. Stated differently, the emblems of status, such as titles and ceremonial roles, became both object of contention and part of the vocabulary which rivals used to "narrate" and display their virtuousness.

Central Americans, in short, found an alternative way to construct archetypical identities: in the "mature" colonial period, all strove to be socially "visible". Accordingly, certificates of racial purity, for example, were crucial to families; pageants were crucial to sodalities and pueblos; and the chapels of the craftsmen were crucial to the guilds. By the end of the 18th century, Central American society was a world of emblems, a world in which clans, localities and corporate groups defended their badges, positions and ranks as if they were constitutive of life itself. They defended, in short, their emblematic identities. And the extant social structure -- which marginalized social and racial hybrids who could not prove their "worth" -- was itself justified in the older discourse of good and evil. The "visible", and most especially the "notables", could be seen and were even "conspicuous" because they were upright. The "no-ones", in contrast, were socially invisible because they were "degenerates".

These struggles over appearances were the struggles of a society which, rather than "static", as Richard Morse has claimed,³² was characterized by what I call "structured spontaneity" -- a system of mutually sustaining contradictions. On the one hand, identities and ideology turned ever more obdurate and social structure remained rigidly hierarchical, and on the other, competitors were rarely in repose and political quiescence was uncommon. Structured spontaneity, in fact, was the macropolitical expression of dramaturgical obedience. And it is in this system of mutually sustaining contradictions that we find the key to the puzzle of recurrent civil war and dictatorship. For it is in this system that, borrowing the language of Anthony Giddens, we find the answer not only to the question of how Central American society "binds" in time and space, but also how it seems to fall apart one moment only to be reconstituted the next. In other words, how it obtains, preserves, loses and then regains its "form".

Macro configurations of social order can change, for example, in response to systemic reform or revolutions. There is nothing startling in this assertion. But the historical recurrence of specific types of socio-political configuration is puzzling. Such recurrence is as strange, in fact, as the proposition that identities and ideology can remain obdurate through intense political competition, and ultimately, even through repeated struggle and social convulsion. Yet, micro

obduracy and macro recurrence are not only causally inter-related, they both stem from the inextricable and dynamic connection between discourse, narrative and identity -- a connection which obtains during moments of stability as well as crisis.

c. Continuity and Rupture

Our sense of mastery over the world, and conversely, our retreats into docility, are influenced by the way we comprehend our struggles and their outcomes. In our eyes, legitimate practices are both a plan of action and a justification of results. And all established practices, legitimate or not, reaffirm our notions of the possible and the inevitable. Even a rudimentary account of our previous interaction with the world, by corroborating our expectations of what is within our reach and what lies beyond it, at once leads us to strive anew for meaning in our waking moments, and allows us to rest in the knowledge that our gains will not be lost in slumber.

In other words, given the "temporal depth" of human beings, quotidian continuity is viable because through narratives we both memorise and explain the essence of our past. Only possession of this interpretative remembrance can give us long moments of serenity even as we strive for ascent. Central American cabildos, or municipal governments, for example, sought privileges from the monarch by dispatching

narrative accounts of the meritorious deeds of local groups. The cabildos entered their stories of distinction and honor into the public record -- that is, into the ongoing narrative of the locality -- which was itself to be conveyed to the metropolis, from whence it would return, after months, or even years, integrated into the grander tale of empire.

Awaiting titles and commendations, people and town proceeded in chore and creativity, sustained by the reasonable hope that they were to be inextricably entwined with the legendary glory of the monarchy and the eternal worth of the church. Creole notables and Indian sodalities, for example, made "donations" to the royal coffers, then patiently awaited the king's "grateful acknowledgement", which upon arrival, would be loudly publicized and discussed for many days in an extended process that enhanced the stature of the donors.

The cabildos' narratives, in short, satisfied people's need for a sense of place in the social order by linking identity, deeds and rewards. Indeed, the more cabildo narratives succeeded in this task, the more the narratives, as a collective practice, had a twin systemic effect. One was the structuration of an aristocratic society and the ongoing legitimation of royal authority. The other was the increasing importance of the cabildo as regulator of the incessant local competition over status and privilege. Neither the distribution of rewards -- so critical to the formation of

social classes -- nor the correlation of forces between a centralist state and its localities can be understood without reference to this competitive process.

Furthermore, the narratives sent to the metropolis, whether by cabildos or individuals, had the recursive effect of imposing strictures on the behavior of colonials. To forge a virtuous identity on paper was not enough: virtue in practice was expected too, even in the face of unpredictable challenges and personalist ambition. Hence the centrality of dramaturgical obedience, not only to its practitioners but to the colonial system, whose contradictory interests it conciliated on a routine basis. Dramaturgical obedience, then, was a force for continuity. But practices themselves are of causal importance to ideology and socio-political structure because they can lead to adaptation, disruptions and breaks even as they promote tradition. I have already mentioned that the way we make the outcome of our struggles intelligible to ourselves can entrench ideology. But the workings and consequences of our practices are only partially visible to us, because our understanding of the causal links amongst cognition, action, and consequence are invariably imperfect on two counts.

On the one hand, when we connect our deeds to our vision of the world, we do as we believe we must: we obey the dictates of our faith. But the manner of our obedience depends on our circumstances: we do what we must as best we can. In other

words, there is gap between the exigency of our faith and our capability to meet it. And to bridge this gap we often turn to our imaginative powers. Hence the emergence of practices that both exemplify a culture and violate its tenets. Recall the dual purpose of dramaturgical obedience.

On the other hand, the causal connections we make amongst cognition, action and result diverge from the actual degree of correspondence amongst them. In the eyes of its practitioners, dramaturgical obedience appeared to serve their personal interests within the extant ideological strictures. But in the long term, the practice proved detrimental to both ideology and interests because practitioners could not foresee its unintended consequences. No one could have been sufficiently prescient to divine that particular expressions of obedience to authority would add up to the erosion of that authority's power. Stated more broadly, practices can be dysfunctional at the systemic level and still remain valid in our eyes. Or, in the parlance of social science, we harbor functionalist expectations but don't always know with accuracy whether or not they have been met. (This finding partially contradicts theorists who argue that though societies do not perform functions, they do have "constituent ways of life", and it is these ways of life that must prove functional to us if they are to survive).³³

Taken together, Chapters 5, 6, and 7 substantiate this claim about the functionalism and validity of practice,

demonstrating how the very mechanisms of continuity can engender disruption. Chapter 5 explores variants of dramaturgical obedience developed by colonials during the first two decades of the 19th century to cope with the risks and opportunities that attended the Napoleonic invasion of Spain. Creole notables, we will see, were loath to appear disloyal to the crown, but they were also determined to increase their own power vis a vis peninsular officials within the jurisdictions of their corresponding localities as well as the autonomy of their localities vis a vis those of higher rank. To further these ends, notables often used their positions of influence in the local government to stage what I call dramatic "representations of inexorable collective ire" in which they figured as champions of moral virtue and loyalty, engaged in political battle with a dazed, potentially violent mass.

These dramas of inexorable collective ire, though staged, were not without risk, because they were ultimately unpredictable. No mere manipulation of normative strictures, these dramas tended to claim a significant degree of autonomy -- sometimes taking on lives of their own. As a result, creole elites did create self-serving opportunities, but also ended up genuinely struggling to vindicate their reputations. Rewards and titles came to the successful, and shame to those who failed because they were "unmasked" and shown to be selfishly ambitious.

Chapter 6 concentrates on the first phase of transition to independence, which as we will see, also marked the emergence of what Myron Weiner calls an "uncivil society". The chapter demonstrates that the previous failure to develop an ideology supportive of autonomous local politics under the colonial period left the region's fundamental worldview unaltered, which meant that political actors apprehended the new struggles of the 19th century through an inherited, albeit partially adapted, interpretative system. It was this system that gave Central Americans their sense of the possible and the inevitable. Accordingly, they developed their arguments advocating constitutional monarchy, and later independence, in traditional manichean narratives. These ideological narratives depicted allies as members of a moral collective identity -- fellows who expected one another to preserve their convictions both intact and uniform as they waged political struggle. In sum, neither a change of mind nor a difference of opinion was justifiable: both signified betrayal of the collective identity -- of the moral community.

Constrained by this moral injunction against ideological flexibility, post-independence Central Americans sought both to preserve their virtuous identities and to gain additional degrees of freedom by resorting to the political theater that had been central to dramaturgical obedience. Thus, as rivals waged their struggles, and as differences of opinions emerged within camps, both inter-camp and intra-camp factions sought

to settle conflict in their favor by deceptive means. But now, absent the royal arbiter, conflicts dragged on without a final resolution. Former allies, for example, explained their rifts by making reference to the traditional worldview shared by both, which divided men into two categories: the loyal and honest; the treacherous and deceitful.

Political actors -- all of whom relied on political theater to enhance their degrees of freedom -- saw the practice as legitimate in their own hands, but as a shameless ploy in the hands of foes. "Unmasking" impostors, or at a minimum, ridiculing their pretensions at virtue, became once again a central political objective. Chapter 6 also begins to show the social and institutional ramifications of this profound mistrust and mutual disdain. Dominant political groups, for example, labeled one another "Cacos", or Thieves, and "Bacos", or Drunkards, later to become "Conservatives" and "Liberals". And even as the Thieves and Drunkards defined themselves in opposition to the other, they split internally. Notables who were allies one moment now frequently turned on each other the next.

Against this background, the collective mistrust which the colonial regime had held in check began to break loose. Here we see again that the outcome of political struggles is about more than the distribution of resources. It is also about the intelligibility of those struggles themselves -- about how we interpret, in imperfect ways, our defeats and our

victories. At the broadest level this means that historiography matters a great deal. For it is the partial lessons we draw from the past that give rise to our notions of the possible and the inevitable. At a more narrow level, intelligibility is itself a political outcome, because depending on how we come by it, a shared practice at any given point can be embraced by some as an act of interpretative obedience, and denounced by others as an egregious violation of the rules of the game. For this reason, a common struggle can leave some filled with loyalty, others with rancor, and all with a determination to inculcate these passions in future generations. This is the price of opaque practices like dramaturgical obedience.

Stated differently, opaque practices -- because they rely on shared games of deception -- have the perverse dynamic effect of creating a seeming oxymoron: a dark transparency. That is, we come to perceive ourselves as capable of "seeing through" one another, and what we invariably "see" is a rival trying to deceive us. Worse yet, opaque practices can indirectly "obscure" the outcome of such transparent practices as patently free elections. In other words, even when elections are procedurally "fair", we have difficulty accepting the moral worth of the victor, whom we "know" to be capable of "mesmerizing" and "deluding" the voters. Accordingly, we often seek to "correct" electoral decisions, though we never call into question the desirability of

electoral democracy. Indeed, electoral democracy remains our genuine aspiration. Hence the recurrence of elections and military coups.

The less transparent our practices, the more violent our politics and the more contentious our historiography. The opacity of the socio-political practice of dramaturgical obedience and its post-colonial variants, for example, led to such disdain and suspicion among Central Americans that radical disunity threatened to make the isthmus, in the eyes of its leaders, easy prey for external powers. Fearful of internal anarchy and foreign rapacity, Central American political and religious orators made appeals for a new beginning based on forgetfulness of the past, and sought peace in a new shared context of meaning -- a new worldview. Specifically, Chapter 7 shows that Central Americans began to see in the family, which exemplified the unity of the "moral" and the "natural", the ideal model for societal harmony. In other words, inherited notions of the possible and the inevitable came together with the discourse of good and evil to shape the "vision" that would replace the imperial metaphor of the State as part of Christ's mystical body and the king as its head.

But a societal model that idealised the hegemony of the family led to further strife in a society dominated by rival families and localities. Which amongst them, for example, deserved to be the exemplary and therefore preeminent clan and

city? Chapter 8 demonstrates how in the 1820s and 1830s this familial metaphor blended with the manichean process of identity-formation. Leaders and followers shaped their camps' identities by crafting stories for "the public" in broadsides and pamphlets -- stories which defined their own narrators as "truthful", publicized the "other's" treachery, and delivered rhetorical exhortations in defense of the "national family" against its immoral, scheming enemies.

The ultimate competitive objective of these narratives was to gain the allegiance of "the honest" majority; the immediate objective was to persuade this majority that the "virtue" exhibited by one's foes was feigned, and that this would sooner or later lead to perfidy. This last claim was credible because it was endorsed by the high rate of alliance-formation and dissolution. Alliances turned ephemeral as families that believed themselves deserving of the privilege to rule fought against one another for dominion of their localities, then banded together under the banner of their locality's superiority to fight against another. Betrayal, in short, became a central theme in broadsides and pamphlets, which in turn were central to identity-formation.

By blurring the line between remembered experience and expectation, this manichean process of identity-formation served as a potent instrument of mobilization -- both when local rivals marshalled their followers in local fights, and when those same rivals, united behind localist causes, led

towns and cities into battle. Chapter 8 further shows how this suspicion among intra-local elites and between rival towns and cities had a destructive impact on the principal macro institution of the post-independence era: the Central American Federation. Presumably indispensable to the isthmus' unity and hence to its protection from foreign powers, the Federation itself became a contentious institution riddled with intra-partisan betrayals; and from start to finish was unable to control fierce local fights.

Simply put, the sources of personal and local suspicion were so numerous that the insitutional framework for unity seemed as threatening to its members as widespread discord. Indeed, as suspicion flowed from the common use of political theatre to conciliate the exigencies of virtuous identity with the need for tactical flexibility, even allies succumbed to mutual mistrust. Within this context, the speculation that Federal power might serve as the instrument of one's actual or potential rivals was so ominous to leaders and followers alike that presidential incumbency was in itself an "argument" that persuaded camps to launch concerted attacks on the officeholder. On the one hand, at any given moment, the Federation was expected by one group to impose regional discipline at the expense of another. But on the other hand, Central Americans' impulse to maintain order via presidential rule was equally matched by their impulse to depose the president for fear of the damage he and his closest allies might do to their

regional, local and familial interests. Not surprisingly, the Federation failed to impose order, and its member states oscillated between the arbitrary rule of petty tyrants and the convulsions of anarchy and civil war. Succintly put, the Federal government was weak, and the states of the Federation were ephemeral at best.

The Federation's debility was particularly evident in its failure to pacify the most violent state, Nicaragua, where political groups, for example, were known to one another by graphically insulting names.³⁴ These groups sought to be distinctive even in the destruction their armies left behind them: some punished the vanquished by severing an ear, others mutilated the nose.

Tradition and rupture went hand in hand. By the late 1830's, the Federation was defunct; Central America was now composed of sovereign states. But the metaphor of the national family still held the Central American imagination. Orators and leaders, often one and the same, once again made repeated attempts to wipe clean the slate of memory -- to erase the rancorous traces history left in the consciousness -- so that "familial unity" could be restored to the region. This was an exercise in rhetorical denial. Rather than assault the privileged notions inherent in the discourse of good and evil, and face the ingrained fears that alienated them, Central Americans left the former untouched and obscured the latter. Once again, they proclaimed themselves family.

But this family gathered the "decent" and "honest" within its fold, and left the "immoral" outside its purview. Chapter 9 demonstrates how the familial model once again gave rise to conflict in the 1830's and 40's, particularly among elites, by leading them into an acrimonious debate about how best to organize the lines of authority within the national family. On the one side stood the Conservative paterfamilias defending the "moral" nation from the "agents of anarchy". On the other stood the Democrats, with their "fraternal" alternative model in opposition to the Legitimist "despot" (but themselves determined to establish "order"). The institutional stakes were high, for the winner would decide which branch of government -- the executive or the legislative -- would be the strongest. And the government in turn would play a dominant role in shaping the country's post-federal "nation-state".

The chapter uncovers the meaning of this dispute and explores its consequences by focusing on Nicaragua, by then already infamous for its barbaric violence. Decoding the dispute shows the "primacy of origins", Uday Mehta's phrase for describing Central America's resistance to deep shifts in worldview. More narrowly, decoding also shows that Legitimists and Democrats were at base expressions of familial and localist identities which, convinced of their moral worth, set out to obtain control of national symbols of that worth, most notably the right to head the national family in its existential struggle for order. In the war that ensued between

Legitimists and Democrats, the principal antagonists were the traditional rival cities of Granada and Leon, each with its own notable families and its own caudillo, or political paterfamilias.

Their battles were at once military and rhetorical, pitting not only armies but also argumentative stories of evil, perfidy and dishonor against one another. As the clash between "the dictator" and the "anarchic enemies of the family" approached an impasse, suspicion reached extremes. Finally, Democratic Leon took a bold step and imported a tie-breaker from the United States: William Walker and his small army of volunteers and mercenaries. Ultimately, Walker's increasing independence from his Nicaraguan "employers" forced the two Nicaraguan camps to forge a broad, bi-partisan military alliance which encompassed the other Central American countries. Together, they expelled Walker from the isthmus.

Foreign invasion, dreaded by elites since independence, pushed rivals toward unity; and after victory, toward a comprehensive settlement. Peace at any cost was the moral that all Central Americans, and Nicaraguans in particular, now drew from the lesson of William Walker. But each camp nursed rancorous memories of their mutual rhetorical attacks. These memories remained a serious obstacle to a post-Walker peace agreement.

Moreover, neither Liberalism (formerly Democrats), with its connotation of anarchic danger, nor Conservatism (formerly

Legitimists), associated with paternalistic dictatorship, were viable options. Instead, drawing on the experience of the anti-Walker bi-partisan alliance, the camps' caudillos -- Generals Martinez and Jerez -- decided on a bi-partisan dictatorial pact.

This pact allowed the two caudillos to circumvent the notables of their respective camps, as well as settle, the caudillos believed, the conflict between the paternal and fraternal alternatives. In this sense, the notion of the "necessary" and "popular" dictatorship turned out to be the ideological culmination of a historical, cultural and political process. Establishing dictatorial rule was the next step. And success in this endeavor seemed plausible at all to Nicaraguan leaders because of the bi-partisan loyalty recently demonstrated by their followers within the framework of the bi-partisan alliance of the National War against Walker. Stated differently: the leaders now expected that their pact would not offend their followers' and clients' sense of "right".

Accordingly, the two preeminent caudillos put their "trust" in their respective camps, each man proclaiming that he would not be punished by his own people for pacting with a "villanous foe". In short, elite consensus presupposed an imagined popular consent which would allow elites to set aside the past altogether, empowered by an assumed act of "general will".

But in order to forget, as the particularly difficult case of Nicaragua shows, it is necessary to revise the narratives that hold our memories; and these cannot be revised fundamentally unless we radically alter the worldview that structures them -- which is to say, their discourse. Having done none of this, the two Nicaraguan "dictators" were soon embroiled in conflict once more, at times driven by their disgruntled followers and allies, at times by their own mutual suspicions. As a result, the bi-partisan dictatorial pact led to a truce that was not only brief, but also ushered into one of the most treacherous and turbulent periods of Nicaraguan history.

Narratives, however, can be more than forces of structuration that link us to the past as we move into the future. We have seen that they also drive us to compete, and that by influencing the way we render intelligible the outcome of competition and struggles, they become part of that outcome. In Nicaragua -- drawing on the discourse of good and evil and on the narrative of the divided family -- the notables redefined substantively the "virtuous identity" of the president. The virtuous president became a "benevolent and peaceful conciliator" -- a definition which combined historical learning, the traditional narrative of the familial worldview, and the discourse of good and evil to create a presidential identity in relation to the necessity of the moment: pacification.

Put in practical terms, Nicaraguans abandoned attempts to conciliate "virtuousness" with the pursuit of power, and instead sought their explicit de-linking -- but not, as Chapter 10 shows, in the sense that they gave leaders license to behave in explicitly "realpolitik" fashion. Rather than endow virtuous leaders with active power, they turned political leaders into symbols of the power of virtue. Thus, every four years an exemplar of probity and humility was elevated to the presidency, which the incumbent was expected to renounce after one term. This representational mechanism was at the core of the regime that came to be known as "The Thirty-Years", a bi-partisan institutional arrangement that governed Nicaragua peacefully between 1867 and 1893.

Chapter 10 demonstrates the workings of this representational mechanism and its institutional consequences. In essence, the mechanism recombined -- through rupture and continuity -- the relationships that had obtained during the colony among coercive power, normative strictures, and worldview (meaning). Presidential candidates were selected on the basis of their "moderate" character. Once in office, presidents became the archetypical incarnation of the virtues that would have inhered in a monarch, serving more as public prisoners of benevolent dignity than as officials in power. One of the president's crucial functions, for example, was to keep a "decorous silence" in the face of any rhetorical attack launched against him in the ongoing discourse of good and

evil. In this way, the president practiced political abstinence. Like a tribal chief in a stateless society, he was given power, which he then devolved to the notables of the parties and to society through prolonged displays of noble submission and impoverishing generosity.

The high transparency of these practices had a profoundly stabilizing effect on Nicaraguan politics. To begin with, these practices transformed the presidency into a national, archetypical identity that exemplified the same virtues which once had brought colonial subjects royal recognition and social stature. This transformation satisfied the moralistic demands implicit in the elites' ideological legacy: the president stood at the apex of the hierarchy because he was virtuous.

But the president was so virtuous, in fact, that he was also harmless. Thus, the elites' traditional mistrust of concentrated power was assuaged. Second, by making the sanctification of scruples its principal task, public ritual, as in the Negara, became an essential component of statecraft. Specifically, the explicit and constant affirmation of virtue through uncontested practices with uncontested outcomes allowed leaders from both the Conservative and Liberal camps to share power (as ministers and advisers) without necessarily inciting charges of "immorality" and "perfidy" from their respective middle ranks and bases.

Under the Thirty-Year Regime, to be sure, bitter

political contestation did not cease completely. But it proceeded within an emergent cultural-institutional context that prevented such contestation from sabotaging the larger effort at peaceful cooperation between the two parties. Against this background of macro-political stability, the regime was able to diversify the country's agricultural base, established a communications and transportation infrastructure, and set the nation's fiscal house in order (thus obtaining access to international credit). The more the regime accomplished, the stronger the nascent state grew. In this sense, cultural breakthroughs produced a sturdy institutional solution to the profoundly disruptive problem of collective mistrust.

And yet, the regime imploded in 1893. Why? What accounts for its ultimate fragility? The regime's presidential system transcended localism and personalism. This was its greatest practical accomplishment. But at the same time, the presidential system placed the regime's fate in the hands of each man it elevated to the office. Every election was an existential gamble, because electing an inadequate candidate meant risking desecration from within. Indeed, the regime's internal breakdown came the first time a president violated its strict rules of executive comportment by -- among other things -- making nepotistic and localist appointments, and by seeking the presidency a second time. Above all, he transgressed the boundaries of his own symbolic role by

attempting to rule. Such violation immediately led to the dissolution of bi-partisan cooperative arrangements, the resurgence of manichean identity-formation and mutual mistrust, and a military coup that ushered into war. Once this war was settled, the country reverted to oscillation between distatorial rule and civil war.

This reversion leads us to a final question. If discourse and narrative are crucial to identity-formation, and identity-formation is in turn crucial to the ways we perceive one another and thus to our institutional arrangements, why did the Thirty-Years exception fail to leave an imprint on Nicaraguan institution-building?

In the conclusion of this study I argue that the Thirty Years Regime left no institutional legacy for two reasons, both of which continue to shape contemporary politics. First, Nicaraguan political elites, like most of their other Central American counterparts, failed to develop a coherent ideology that would have allowed them to institutionalize the primacy of procedure over content. In this sense, the Thirty Years Regime contained an institutional flaw that rendered it exceedingly fragile in the face of unforeseen circumstances and the complications of its own evolutionary process.

Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, the absence of an alternative discourse and worldview precluded the emergence of a historiography that might have incorporated the lessons of the Thirty Years Regime.

It was precisely on both these counts, we will see, that Costa Rica was the isthmian exception.

IV. Remembrance and the Future

Historiography looks forward as it glances back. It is an implicit but ongoing discussion of the future -- what is inevitable and what is possible --- based on explications of the past. Central American, and particularly Nicaraguan historiography, is highly contentious. More often than not, historical writing harks back to colonial socio-political narratives, setting in motion acrimonious debates over the veracity of previous historical accounts. Absent a "senior royal chronicler", the debates are never resolved.

Moreover, because history books are often written by the protagonists themselves, they are attempts at self-vindication --attempts that are based on minutiae marshalled to prove or disprove the accuracy of given dates and specific claims made about hidden motivations. History books, in short, offer us a confusing trove of historical data and speculation whose reading leaves discussants entrenched in a multiplicity of narrow disputes. To this day, Central American historical accounts of nineteenth- and twentieth century politics can be readily identified as either Liberal or Conservative, and in specific cases, as either a defense or an attack on particular caudillos. Of course, the revolutions and counter-revolutions of the 1930's, 1970's and 1980's also have their historians.

This marked partiality of historiography is a phenomenon that is found in every Spanish American country, from Mexico to Argentina.

Like the practice of dramaturgical obedience, partisan historiography, though shared by camps, is recognizable as such only in the hands of rivals. Hence the distinction made since the late nineteenth century between one's own "veridical" accounts (also reminiscent of the colonial epoch, when credibility was a hard-won resource for chroniclers and scribblers), and the "non-veridical" accounts of rivals. At stake in the contention is the "truth" about the culpability of various caudillos, families and localities in a series of calamitous episodes, some of which date back to the early nineteenth century and involved the ancestors of those who today argue about the pertinent details and continue to engage in political struggle.

And the "truth" is never an insignificant stake. In Central America, historical debates have been known to culminate in deadly physical violence between historians. Such personalistic violence is, in turn, entwined with larger conflagrations. For history has become the new repository of the discourse of good and evil. Histories have become stories which, taken separately, defend one camp against another; taken collectively they reinforce the expectation that sooner or later the "national family" is bound to suffer another calamity. This is the "historiographic link" -- Peter Smith's

phrase -- between past, present, and future.

The Thirty Years regime, headed by Conservatives from Granada but widely inclusive of Liberals and notables from various localities, repudiated in practice the story of inevitable enmity between camps. But absent an innovative discourse with which to draw lessons from the major triumphs and losses of our lives and history, these may be subordinated in meaning to received descriptions which barely capture a changed reality; or worse, they may be forgotten altogether. Thus, the collapse of the Thirty-Years led to mutual recrimination, one group ascribing ignoble intentions and malevolent deeds to another.

Then, for all practical purposes, the regime was forgotten; its memory crowded off the page by an ongoing collective tale which said that all worlds, large and small, are divided between friend and foe. Beyond the boundaries of this tale, the regime's extraordinary resilience turned into an inscrutable miracle. As time passed, its virtues and failings still undeciphered, the regime came to be known simply as The Thirty Years: three isolated decades delinked from past and future and therefore politically useless. In effect, a major political innovation was eradicated from the collective memory of a people who once had lived and struggled guided by the notion that to remember is to imagine anew.

1. See Larry Diamond, Juan Linz, and Seymour Martin Lipset, eds., Democracy in Developing Countries, Latin America. Volume IV. (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1989), ix.

2. See Roberto González Echevarría, Myth and Archive, A Theory of Latin American Narrative (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 10; and 70.

3. Ibid., 48.

4. This view was articulated by Michel Foucault in The Archeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972).

5. Argentina, Chile, Colombia and Nicaragua come readily to mind. In the 19th century, for example, the first three were split into two political camps which approximated the Conservative-Liberal cleavage that emerged in Nicaragua, and engaged in violent conflict over the form and content of the national state. In the 20th century, they have all experienced violence, dictatorship and regime breakdown. But in both centuries, the level and pattern of economic development between, say, Chile and Colombia, have been quite different; the gulf between these two and Nicaragua is, of course, much larger.

Differences in foreign relations were also marked from the beginning. Argentine leaders, for example, saw Great Britain as a financial partner. Nicaraguan caudillos, on the other hand, saw external forces as potential tie-breakers in their domestic feuds. The 19th century Liberal caudillo Maximo Jerez engaged the services of the American adventurer William Walker in an effort to achieve a military victory over the Conservative camp.

6. With the notable exception of Samuel Huntington's Political Order in Changing Societies (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), the broad premise which classical liberalism provided for the Modernization school turned into a kind of economic determinism: modernizing economy leads to mass mobilization, which leads to mass participation, which in turn both produces and is mediated by liberal institutions. For Huntington, "order" was a necessary condition for institutionalization, but was not automatically generated by socio-economic development. In this crucial respect, Huntington's work antedated state-centered approaches.

For a limpid view of the connection established by the Dependencia school between Marxian analysis and class struggle, the state, and the international division of labor with its core-dependency configuration see Cardoso and Faletto's Dependency and Development in Latin America (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971).

For an early statement of corporatist account of politics

and institutions see Philip Schmitter's Interest Conflict and Political Change in Brazil (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1971).

For the classic reassessment of the assumptions underlying Modernization theory and the connection between this reassessment and the B-A model, see Guillermo O'Donnell in Modernization and Bureaucratic-Authoritarianism: Studies in South American Politics (Berkeley, Politics of Modernization Series, No.9, 1973).

7. See Claudio Veliz, The Centralist Tradition of Latin America (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980).

8. See Richard Morse, New World Soundings, Culture and Ideology in the Americas (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 97.

9. An excellent study of a dramatic attempt at state-building is Alfred Stepan's The State and Society, Peru in Comparative Perspective (Princeton: Princeton University, 1978).

10. See Guillermo O'Donnell, P. Schmitter, and L. Whitehead, eds., Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Prospects for Democracy (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986).

11. For a critique of the transition literature, see Peter Smith, "Crisis and Democracy in Latin America," World Politics, 43 (July, 1991).

12. Diamond, Linz, and Lispet, op. cit.

13. Robert Wuthnow, James Davidson Hunter, Albert Bergesen, and Edith Kurzweil, Cultural Analysis, The Work of Peter L. Berger, Mary Douglas, Michel Foucault and Junger Habermas (New York: Routledge, 1987), 3-15.

14. Ibid., 15-20.

15. Lynn Hunt, ed., The New Cultural History (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 12-13; 72-77.

16. These symbols included the procession, the tower, and the pyre in the royal cremation that purified the deceased and inmolated his wives. And the ceremony was both ritualized and competitive. The tower loomed large, for example, because rival lords identified their own stature with that of the towers they erected.

Cliffor Geertz, Negara: The Theatre State in Nineteenth-Century Bali (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980).

17. The Chief's position, to be sure, is based on prestige, and brings him the prerogative of polygyny. But this prestige must be constantly derived from his oratorical eloquence, magnanimity, and martial prowess. Not endowed with law-giving power, the Chief -- the conciliating orator -- speaks as eloquently as possible in an effort to persuade his people not to quarrel. As a paragon of generosity, he surrenders his possessions to the constant demands of those "under his administration." And as his past military exploits recede from collective memory, he must propose war to his tribe. But the tribe, determined to remain the sole realm of power, might resolve to act deaf when the Chief speaks. And when he calls young males to battle, these, though inclined to seek the prestige that comes to warriors, may well decide to make themselves unavailable.

Pierre Clastres, Society Against the State (New York: Zone Books, 1989).

18. Pierre Bourdieu, Language and Symbolic Power (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), 23.

19. Pierre Bourdieu, Outline of a Theory of Practice (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

20. Pierre Bourdieu, Pierre, In Other Words, Essays Towards a Reflexive Sociology (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 130-135.

21. Ann Swidler, "Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies," American Sociological Review, 51, (April, 1986), 273-286.

22. Ibid.

23. For an excellent discussion on the rational actor and methodological individualism in political-economic analysis see Jeffrey A. Frieden, Debt, Development, and Democracy, Modern Political Economy and Latin America, 1965-1985 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 17-22.

24. Excerpt of After Virtue, in Michael Sandel, ed., Liberalism and its Critics (New York: New York University Press, 1984), 125-147.

25. See Anthony Giddens, A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism, Volume I, Power, property and the state (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).

26. I have translated most of these documents from the original Spanish.

27. Colin M. MacLachlan, Spain's Empire in the New World, The Role of Ideas in Institutional and Social Change (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 1.
28. Richard Rorty, Contingency, irony and solidarity (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989).
29. Charles Taylor, Sources of the Self (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989).
30. J. Gusfield, Kenneth Burke, On Symbol and Reality (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), 13; 29.
31. Donald Lawrence Brenneis and Fred Myers, eds., Dangerous Words: Language and Politics in the Pacific (New York: New York University Press, 1984), 27-29
32. See Morse's "Toward a Theory of Spanish American Government" in Howard J. Wiarda, ed., Politics and Social Change in Latin America, Still a Distinct Tradition? (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992), 129.
33. M. Thompson, R. Ellis, and A. Wildavsky, Cultural Theory (San Francisco: Westview Press, 1990), 3.
34. The names often caricatured the physical appearance of one's foe, as in "Mechudos" and "Desnudos". The former carried the degrading connotation of a long-haired savage, the latter of an unclad barbarian. There were other debasing names, each connoting moral and intellectual inferiority.

CHAPTER 2

The Inquisitorial State and Identity-Formation

As in language, with its rules of structure and style on the one hand, and its potential for novel expression on the other, the conquest and colonization of the Indies was both a highly regulated enterprise and an opportunity to begin life anew. Migration, trade, urban construction, and circulation of European texts (including documents issued by the church), were meticulously controlled by the Crown.¹ The structure of the socio-economic hierarchy, moreover, was a given. Conquerors and colonists fought not to redefine the meaning of status, virtue, and honor, but for the right to claim them as the emblems of their identities. Thus they displayed courage and prowess in battle, then strove for rank, which in their worldview evinced moral worth.

At the same time, however, conquerors, colonists, officials and friars enjoyed the crucial freedom to correspond with the sovereign. One monarch after another, anxious to obtain the "intelligence" necessary both to stunt the emergence of a colonial feudal class and to govern effectively, welcomed their letters and reports. For their part, overseas subjects turned their documents into instruments of political competition. Employing the received discourse of the Reconquista, and following the notarial and historiographic rules of a legalistic and centralizing state

culture, they crafted narratives which built and destroyed "virtuous" identities, in turn the basis for claims to various privileges.

By discourse I mean the ideological lingua franca that enables interlocutors both to agree on and to contest the particulars of reality on the basis of a shared understanding of that reality's fundamentals. Thus, the discourse of the Reconquista, embedded in long centuries of battle between Christian and "infidel", rendered the world intelligible by casting the sentiments and deeds of men as direct expressions of two eternally antagonistic forces: good and evil.

Narrative, in turn, is a story -- an account as tale, in our case, of the clash between these two eternal forces at a particular time and place; a tale involving new antagonists in the workings of a plot at once familiar and unpredictable. The plot was familiar because it was written in the discourse of good and evil, which imposed a widely accepted vocabulary of intent, action and consequence on antagonists. But it was unpredictable because the antagonists as narrators, in their effort to vindicate themselves in the eyes of their sovereign -- the great reader -- infused "veridical reality" with the imaginative power of their passion.

Thus rivals insinuated their political agendas even into those texts that were strictly governed by the notarial and historiographic rules of empire -- rules which aimed to gather for the Emperor detailed and exhaustive information about

social and natural life in his ultramarine possessions. This chapter shows how conquerors and colonists deployed the discourse of good and evil in an effort to gain royal recognition and rewards even as they complied with the metropolis' insatiable demand for reportage and adhered to its formal structure. As we will see, their narratives told the sovereign about their own meritorious deeds while exposing the ignoble comportment of others.

Significantly, conquerors dedicated as much intensity and time to the depiction of treacherous conflict among Spaniards as they did to the military confrontations between the "faithful" and the "heathen". But in either case, from their narratives there emerged two archetypal socio-political identities. One exhibited the self-abnegating virtues of fidelity, valor, honesty, and charity. This virtuous self bowed to the central socio-political injunctions of the discourse of good and evil -- constant fidelity to the sovereign and absolute adherence to church dictates. In contrast, the posited foe of the virtuous self rejected self-effacement and instead embodied the vices that everywhere stood in the way of the champions of good: perfidy, cowardliness, deception, and avarice.

Obdurate as they might be in their archetypal form, these identities were easily lost by their "bearers" in their political struggles over credibility. For in the quest for recognition from the crown, one narrative prevailed over its

rival, which meant that in any given struggle one antagonist received the socio-political rewards that came to those who proved their exemplary service to Crown and God. Put another way, one of the identities proved its claim on virtue and thus lasted beyond its textual existence, while the other perished at the hands of the state.

This process of identity-formation and destruction, as we shall see, had its origins in royal dread of alternative power-holders. Monarchs interrogated their distant subjects; and within this interrogatory context, Central Americans did battle over a just distribution of rewards. In telling the sovereign about the state of affairs in their "part" of the New World, they came to see in one another villanous foes to their own virtuous selves. And so, in retrospect, to look for the passage from the cutthroat phase of the conquista to the mature colonial period, is to come face to face with the routinization of suspicion and rancor among colonists and officials alike.

a. The Institutionalization of Regalist Mistrust:
Inquiry and Narrative

Royal suspicion of feudal lords was as embedded in the experience of the Reconquista as the discourse of good and evil that Christians deployed against Moors. In the New World, the interplay between this ancient legacy of suspicion and the novel experience of the initial stages of the conquest gave rise to an imperial administrative regime which combined a

hierarchical system of rewards with a complex system of surveillance. In order to enhance its control over the Indies, the crown not only created an immense bureaucracy, but made of its colonial subjects royal informants.

The Trade House, for example, kept a monopolistic grip on trade with the Indies, while the Solicitor kept vigilance within the House.² His functions are telling. He was

the king's mouth in causes wherein he is concerned, a check upon those that manage the revenues, a spy upon those who embezzle it, an informer against those that defraud it, an agent to improve it, and lastly a two-edged sword in a civil and criminal capacity, to defend the patrimony of the crown.³

Or take the Council of the Indies. Established as a legislative, judicial and executive body, as well as policy advisor to the monarch,⁴ the Council also played a central role in the internal surveillance of the colonial bureaucracy. The Council, for example, made arrangements for the dreaded "residencias", the judicial reviews conducted at the conclusion of officials' terms of office, and for the more occasional and even more dreaded general inspections, or "visitas".⁵

In the Indies, the remarkable autonomy of the "adelantados" -- an exalted title granted to heads of colonies during the conquest

-- gradually became a thing of the past as they were displaced by a vast bureaucracy that was fully established in less than

three decades. The officers of this bureaucracy operated under the authority of the Crown. Transoceanic distance, however, forced the Crown to delegate authority far more than was the case in Spain, an anxiety-provoking state of affairs for the monarchs, who tried as best they could to preclude treachery from their highest representatives -- the viceroys.

In an attempt to select a loyal servant, monarchs chose their viceroys from the nobles at court. A viceroy was "one whose birth and position would insure his loyalty, and act as a safeguard against malfeasance." All ecclesiastical and secular officers owed deference and obedience to this viceroy, the king's representative, who was president or chief justice of the supreme court (Audiencia) and commander in chief of the army.⁶

But grievances which arose from a decision by the viceroy or president could be taken before the judges of the Audiencia for appeal. Indeed, audiencias enjoyed a significant degree of autonomy and power. The Council of the Indies, for example, delegated to the audiencia its obligation to instruct the Indians. And judicial decisions reached by an audiencia could be appealed only in civil suits of more than ten thousand gold pesos. Such exceptional cases were elevated to the king.⁷

To this bureaucratic maze, viceroys brought with them, in addition to some dependents, other people they could "trust" and make their agents.⁸ But as we have seen, the viceroys themselves were not entirely trusted by the crown. In order to

stunt personalist ambitions, the crown deliberately limited the term of office of the viceroys (at first to three to five years), and could either extend it or truncate it at will.

In its resolute efforts to prevent usurpation of power by the members of the Audiencia and viceroys alike, the Crown institutionalized suspicion in other ways. Traditional instruments of surveillance such as the Residencia and the Visita mentioned above were brought to bear on royal officials in the Indies. The Residencia was a judicial review of an outgoing official held by his incoming successor. The Visita was an inspection visit to a part of the colonial realm, of which there were two types, general and ordinary. A general visitor was sent with full powers by the king, either from Spain or from one of the colonies. An ordinary Visita had the same intent as the general Visita, but originated at the local level, and was one of the functions of the Audiencia, whose members, like viceroys, could engage in direct correspondence with the monarch, neither Audiencia nor viceroy having to apprise the other.

The Crown made it

the special duty of the ecclesiastical authorities and the members of the Audiencia to 'watch the governors, take care of each other, and give an account to the King of what they observed and considered worthy of his knowledge'. Other observers or examiners with high-sounding titles, such as royal investigators (pesquisadores), visitors (visitadores), and seers (veedores) were sent out by the King from time to time in order to make personal reports to him as to what was going

wrong and who was to blame ... and when the viceroy or governor retired from office he was subjected to a public hearing before a lawyer appointed by the king, who acted as a sort of one-man court before whom all who had grievances could air them.⁹

Both the Residencia and the Visita became points of interaction between royal policy (aimed at suppressing bids for autonomy), on the one hand, and the colonists' competitive tactics, on the other. Consider the first Residencia held in the New World, as described by the historian Ursula Lamb. In 1500, an investigative judge was sent to Hispaniola. He held the first judicial review. In 1502 he was replaced by a royal governor, who now held a Residencia of the investigative judge and his officials. "It was a marvel," wrote Las Casas, "to see people outdo each other to accuse [the judge] and to turn upon him who had been the most generous of governors".

The governor's term ended in 1509, when he was replaced by Diego Columbus, son of the explorer. Now it was time for the outgoing governor to be subjected to a Residencia. A suit was brought against him by a disgruntled former ally who, in accordance with the dictat of fidelity to the crown, portrayed himself as champion of royal prerogative. The litigant's case turned on the accusation that the governor had "obeyed" but had not "complied" with a royal order favoring the litigant's brother.¹⁰

The two aggrieved brothers also wrote a letter of complaint and dispatched it to the king. The accused governor,

however, seized and destroyed the letter. Predictably, the king was informed of the incident by allies of the governor's rivals. "It makes me wonder at you," the angry king wrote the governor, "knowing that I know [the authors of the letter] personally and that any news they would send would only be in my interest".

Significantly, the king approved of the governor's decision to obey but not to comply with his orders "because [the orders] must first be obeyed but not executed, and then consulted". But the king reproached the governor's interference with the mails because

all who want to write to us should be free to do so, and any information received we will inquire about and we shall make our decisions on the basis of the whole truth; and truth once known we shall decide.¹¹

Indeed, the crown ordered that "no official should prevent anyone from sending to the king or anyone else letters and other information which concern the welfare of the Indies".¹² The king's letter to Diego Columbus (the new governor) explained that the previous governor had prevented the citizens of Hispaniola from sending letters, "which was a great disservice to the king," and then referred to his order against such interference. Columbus was told to obey it, and

not to impede or allow anyone else to prevent any person from writing to us as he wishes. Everyone is

to have entire freedom to write, for no matter what they write I will see that what they say will harm no one unless he merits it.

The king then instructed Diego Columbus and royal officials

henceforth not to restrict anyone who wishes to send or bring books or accounts or letters or other writings, but on the contrary everyone may write as he pleases.¹³

There was more. The same crown that went so far as to deny municipal governments the right to assemble their representatives at Cortes (the Spanish assembly of representatives from major towns), also granted these local institutions the crucial right to correspond directly with the sovereign. Colonial society, in fact, was soon populated by informants, sermonizers, complainers, litigants, scribblers, and chroniclers.

From the very beginning of the conquest and throughout the sixteenth century, friars, conquistadores, colonists, Indians, judges, and a multitude of royal administrative officials sat down in all the far corners of Spain's World Empire to compose personal messages to their king, explaining what and who was wrong, and describing the measures needed to remedy the situation.¹⁴

Many of these "scribblers" were newly-appointed officials, who were also the judges of their predecessors. Other scribblers were the Visitors, who investigated the powerful and informed the king about them. To apprise the king, the "Visitors"

employed the "carta-relacion" -- a report or a deposition "bearing witness to something". This document was similar to the "carta de relacion" -- a letter used by conquerors that also served as a charter which enfranchised both the writer and the newly-discovered territory.¹⁵

Both documents, then, were legal instruments in form; they were the almost imperceptible movements that collectively added to the great machination of a legalist and centralist state. For this reason, the specifications of the carta-relacion, like those of other types of accounts, became more detailed and standardized as administrative institutions developed in the metropolis; and as policy debates enhanced the need for overseas intelligence.¹⁶

But both the letter used by conquerors and the letter used by Visitors were, above all, narrative accounts -- often rendered in intricate detail -- of events, incidents, conflicts, peoples; and descriptions of the flora and fauna. A judge-visitor writing to his king from the province of Guatemala succinctly described the task at hand for narrators:

Viceroy, presidents and governors of these parts have been commanded and ordered in your decrees and provisions to prepare long and truthful narrations of the land, Indians, tongues, customs, rivers, mountains, rarities, and things in their districts which must be related to Your Majesty.¹⁷

As texts flowed in, the Crown was forced to create the office of Principal Royal Chronicler-Cosmographer, whose function was the preparation of appropriate histories and geographies of the Indies. The flow was vast.

Between the 1550's and 1570s certain Audiencia judges and other lawyers and officials began to compose systematic descriptions of how the indigenous systems functioned, making copious recommendations for proper legislation. Chronicles, often by ecclesiastics, began to be written in a similar spirit, very different from the day-to-day campaign accounts of the earlier conquest histories. Around this time the royal government instructed its local officials to carry out a thorough survey, description and population estimate of all its American domains, the famous Relaciones Geograficas ... [and] merchants and artisans in the central areas began to formalize their guilds and write ordinances.¹⁸

Indeed, Philip II, in his endless quest for information, invented the questionnaire. Prepared by the Principal Royal Chronicler-Cosmographer, the questionnaire evoked lengthy replies, known as the "Relaciones Geograficas", or Geographical Narratives (Reports). The king also demanded that his innumerable correspondents write clearly. Their letters, the king told them, should be "brief, clear, substantial, and decent, without generalities, using words which will most appropriately convey the meaning of the writer".¹⁹

The king was bent on grasping the essence of the letters because he was determined to apprehend aspects of the "creation" theretofore hidden and now being "revealed" to him

in recompense for the Christian intent of his imperial explorations. Like his ancestors before him, Philip believed that to possess information in its totality was to possess the key to a happy kingdom. But the idea of a totality of information -- a finite stock of data -- seemed plausible at all because in the mindset of the day the universe was contained by a providential frame. All that there was, was there to be discovered and conquered. And God had chosen the Catholic monarchs to make of the world a kingdom within a kingdom. Even before Philip ascended to the throne, Spain and its colonies were ruled ideologically by what we might call a "regnant metaphor", developed fully under his father, Emperor Charles V -- son of Juana the Mad, daughter of the Catholic monarchs -- who dared assert that Spanish was the language of God.

The regnant metaphor of empire, to paraphrase Waldo Frank, held that the world was to become part of the Spanish state, and that the Spanish state was part of the Corpus Christi.²⁰ According to this grand, mystical vision of conquest, worldly ambition was the vehicle of spiritual aspiration. Men were intrepid because they were in the thrall of the highest authority. In this crucial sense, the metaphor of empire both emboldened and disciplined the imagination of the imperial soldiers. On the one hand, it legitimated the expansive quest for dominions and the socio-political distinction that came with success. But on the other, it

reaffirmed the self-abnegating nature of the virtuous identity embedded in the traditional discourse of good and evil. For honor and status were indeed desirable possessions, but they were not inherently legitimate objectives that could be attained in a variety of ways. They were rewards granted by a king who was himself at the service of a higher purpose; honor and status were seen as the emblems of a meritorious life.

This regnant metaphor, moreover, both empowered monarchs and exposed them to criticism and appeals from their subjects. Imposing a previously unfathomable task on Spain and its monarch, this was an exigent vision, particularly harsh on the emperor who, as head of an ever-expanding body, grew incapable of seeing the distant "truth" of his realm. He needed eyes, but he could fully trust only his own. So he became dependent on competing eyewitness accounts. Consequently, as Lewis Hanke has shown, all the ordinances promulgated by the crown were influenced by complaints from the colonies.

But ironically, the emperor's innumerable eyes -- conquerors, officials, colonists, friars and notaries -- saw reality in a special way. For as the crown and its agents tried to assert control over colonials -- either by resorting to traditional investigative methods or more novel inquisitorial tools such as the Questionnaire -- the importance of imaginative power became increasingly central to the full spectrum of competitive struggles. Indeed, colonists came to live by word and symbol, and of word and symbol they

constructed a paradoxical world in which actors, though desperate for credibility, doubted one another's utterances and gestures. As early as 1516, an anonymous memorial warned that informers on the affairs of the Indies should not be believed implicitly, for each one had his own particular interest. In 1563, Martin Cortes, heir to the famous conquistador, repeated the warning to the king in a letter from Mexico:

Your majesty and your Royal Council of the Indies should understand clearly that there is no story so improbable concerning events here that witnesses may not be found to swear to its truth, for exaggeration flowers in this land.²¹

b. Narrative and Political Competition

Regalist and legalistic in outlook, one Spanish sovereign after another was paralyzed by the prospect of ruling the Indies without sufficient data and intelligence. But if monarchs were avid collectors of information, their subjects were bent on obtaining recognition for their merits. On the basis of their proven fealty and valor, conquerors, for example, sought the legitimacy of a royal appointment to a governorship as support against rivals, who in turn cried for royal intervention in their favor. Even in the post-conquest years, the senior and the powerful looked to government for legitimation of their positions in the status quo, while

parvenus appealed for favors for themselves (and struck alliances with officials who tried to control the conquerors and encomenderos, the Spanish colonists who "protected" Indians and in return received their labor).²²

In their struggles for wealth, status and honor, competitors "related" their meritorious deeds to the distant crown. Conquerors and colonists, for example, turned legal documents into autobiographical affirmations of self-worth. Put another way, legal documents became instruments of identity-formation. One such document was the "Relacion de Servicios", or "narration of services." The Relacion was "an ex parte statement of his services by the claimant, usually declaring that he had served at his own expense and had not been rewarded. 'Rewarded' as a rule meant suitably so".²³

A similar document was the "Probanza de Meritos y Servicios", or "proof of merits and services". The probanza was

another ex parte proceeding, taken under oath. Witnesses were called and an interrogatory was presented to them to bring out the points the party wished to prove. A probanza was carried out under oath to clarify facts which it was desirable to set forth in perpetuity.²⁴

The Probanzas almost invariably turned into highly personalized accounts designed to obtain greater recognition from the sovereign. They were miniature autobiographies imbued with the author's sense of his own worth.²⁵ Indeed, historians

have speculated that Bernal Diaz del Castillo, the great chronicler who wrote his history of Mexico's conquista long after the fact, may have drawn from his own "Probanzas and Relaciones".

As conqueror, Diaz wrote "Relaciones and Probanzas" to claim his rewards, and Diaz the chronicler later used the documents as stored memory to recall the past in detail. Ironically, Bernal Diaz lived most of his days in the New World not in Mexico but in Guatemala; and we will see later how his letters of appeal played a role in Central American struggles over the Encomienda -- the system whereby the Crown appointed a colonist as spiritual and physical "protector" of a group of Indians, who paid him in return with their labor.

Important as the "Relacion" and the "Probanzas" might have been to the claimants, the genre of the chronicle was the most expansive and detailed of narratives. As the literary theoretician Gonzalez-Echevarria has argued, the history of the new world had to be written within old notarial and rhetorical strictures. Both fictional and historical writing "issued from the forms and constraints of legal writing." Moreover, as he put it so succinctly, "to write was a form of enfranchisement, of legitimation".²⁶

Colonial chroniclers, to be sure, wrote as official and unofficial witnesses to the unfolding events of the empire. But in either case, their chronicles were detailed narrative accounts of history as clash between good and evil, virtue and

vice, honor and shame. Indeed, the chronicle was often used to do combat with an alternative version of the same event, putting special emphasis on the character and merits of the various protagonists. Chronicles, then, had villains and heroes, and argued for and against alternative distributions of recognition and reward.

Chronicles, moreover, shaped avant la lettre the gestures and utterances of protagonists that would be captured in future narrative accounts. Actors self-consciously lived history as story, knowing that what they did would have to be reported, and reported in detail. Caught between rules and norms engendered by the past, on one side, and the future narration of their present behavior, on the other, actors engaged in strict compliance with formal requirements; in ceremonial observance of the law. To do this they drew on remembrance and imagination.

c. Competition and Identity: The Conquest of Central America

Conquerors and colonists, however loyal to their sovereign, were neither royal marionettes nor mere supplicants; they harbored ambitions which, like those of their monarchs, had been shaped by the experience of the Reconquista. Aristocratic warriors who were not first-borns, and were thus barred by primogeniture from inheritance, went to the Indies for the spoils of war, so that they might bequeath land and titles to

their own descendants. Friars went to conquer souls. Dignified but impoverished "hidalgos" -- literally "sons of something or someone" -- went in search of wealth. Commoners, in turn, went to become hidalgos. And criminals went to be reborn, for between 1497 and 1548, the Crown deemed pardonable any crime -- save heresy -- committed by a male willing to cross the "Ocean Sea".

Distrustful of their own subjects -- yet dependent on their ambition and admiring of their boldness -- one monarch after another, though profoundly legalistic, failed to dictate a general and explicit code to regulate relations among conquistadores and colonists. Instead, the monarchs set up a bureaucracy, and more importantly, they upheld fidelity to the sovereign as the loftiest of virtues, and rewarded the virtuous accordingly.

As a result, imperial expansion was propelled by initial cooperation among colonial governors, expeditionary captains and lieutenants, then was frequently followed by cutthroat competition. In retrospect, it is even possible to speak of the conquest as a "relay system" to describe a process whereby successful expeditionary captains rebelled against their superiors, then quickly founded cities for the dual purpose of military defense against their native foes and legitimation of their newly-claimed autonomy.²⁷ Not surprisingly, sponsors felt betrayed; avenging and disciplinary campaigns became commonplace; and suspicion gained ground.

Central America was no exception. The conquest of the isthmus by two converging expeditionary waves -- one originating in Mexico, the other in Panama²⁸ -- proved particularly difficult in part because unlike the Aztecs and the Incas, the local tribes had no vital power center for the Spaniards to seize.²⁹ Defeating them required twenty years of struggle aggravated by rivalries between groups of conquistadores for control over the territories.³⁰

Both the struggles among Spaniards and their battles with native foes had proximate outcomes which could be ratified only by the crown. To this end, rivals strove to persuade the crown in their favor. Centuries later, apprehending the intensity of those distant competitive struggles is not easy. But imagine for a moment modern athletes holding an Olympic competition out of sight of cameras and judges, and with no impartial observers present. Under such peculiar circumstances -- a spectacle without spectators -- retrospective accounts of each athlete's performance would matter as much as performance itself; and all manner of irregularity would likely occur. Now imagine the plight of the conquerors, their fate in the hands of a monarch who sat in judgement on the other side of the "Ocean Sea" -- a sovereign who was, above all, reader and listener.

One of the earliest of such narrative accounts read by a Spanish monarch was penned by Vasco Nuñez de Balboa from the town of Santa María de Darién (in the area of today's Panama).

At the moment of writing, Balboa had finally prevailed over rival conquerors. He now depicted himself as magnanimous towards the men his rivals had "abandoned"; and he launched a ~~direct character attack on his foes.~~

I have to inform your most Royal Highness that both the governors, Diego de Nicuesa as well as Alonzo de Ojeda, performed their duties very badly. They were the cause of their own perdition because they did not know how to act. They imagined that they could rule the land and do all that was necessary from their beds.³¹

The vices of these men, like the virtues of others, transcended them as individuals. Given the temporal and spiritual dimensions of the imperial enterprise, men's character was of consequence both to the State and to God. Balboa knew this.

I have thought of nothing day or night but how to support myself and the handful of men whom God has placed under my charge, and how to maintain them until your highness sends reinforcements. I have taken care that the Indians of this land are not ill-treated, permitting no man to injure them and giving them many things from Castile whereby they may be drawn into friendship with us. Because of this honorable treatment of the Indians, I have learned great secrets from them, through the knowledge of which large quantities of gold may be obtained, and your Highness will thus be well served.³²

The gold which the conqueror would be able to obtain for the

crown was but one sign confirming his merits. For there had been divine manifestations, too. Indeed, in Balboa's account, God's benevolent intervention was directly pitted against the uncharitable indifference of his great rival, the Governor of Hispaniola.

I have often thought of how it will be possible for us to sustain life, seeing that we have been as badly succored from the island of Espanola as if we had not been Christians. But our Lord, by His Infinite Mercy, has chosen to supply us with provisions in this land. We have often been in such straits that we expected to die of hunger; yet at the time of our greatest necessity our Lord has pointed out the means of relief.³³

Divine interest in the success of the virtuous manifested itself not only in providential interventions in their favor but also in explicit rewards granted them. Accordingly, discovery of natural wonders and vast potential wealth came to the worthy. In biblical fashion, revelation followed personal sacrifice. "I wish to give an account," Balboa wrote, "of the great secrets and marvelous riches of this land of which God has made your Most Royal Highness the Lord, and me the discoverer before any other."

Thus, Balboa went on to describe Santa María de Darién -- its mines, its "caciques" (chieftains), its people, some of whom were "evil and warlike,"; and its rivers and mountains. He also wrote of what was to be his great discovery, the Pacific Ocean and its abundant pearls.³⁴

The pearls not only made the "other sea" most compelling,

but, in a world in which expansion of the King's dominion meant expansion of God's kingdom, they signified divine approbation of further exploration.³⁵ Of course, not all men were equally fit to carry forth this sacred mission, a point which Balboa made by referring to the failure of the explorers who had preceded him. Character made all the difference.

I assure your most Royal Highness that I have worked with more diligence for your service than the governors who were lost here, Alonzo de Ojeda and Diego de Nicuesa. I have not remained in my bed while my people were entering and exploring the country. No party has gone into any part of this land unless I was in front as a guide, opening the road with my own hands for those who went with me. If this is not believed, I refer to what I have sent home, the fruits of all those who have labored here.

As one who has more knowledge of the land than anyone else has acquired, I desire that the affairs of these regions which I have originated may flourish and reach such a position as to be of service to your most Royal Highness. Therefore I must make known what is necessary to be done and to be provided at once, until the land is known and explored.³⁶

Identity-formation and political rivalry were thus connected. At stake were status and honor, which is to say justice and power. To the extent that Balboa felt deserving of military assistance and financial rewards for his people, his socio-political future as leader was both an egoistic concern and a matter of fairness.

Your Highness should receive all this from me as your loyal servant, and should give it credence

because your service will thus be advanced. I do not desire to make towers of wind like the governors whom your Highness sent out. Between them both they have lost eight hundred men. Those whom I have rescued scarcely amount to fifty, and this is the truth. Your Highness will consider all that I have done, and discovered, and endured with these people, without any help but from God and my own industry.

If I have erred in anything working for the service of your Highness, I beseech that my earnest desire to serve your Majesty may be considered. Although, most puissant lord, I have not succeeded in doing all that is necessary in this land, I can certify that I know how to administer better than all those who have come here before. That your Highness may understand this, you must consider how little other governors have discovered until today, and how they have all failed and left these shores full of graves. I do not desire to enlarge upon this, but your Highness should know what each man has been able to do and has done up to this time [emphasis added].³⁷

The words "truth" and "credence" are crucial here, for they hint at the growing internal suspicion that pervaded an empire bent on expansion. Ideed, in this context, a written narrative was often not sufficient, for it might well sink to the bottom of the sea in a vessel that perished, or be intercepted by a rival. Hence the importance of the "trusted" messenger.

Most puissant lord, I have sent Sebastian del Campo, that you may be better informed of all that has passed here. I entreat your Highness to give him full credence, for he has been informed by me of the whole truth concerning all that can be done in your service, and of that which ought to be done for his land [emphasis added].³⁸

In the Indies, however, neither trust nor truth were easily established.

Your highness must know that formerly there were certain disagreements here, because the alcaldes [mayors] and regidores [aldermen] of this town, filled with envy and treachery, attempted to seize me. When they failed in that, they made false charges against me with false witnesses and in secret. I complain of this because if such acts are not chastised, no governor you may send here will be free of attacks. For I, being mayor for your Highness, have been exposed to a thousand slanders, and if your representative is not respected, he cannot do what is necessary for your service. And because the mayors and aldermen sent an accusation against me, which I believe your Highness will see, I appointed two gentlemen as my judges, that they might draw up a report of my life and of the great and loyal services which I have done for your Highness in those parts of the Indies where we now are. I send this that you may see the malice of these people, and because I believe that your Highness will be pleased with all that I have done for your service. I beseech that favor may be shown me in proportion to my services. I also send a report of what passed with respect to those who invented these calumnies. [emphasis added].³⁹

Rivals, then, sent the king competing narrative accounts which aimed to vindicate the honorable and to unmask villains. But as the previous passage shows, the accounts themselves told only part of the tale. Lawyers told the other. In an atmosphere of "slander", "false witnesses" and "calumnies", rivals turned to "judges", who would then investigate the comportment of the parties involved and write narratives of their own depicting the "lives" of the disputants. Hence Balboa's appointment of "two gentlemen" as his judges, his keen dislike of lawyers notwithstanding.

As agents of royal vigilance -- lawyers (often hidalgos) -- dealt in reports, records, and certificates, and were

trusted by the crown yet feared and suspected by conquerors. Such was the importance of these alert scribblers that to reduce their numbers, Balboa thought, was to rid political competition of "devils" who "not only are they themselves evil, but they give rise to a thousand lawsuits and quarrels."⁴⁰

d. Conciliating Self-Interest and Self-Abnegation:
Ceremonial Narrative

Balboa got the king to name him captain general and interim governor of Darien. Balboa, however, soon found out that his term in office would be very brief, since the king was as tired of the fights among his conquistadores as he was eager to expedite the exploration of new territories. Facing the loss of identity entailed by his removal from office, Balboa set out to prove himself virtuous yet again -- he prepared an expedition which led to the discovery of the South Sea.⁴¹

In this new enterprise, Balboa was under the scrutiny of the expedition's notary, who recorded the precise moment of discovery. By his very presence, the notary elicited from the discoverers of the Pacific an enactment of the narrative that was later to become the notary's textual report.

[Balboa] turned toward the troops, very happy, lifting eyes and hands to Heaven, praising Jesus Christ and his Glorious Mother the virgin, Our Lady; and then he knelt down on both knees and gave

much thanks to God for the grace He had shown him in allowing him to discover that sea, and in doing so to accomplish so great a service to God and to the Catholic and Most Serene Kings of Castile...

And he commanded that all those who accompanied him should kneel down likewise and give the same thanks to God, and should pray very devoutly that He permit them to discover and see the great secrets and riches which lay in that sea and coast, to the greater exaltation and growth of the Christian faith and for the conversion of the Indian natives of those austral regions, and for the great prosperity and glory of the royal throne of Castile and its princes present and to come.

Everyone did so very willingly and joyously, and then the captain caused a fine tree to be felled, of which was made a tall cross which was planted and fixed on that same place and high hill from where that austral sea was first seen. And because the first that was seen was a gulf or bay entering into the land, Vasco Nunez [Balboa] commanded that it be called the Gulf of San Miguel, because it was the feast of the archangel four days later. And he also commanded that the names of all the men who were there with him should be written down so that the memory should remain of him and of them, because they were the first Christians who saw that sea; all of whom sang the hymn of the glorious holy doctors of the church, Ambrose and Augustine, as a devout priest who was there, sang it with them, saying: Te Deum laudamus: Te Dominum confitemur.⁴²

The notarial document, which was signed by all "caballeros" (knights) and hidalgos present, at once legalized and described the moment when the discoverers, by ceremonial means, externalized their souls, or in the terminology of our day, their mental universes. The discoverers said a prayer, unselfconsciously requesting wealth and power, the tangible signs of divine approbation of those engaged in the imperial quest. Similarly, the site of discovery received the cross and a holy name as emblems of its spiritual significance. And the

names of those present were recorded for posterity because they were participants in a glory at once temporal and spiritual. In short, the narrative, though descriptive in character, reaffirmed the regnant metaphor, which blurred the boundaries of an expanding empire with those of the divine corpus.

But the narrative did more than pay homage to a worldview. Its enactment by the protagonists and its subsequent textual exposition by the notary enabled both a king suspicious of his own conqueror and a conqueror fearful of his suspicious king, to avoid potential misunderstandings and their perilous consequences. Stated differently, the ceremonial narrative made possible a de facto compromise between crown and would-be feudal lord because it both forced and empowered political actors to conciliate boldness and obedience, ambition and loyalty.

Thus, two days after discovering the Pacific, Balboa put on his full uniform, armor, and helmet. As a soldier followed him with the flag, he went down to the beach, where he paced up and down, staking his broad claim to power by asserting both a view of the world and his fealty to the sources of authority in that world, which he knew to be a divine creation rife with conflict between good and evil.

Should any ... prince or captain, Christian or infidel, of whatever law or sect or condition he may be, pretend to any right to these lands and seas, I am ready and prepared to deny him and to

defend them in the names of the kings of Castile present and future, whose is this empire and the dominion of these Indies, islands, and mainland, northern and southern, with their seas, in the arctic pole as in the antarctic, on both sides of the equinoctial line, within and without the Tropics of Cancer and Capricorn -- so that each thing and part of it belong and appertain most completely to their Highnesses and to their successors, as I declare more at length by writ, setting forth all that may be said or can be said and alleged in behalf of their royal patrimony, now and for all time so long as the world shall last until the final universal judgement of all mortals.⁴³

After this, Balboa and his people tasted the water to determine if it was salty, and thus ascertained that this was indeed an ocean. They gave thanks to God, and began to make wooden crosses. Finally, they once again signed the notary's account.⁴⁴

* * *

A month later, Balboa returned to Darién, only to find that his successor had already been appointed. Nevertheless, Balboa sent his report to the king, including the ceremonial narrative of discovery. The report had its intended effect. Below is the king's reply.

I was rejoiced to read your letters and to learn of the things you discovered ... I am grateful to you, and I deeply appreciate your labor and achievement in this as that of the most true and loyal servitor. And I also hold in service all those who went with you on that journey, and the hardships and hunger and suffering which you and they endured. And since it has been so great a service to God and to us, and to the welfare and resources of these realms, you must expect that you and they will be

well rewarded and remunerated, and that I will always keep in mind your services and theirs, to the end that you may receive favors.⁴⁵

Once again, Balboa's virtuous identity began to assume a distinct form, and the attendant signs of status and power seemed at hand. Unfortunately, Balboa's correspondence had reached the king rather late. As the king explained,

When your letters came, Pedrarias had already left. I am writing to him to look to your affairs with care and to favor you as a person whom I greatly desire to gratify and who has greatly served me, and I am sure he will do so.⁴⁶

Balboa's successor, it turned out, was Pedrarias Dávila, who arrived in Darién before the king's letter. With great alacrity, Pedrarias undertook Balboa's Residencia, or judicial review. Typically, judicial reviews were protracted affairs, as they gave enemies an opportunity to retaliate against the outgoing official under investigation. And in the case of Balboa, the enemies were about half the population of the camp: Darién, like other settlements, had split into two factions.

Balboa was held in captivity by the courts, and remained in confinement until the bishop forced Pedrarias to release the latest correspondence from the king. In his new instructions, the king, in an effort to control the power of his officers, yet obliged by the ethos of the conquest to recognize their merits, sought to strike a balance between the

two rivals by distributing privilege, honor and power between them. Thus, the king appointed Balboa governor of the newly created province of the South Sea Coast, and granted him the title of Adelantado.⁴⁷ In the context of the Indies, this title was granted to leaders of expeditions and heads of colonies. Columbus' brother had been an adelantado; and after Balboa, so too would be most founders of colonies in districts theretofore unoccupied by Spaniards.

But having named Balboa Adelantado, the king also decided that Balboa would have to "request his supplies and men from Pedrarias, and he would have to report directly to the older man".⁴⁸

The king's attempt at a balance of powers, however, led to an ever more acute struggle between the two officials, who set out to destroy one another's reputation. This is what Balboa had to say to the king about Pedrarias.

He is a person who is delighted to see discord between people, and if there is none he creates it, speaking ill of one to the other; this vice he has to a very great extent. He is a man who, absorbed in his profit-getting and greed, does not remember that he is Governor or occupy himself with anything else; because it matters nothing to him whether the whole world be lost or won, just as if he were not Governor.⁴⁹

And this is what Pedrarias, who wanted to claim the South Sea for himself, wrote the King about Balboa.

It is public and notorious that [Balboa] does not know how to speak the truth ... that he has no love or good will for any worthy person, but likes to converse and be intimate with people of low degree. That he is most excessively avaricious; covets greatly any good thing possessed by another; is very cruel and disagreeable; never forgives; never submits to any advice; has no self-control nor can use any to resist any vicious appetite; is very mercenary; has neither obedience nor reverence for the Church and her ministers; is of most evil conscience; is always set on tricking the person with whom he converses; when one asks counsel of him he gives it contrariwise. That he is very determined to procure, by fair means or foul, to be superior to what he has already trying to be, by confederations and combines and by any other means he finds handy even if it be contrary to all loyalty and service owed to God and their Highnesses.⁵⁰

e. The Third Man: A Chronicler

Communication with the king was by no means confined to Balboa and Pedrarias. Just as Balboa had had to operate under the watchful eye of a notary, Pedrarias had to contend with Gonzálo Fernández de Oviedo, who had come to Darién with Pedrarias from Spain, and was to become a great chronicler of the Conquista.⁵¹

Oviedo prospered in Darién, but only a year after his arrival he decided to return to Spain. Significantly the reasons for his return home were, as he put it, "to give news to my king, and to live in land safer for my conscience and my life".

The "news" Oviedo gave his king were mostly unfavorable reports of Pedrarias, which were in turn used effectively against Pedrarias by his foes in Spain. So effectively, in

fact, that under the regency of Cardinal Cisneros, who took over after Ferdinand's death in 1516, Pedrarias' influence at court declined.

Forced to adapt, Pedrarias did so swiftly. He released Balboa from prison, married him by proxy to his own daughter, and allowed him to leave for his new province, where he was at last a governor. All of this, Pedrarias did just in time, for he soon received instructions from the court to "permit Vasco Nunez de Balboa to do what he wishes".

Soon thereafter, Oviedo's campaign against Pedrarias yielded its best results yet: Pedrarias was informed that he was to be replaced as governor of Castilla del Oro.

Balboa heard about the latter news while in the gulf of San Miguel, where, determined to explore the Pacific, he was capturing Indians to build ships. The news provoked anxiety in Balboa, who at last had a minimum of cooperation from Pedrarias, now his father-in-law. So Balboa selected a group of friends who were "honorable" men to go on a secret mission and find out about the new governor. If there was indeed a new governor, then Balboa's people were to return to Darien so as to avoid a recall of the expedition by Pedrarias' successor.

But Balboa was betrayed by one of his "honorable" friends, who divulged the secret mission. And Balboa, who had made many enemies among Pedrarias' officials by failing to send them captured Indians, was charged with rebellion. He was

decapitated on orders from his father-in-law. After the execution, "a pole was raised on which the head of the Adelantado was exposed for days".⁵²

Now that Balboa was dead, Pedrarias rushed to the Pacific, where, by means of ceremonies of possession, he repeated Balboa's acts of fourteen years earlier.⁵³ If Balboa's ceremonial demonstration of loyalty had been intended to reassure a mistrustful sovereign in the very act of writing history (a royal notary was witnessing the event), Pedrarias' elaborate mimesis was an attempt to rewrite the story of Balboa and the South Sea.

But even after death, Balboa haunted Pedrarias. The town of Santa María de Darién, founded by Balboa, stood like a shadow over Pedrarias, rendering unforgettable the story of its founder -- a story which could not be rewritten, only erased.

And erase it is precisely what Pedrarias set out to do. The chronicler Oviedo related that Pedrarias, even after Balboa's death, was motivated by spite to finish Santa María de Darién,

which city he had dishonored and written that it was unhealthy, which it was not, but he destroyed it for the hatred he felt for it ... since it was built by Vasco Nuñez [Balboa], and he wished also to destroy me.⁵⁴

Oviedo seems to have understood fully the power given to his narrative by passages dealing with cities. For example, aware

that the crown looked upon settlements as central to the successful propagation of the faith as well as to the extension of Spanish dominance, Oviedo dedicated a good part of a chapter to "the ways found by Pedrarias to depopulate Darién". Conversely, Oviedo used his narrative to turn his own struggle for power and status into a display of selfless devotion to the city.

As others deserted the city, I began to labor, and left a plan and money to my wife for the purpose of constructing a house. This she did, and of such quality that no other house equalled it in Tierra Firme. This gave the city some hope, because while the King's other officials abandoned it, I did not; and the city gave me its power to conduct its business with the governor.⁵⁵

The affinity between the city of Santa María and Oviedo was such that when the moment for Pedrarias' fall seemed to have arrived, Oviedo returned to Santa María, bringing his wife, two sons, and eight servants. Oviedo returned in the entirely reasonable expectation that Pedrarias was to be subjected to a judicial review by his newly-appointed successor to the governorship. On the occasion, Oviedo would have an opportunity to see his foe attacked by others, and to lodge his own complaints as well.

But it was not to be. As Oviedo himself wrote in his chronicle, the new governor, an elderly official,

began to dress himself upon docking, and finished

giving instructions on the manner in which he would disembark. But while still inside the vessel, he expired, and gave his soul to God.⁵⁶

The unexpected death of the royal official who had crossed the Ocean Sea to judge and replace Pedrarias reversed the proximate outcome of the ongoing competition between Oviedo and Pedrarias. Oviedo, in a matter of hours, went from winner to loser, while Pedrarias, says Oviedo, interpreted the turn of events as "a miracle; as God's expressed will that he and no other should govern the land".

Thus anointed, Pedrarias, through displays of courtesy, proceeded to make allies and clients of the retinue and family of the deceased. For example,

[Pedrarias] had the corpse brought onto land honorably, for interment in the cathedral's most prominent place, in front of the main altar, at the foot of the steps, showing much grief for the death.⁵⁷

Oviedo could not deny Pedrarias' "courtesy and upbringing", but he also used these "undeniable" qualities to draw an unflattering character portrait of Pedrarias, by contrasting the governor's self-serving decorum with his vindictive treatment of Oviedo himself.

This "vindictive" treatment did not take place in a vacuum. The death of the incoming governor truncated the judicial investigation and the process of official succession. And this lack of resolution intensified the enmity between

Pedrarias and Oviedo. Both rivals felt deprived of an opportunity to restore their social honor and hence their virtuous selves. Moreover, both rivals must have known that, given their intensified rancor, they were now even more dangerous to one another. Indeed, when Oviedo suffered a "treacherous knifing", he naturally suspected the governor, and resolved, once again, to exact revenge from his enemy. "I decided," he wrote years later, "to spend all I had in the pursuit of justice in Spain, and in asking for "a gobernador contra Pedrarias".⁵⁸ The phrasing of this last sentence -- "asking for a governor against Pedrarias" -- is telling, as it reveals in the particular the generalized view of power-transfers as opportunities to engage in the vindication of one's identity through the destruction of another.

The transfer of power, as already mentioned, was attended by Residencias, which aimed to placate royal suspicions of colonial officials. However, by encouraging the participation of "aggrieved" citizens, Residencias also promoted vindictiveness in politics, as character-attacks led to dispossession, shame, even prison and execution.

Success in such a rancorous task, however, was seen by litigants as a triumph of good over evil, and as a reaffirmation of royal legitimacy. Oviedo interpreted the ultimate success of his efforts against Pedrarias thus: "In the end, His Ceassarean Majesty, being a Most Just Prince, gave the office and governance of Castilla del Oro to Pedro de

los Ríos." Yet success was not resounding in this case; the struggle between the chronicler and the governor persisted. Pedrarias continued to foment his city, Panama, at the expense of Oviedo's -- Santa María de Darién.

In addition, Pedrarias renewed his struggle for recognition from the king by sending his lieutenant Hernandez de Cordoba to occupy Nicaragua. Soon, Pedrarias was in a position to write the king with news of his lieutenant's accomplishments, which included the founding of the cities León and Granada in "very populated [by native families] and abundant" lands.⁵⁹

f. The city in the narrative

The founders of these two cities, to be sure, were obeying the imperative to settle which issued from above, thus furthering the crown's imperial and religious vision. For absent these new urban centers of power, the conquered territories might not remain as such for long. But city-founding was also a bid for power by conquistadores and colonists. Or put another way, the quest for identity was entwined with the founding of cities and the structuration of urban life.

A senior and powerful figure or figures in a given area would propose the acquisition of a known but still unoccupied territory within reach, and the local governor would approve the venture, even helping organize it, in the hope that the new acquisition would be part of his own jurisdiction.

But no sooner would the leader of the expedition meet with success than he would write off to the crown asking for a separate governorship, which would usually be granted.⁶⁰

In competition, the municipality was both crucial to the process, and an essential part of the reward. Only through the municipal government -- only as a corporation -- could conquerors claim their rewards from the sovereign. Stated differently, only through the "cabildo", or municipal government, did they have a voice with which to tell their stories. In their letters to the king, for example, cabildos fought for local prerogatives and for suitable rewards for their notables and guilds. However, cabildo letters also shaped the identities of localities and their notables and guilds, thus shaping their codes and norms of conduct. The pursuit of recognition and the exigencies of norms, in turn, combined to make of the Spanish American city an expression both of aspiration and fulfilment, claim and reward -- a place where citizens strove to gain titles, status and wealth, and a place where all these rewards came to life. Indeed, the city itself was a petrified statement and a spatial affirmation of the locals' struggle to ascend. Monuments, buildings and their location, in turn, attested to the inextricable connection between virtue and status, and confirmed the universal meaning of ascent.

Facing the central square or nearby, conquerors and colonists built the cathedral, the municipal council building,

the residence of the governor, and the residences of the preeminent citizens (usually the encomenderos, or colonists who held Indian laborers in encomienda), each trying to be more imposing than the other, so that the center would soon be fully developed. Spanish settlers of modest means had their homes in an outer ring of lots, and beyond these, gardens occupied whole blocks. After these came the ranchos -- huts that were usually for Indian servants.⁶¹

Urban settlement was encouraged from the start by the monarchs, who, following the tradition of the Reconquista, identified order with urbanization, chaos with scattered settlements. Early on, the governor of Hispaniola was told that Christians were not to live dispersed about the country, a rule that was observed to various degrees in Spanish America.⁶²

The crown, moreover, in its pursuit of micro-political control, extended the tradition of the settlement as a social identity; it ordered the establishment of a local government and that villas should be founded for Christians to live in. The results were ratified by the royal designation of coats of arms for fifteen towns.⁶³

The coat of arms was the emblem of the city's honor, just as its name was often the emblem of its pious devotion to a patron saint. In this important sense, the urban settlement was a collective personality endowed with sensibility and pride, which the cabildo, or municipal government,

safeguarded. The cabildo was initially made up of members selected by the governor. During the sixteenth century these "men of property" not only administered their towns, but chose their successors upon retiring.

By mid-sixteenth century, however, the Crown's bankruptcy forced Philip II to initiate in the New World the Castilian practice of selling offices. Municipal offices were not only put up for sale but their number increased as the Crown strove to satisfy its ever-greater need for revenue. By the turn of the seventeenth century, "fee-collecting, honorific and municipal offices" were for sale, and could be bequeathed by purchasers to their heirs. Thus the generational entrenchment of local families in local office was favored by the law.⁶⁴

The tight connection between the identity-formation of the city and that of its founders remained in evidence throughout the conquest and colonization of Central America. Conquerors and colonists strove for the title of "vecino", which today literally translates as "neighbor" but in its historical context was reserved for "founders" of cities. Vecinos strove for membership in the cabildo. And cabildos competed for ascent in the imperial hierarchy: villages and towns strove for the title of "city", and cities strove for such titles as "Very Noble and Loyal".

In this constant yearning for distinction, the bold Pedro de Alvarado styled the municipal government of Guatemala a

"city" from the start; and, as its founder, staked his claim in a letter to Cortés.⁶⁵

Your Grace gave me the honor of the lieutenancy of this city, and I helped to gain and defend it when I was there, with the danger and suffering that your Grace knows. For what I have served His Majesty he would have confirmed me in it and granted me other favors, if I might have gone to Spain. They tell me that His Majesty has disposed of it, which does not surprise me, as he has no notice of me. For this, nobody is to blame but Your Grace, for not having given account to His Majesty of how I have served him since you sent me here. I pray your Grace to give him an account of who I am and of how I have served His Majesty in these parts.⁶⁶

It was not until Pedro de Alvarado narrated his own story of loyal service to the Council that he received due recognition: he was knighted by the king, and given both the title of Adelantado and the cross of the order of Santiago. The king also appointed him governor and captain-general of Guatemala, subordinate only to the crown.

If the virtue of conquerors and colonists was proved through the rituals and activities of conquest and city-founding, and if their virtue was rewarded through posts of authority and ranks of privilege in those cities, then it is not surprising that their self-abnegating identity became tied to their locality. The more renowned the city of Guatemala became for its obedience to the crown, for example, the more its notables became subject to the strictures of their emblematic virtue. Thus, when Pedro de Alvarado traveled to

Spain to be interviewed by Charles V, the Bishop of Guatemala wrote to the king, recommending that the conqueror should be persuaded to take a wife before returning to the Indies. "As a married man," the bishop reasoned, "he will respect the fact that he will have to live and die in [Guatemala], and therefore make an effort to enhance and populate her".⁶⁷

The bishop's advice, which evinced concern for one of the central notions that made of the Spanish Empire a virtuous power in its own eyes, was heeded. Alvarado addressed a letter to the cabildo of Guatemala City, informing its members that he would return to them a married man: "I will arrive wedded to Dona Beatriz, who is highly virtuous. She brings with her twenty maidens: genteel women, daughters of caballeros and of very good lineage".⁶⁸

Virtue and identity were inextricable in other ways. The capital city of Guatemala, for example, was erected in "devotion" to Santiago, and was formally known as Santiago de los Caballeros de Guatemala (Santiago of the Knights of Guatemala). In 1532 Carlos V awarded the city a coat of arms, which in turn depicted the city's biography. The city's patron saint, Santiago, appeared on the coat of arms wielding a sword on horseback, and three high peaks. The peak in the middle hurled flames and scorching stones; the other two displayed crosses of gold and planted trees, signifying the labor and victory of the discoverers, conquerors and founders.⁶⁹

If the coat of arms depicted the city's biography, the

city's life was an ongoing enactment of its founding narrative --an incessant attempt to "appear" as virtuous in deeds as in story. This dynamic interdependence between narrative and collective personality was reflected in the exhaustive stipulations in the "Leyes de Indias" (Laws of the Indies) regarding urbanization (Book IV, titles VII and VIII).⁷⁰ Far from being royal caprice codified, the Leyes were a legalistic response to the functional demands of representational politics with its emphasis on the construction and destruction of appearances.

Edification, broadly defined, was in fact a crucial task of collective identities. To this end, collectivities -- from satellite Indian pueblos to imposing viceregal cities -- composed ceremonial narratives, which were in turn transcribed in the textual correspondence between cabildo and king. Indeed, the Leyes implicitly recognized that the city was both a stage for socio-political representation and in itself a condensation of meaning recursively derived from socio-political representation. Put another way, if the city served as stage for the struggle over distinction and lineage, the signs of distinction and lineage won by citizens in turn became part of the defining story of their city.

By this logic, architectural and ceremonial appearances became entwined. For instance, the scope and grandeur of the plaza mayor, the Leyes stipulated, should be in proportion to the number of "vecinos". This rule, to be sure, evinced the

Renaissance predilection for mathematical design and unhampered circulation. But it also revealed the crucial importance of ceremonial narratives to the competitive efforts of the collective personality. The annual commemoration of the city's founding, for example, was an occasion to take pride in the emblems of distinction awarded by the crown to the cabildo. And one of the most exalted "symbolic feasts" for a city was the "paseo del pendon" or "estandarte" -- the procession of the banner or standard.

g. Power: Credibility Amidst Treachery

In their colonizing quest, conquerors competed with one another with tenacious ferocity, trying at each step of the way to unmask impostors. The royal arbiter, whose decisions were in essence life-and-death rulings on the identity of rivals, must not be duped. In the passage below, for example, Pedrarias makes a villain of Gil González -- one of the two discoverers of Nicaragua. The "treacherous" González, upon being vanquished by a lieutenant of Pedrarias, executes yet another deceptive plan while invoking the name of the emperor.

Gil Gonzalez ... called out loudly saying 'Peace, sir Captain, peace in the name of the emperor'. Believing the peace was real and not feigned, Captain Soto withdrew his men; although his companions told him that Gil Gonzalez was acting deceitfully in the expectation of more men, he still turned aside with his men. Then when Gil Gonzalez was stronger, more of his men having arrived, and the other side trusting in peace, seeing his advantage he started fighting again and

took from them 130,000 pesos of local low-carat gold and some other spoils, as though they were his enemies. When Gil Gonzalez saw ... that he could not maintain his position, he abandoned his men, leaving behind the banner and some halberds and a folding chair and some other stores, and went away with ten horsemen and twenty foot[men].⁷¹

The villain not only invoked the emperor's name in vain, he abandoned the banner as so much rubbish. Treachery and cowardice had led to sacrilege! These details revealed behavior so scandalous as to verge on the incredible. Yet if credence was the principal objective of narrators, it also posed the greatest difficulty. Amidst rumor campaigns and ubiquitous informants, making a story prevail among others was no easy matter. Thus, in the pursuit of credibility -- which is to say, power -- narrators combined all manner of formality with descriptive techniques. Pedrarias' seemingly stark account of treachery, cowardice, and sacrilege, for example, was also a legal document. As he noted in his letter to the emperor, his lieutenant Hernández de Córdoba had sent him sealed and notarially authenticated evidence of the story being told.

Credibility, moreover, was rendered crucial by the times and circumstances, under which even the most sober report about exotic peoples and customs was likely to sound fantastic. Put another way, in fantastic times, sobriety posed a challenge. Efforts to meet this challenge reinforced the tendency toward narrative description, which, as we have seen,

located the marvel of "truth" in its details, and rendered hyperbole redundant. For this very reason, if an astute writer wished to engage in hyperbole, then he simply limited himself to deploying his descriptive capabilities. Consider how, in a style resembling that of a naive painting, yet firmly rooted in historical time, Pedrarias harked back to the Reconquista as he reported on the manifestation of providential signs.

[My lieutenant] also says that more than 400,000 souls have been converted to our holy Catholic faith of their own free will, and more continually come to request baptism, because the Indians in one town where a wooden cross had been set up tried to burn it and never succeeded, and then all the people of the town died of pestilence without an Indian remaining, and seeing this miracle and other miracles that have occurred, the Indians of the region around came to be baptized and request crosses, which are given to them with the greatest ceremony possible. Also certain mosques that had not yet received images of Our Lady were struck by lightning and burned, and seeing this the people of those towns come to request images and crosses and baptism, and as there are few priests, the Indian themselves, seeing the acts the priests perform, cross themselves and sprinkle water on each other.⁷²

Manipulation of the discourse of good and evil was as spontaneous and pervasive as it was destructive in its ultimate effect. For in the hands of a skillful practitioner, concern with the holy faith led naturally to power-plays -- eradicating on paper the line between virtuous purpose and self-serving maneuver. Pedrarias' attempt to have a religious ally appointed to high ecclesiastical position, for example,

was justified as necessary to the expansion of the holy faith -- this task being, as he put it to the sovereign, "the principal thing with which your majesty has charged me with in your service".

After he impugned the character of the rebel Gil González, reported on the obedience of his own men and on God's approval, and made a bid for influence in the ecclesiastical sphere, the narrator next challenged directly the veracity of the rebel's word and vindicated his own. González, whose deceit Pedrarias had already described, was depicted as an ungrateful liar.

I have been informed that Captain Gil Gonzalez, forgetting the benefits he received from me in this kingdom and how much I, trying to serve your majesty, helped him with the expedition under his command, has departed from the truth and told falsehoods to your majesty and those of your very high council. And also they say that an Oviedo who was here filling certain offices for Secretary Lope Concillos and fled secretly in fear of the punishment his crimes merited has presented certain charges against me, and since any guilt on my part should be punished more severely than in another, I humbly beg your sacred majesty, in remuneration for the services I have performed since my childhood and that I did for the blessed Catholic Monarchs of glorious memory, for your grandfather and your father and for your majesty, that you appoint a judge above suspicion to come and review my performance, because I feel sure that your majesty will be informed of my services, and I will be freed from the iniquitous accusations the above two have made against me.⁷³

The Oviedo whom Pedrarias almost casually dismissed as a criminal in 1525 was the same Oviedo, our chronicler, who had

participated in Pedrarias' expedition to Darien in 1514 -- the expedition that, as we saw already, culminated in the execution of Balboa. Eleven years later, the enmity between Pedrarias and Oviedo remained as intense as ever; and would endure 'til their deaths. In the meantime, Oviedo exacted most of his revenge in his famous chronicle -- General y Natural Historia de las Indias, which he addressed, as one would a letter, to the "Sacred, Caeserean, Catholic and Royal Majesty of the Emperor, the King our lord". Oviedo challenged Pedrarias' credibility explicitly.

Pedrarias the governor and his ministers wrote our lord the Emperor that in Nicaragua a city three leagues in scope had been found; and they wrote him other things that were untrue. If the insolent were punished for the exorbitant accounts they write their Prince and sovereign King, they would know that there is no license (where there is shame) for such audacity.

The letters were not only circulated ... they were [also] preached in the pulpits and the principal temples ... All this was done with malice and craftiness, to deceive the King and his Royal Council of the Indies ... I knew very well the inventor of these fictions and knew how much credence his words deserved. And so I told some of the senores of the Royal Council of the Indies...⁷⁴

h. Frightful Eloquence and Royal Legitimacy

The preceding passage illustrates the prevailing belief that if the King's intentions were always good and his wisdom was great, so too was the power of words. And it was the power

of words that undeserving men deployed in their efforts to obtain the signs of prestige that ought to be reserved for the truly virtuous. Thus, the chronicler Oviedo complained that Pedrarias' lieutenant and (yet another) son-in-law -- the conquistador Hernando de Soto -- on a return trip to Spain,

gave such account of his losses, services and merits that he was very well treated by the Emperor, our lord, who made him knight of the order of the apostle Santiago and made him other grants, and appointed him Governor and Captain General. During his stay in Castile, he [also] married one of the daughters of Pedrarias Davila.⁷⁵

Rather than accept the situation, Oviedo exploited it, this time to get at Pedrarias indirectly, through his son-in-law.

He [De Soto] was quite prone to killing Indians, ever since he fought under Pedrarias Davila in the provinces of Castilla del Oro and Nicaragua.⁷⁶

Once again, however, Oviedo seems to transcend his own rancor, by making his frame of reference a universe dominated by greater powers. Hence his use of the politics of suspicion to narrate history as a tale in which masked evil persuades innocent men to stray.

Oh marvelous God, what blindness and rapture hid under [Hernando de Soto's] greed and vain preaching to those deceived soldiers, whom he led into a land on which he had never set foot; a land where three governors more expert than he had become stranded.⁷⁷

The propagation of evil, like the defense of truth and virtue,

was seen as dependent on the power of persuasion. Thus the battle was joined.

Listen Catholic reader, and do not weep less for the vanquished Indians than for their Christian conquistadores, killers of others and of one another. Pay attention to this ill-governed governor [De Soto], instructed in the school of Pedrarias de Avila, in the destruction of the Indians of Castilla del Oro; a graduate in the killing of Nicaragua's indigineous people, yet canonized in Peru, by order of the Pizarros. Unscathed by his infernal ways, he [De Soto] went to Spain loaded with gold. But whether married or single, he could not rest; and returned to the Indies to spill more human blood. Still, not happy with this, he finally lost his life, taking with him to perdition many sinners who were deceived by his spurious words.⁷⁸

In short, Oviedo not only constructed history as story, but also revealed a "true" identity -- one to challenge De Soto's "false" reputation, on earth and beyond. Stated differently, history was a story, and stories were ultimately dependent on the discourse of good and evil, virtue and shame. Narrative simultaneously built and assailed reputations while entrenching a worldview. To repeat, the chronicler's attack on De Soto might be inspired by rancor for his rival, but it was a larger vision (not his own) which invariably led the chronicler to conclude his intricate accounts of treason and intrigue with an implacable moral: sooner or later, malefactors shall be punished.

Stated differently, the chronicler did not look for the causes of jealousy and suspicion in colonial statecraft.

Rather, he described what he saw in the received discourse of the day, thus reasserting the notion of worldly politics as a reflection of a larger conflict. Accordingly, in Oviedo's chronicle, conquistadores who were able to distinguish right from wrong but chose the latter were characterized as "diabolical". Ambiguous characters -- good or evil? -- were those who had both friends and foes, and therefore died in an equally ambiguous state. "Some who wished him ill say that [he died] not in a very Catholic way, while others say differently," wrote the chronicler. The world was filled with animosity, (in the form of endless legal petitions and legal fights), violence always lurking around the corner. "He was knifed while standing before his own door," Oviedo stated, almost casually, while describing the end of yet another disputant. And judgement day never failed to arrive. Sooner or later, the wicked were punished.

Vasco Nunez de Balboa, who had caused the death of the governor Diego de Nicuesa...later died like a traitor, his throat slit...Francisco Picarro ... who was one of Vasco Nunez' accomplices against Nicuesa, died a bad death last year while at the peak of prosperity; he died from a blow to his throat, died with one of his brothers and six others, so that the unjust death of their unfortunate comrade the adelantado Diego de Almagro, worthy of infallible memory, should not be left without punishment or vengeance.⁷⁹

The tragic list went on to include many other conquerors and colonists, blurring throughout the line between social lineage and moral worth. In the passage below, the character-flaws of

corrupt officials are traced back to defiance of God; lowly familial origins; and brazenness.

The danger to their souls is rooted in two or three things. The first and foremost is that they do not fear God. The second is that they use their titles, ranks and robes to conceal the ignoble lineage and baseness of those who lack good blood. An the third and last source of their flaws is their lack of shame. Lavish blood, titles of science and robes, have little value or use without shame.

The damnation that followed from these flaws in turn blurred the line between the social humiliation that takes place within the frame of temporal history and the ineffable penance that awaits sinners in eternity.

Reader, you should know that Licenciante Castaneda [a corrupt judge] died in Spain with a bad reputation -- known as a tyrant and in disgrace with the Emperor and his Royal Council of Indies; in jail, with part of his properties repossessed. And what he owned in this city of Santo Domingo, where he had resided, was sold publicly by order of the Ceasar, and in the name of his fiscal authorities; for [the judge's] person deserved such infamy. Besides it is well that those of you who govern fully understand the far reach of the King's arms and ire. And that none of you should lose your shame and conscience lest you forget that you have a king and a superior judge; and that should the temporal fail, the Eternal and celestial cannot forget the culpability of sinners; nor can He be deceived by astute or bad judges.⁸⁰

Time and again, the power of God manifested itself in the social and political realms. Indeed, divine symmetry governed

the relation between a wrongful act and retribution. The more direct the transgression, the swifter the punishment.

In Leon, Nicaragua, Captain Garavito and others disguised themselves in Moorish costumes, and on horseback they approached some Spanish women who were looking at the fiesta. He said: "Senoras, turn Moorish" [convert]. Praising Mohamad's sect, the captain fell dead on the spot, and spoke not one more word. And Francisco Benitez, Aclas's scribe, the one who was said to have discovered the spies of the adelantado, and notified the governor, died suddenly in Panama three years later. They found his corpse in his hammock. He had gone to rest the previous night entirely healthy. Thus ended the lives of these sinners.⁸¹

In short, conflict among men, though ultimately bounded by God's will, was an extension of the struggle between good and evil.

If you have followed the lesson [the story], you the reader must remember ... how I was treacherously stabbed; how I spent all I owned on seeking justice for myself in Spain, and asking for a [new] governor [against Pedrarias]; and how, in the end, His Ceassarian Majesty, being a most just Prince, granted the governorship of Castilla del Oro to Pedro de los Rios.⁸²

Indeed, neither conquistador nor chronicler challenged their shared frame of reference: the dualist imperial worldview and its discourse, which allowed conquistador and chronicler alike to contest only the specifics of a narrative. Hence the attention to detail and the intense disputes over particulars.

Gil Gonzalez and Andres Nino bragged of having

covered 650 leguas [leagues]...Gil Gonzalez said that he walked 320 leguas, from [which expedition] he returned with 112,000 pesos given to him by caciques, more than half of which was of poor-quality gold; and he wrote to me that 32,000 souls or more had been baptized out of their own volition. But it seems to me that the new converts to the faith understood otherwise, for it soon became convenient for Gil Gonzalez and his people to leave that land. They found large populations and discovered an enormous lagoon, which they thought was a fresh-water sea and on whose coasts live a multitude of Indians, whom I saw later (and much better) when I went to that land... These armadores [privateers] must not be denied the merit of their work. But ... the journey ... in reality was far less than as portrayed by Andres Nino and Gil Gonzalez...⁸³

Once again, the practices of empire were not being questioned. Rather, criticism was directed at practitioners by rivals. Thus, Pedrarias questioned the veracity of the claims made not only by his foe Gil González but also by his own lieutenant Francisco Hernández de Córdoba, regarding the alleged conversion of thousands of Indians. Accordingly, Pedrarias demanded a "Probanza" or Proof of Merit.⁸⁴

Pedraria's disputation was a retaliatory attack on Hernández de Córdoba, whom he once had depicted in a letter as a paragon of loyalty and valor. But now Hernández de Córdoba, like all the others, was seeking independence from his mentor and superior, Pedrarias. The latter felt betrayed. As the pro-Pedrarias chronicler Pascual de Andagoya wrote,

Francisco Hernandez who settled that land, sensing himself powerful in numbers, and being vile as he was, tried to rebel against Pedrarias, and would

not obey him or anyone he might send. To this end, [Hernandez] gathered all the principals of these two pueblos so that they would write Your Majesty requesting him as governor.⁸⁵

In his rebellion, Hernandez de Cordoba tried to attain independence by "affirming his prestige".⁸⁶ Hence his efforts to make the cities of León and Granada worthy of notice. And hence Pedrarias' counter-attack (demanding a Proof of Merit). But Oviedo attacked Pedrarias on this point as well.

But such a [Proof] could also be made in Castilla del Oro, where Pedrarias was governor for fifteen years or more. And in this case, I think, the Indians who are baptized as adolescents and even older who can be said to be Christians are very rare.⁸⁷

In the meantime, however, after the Probanzas were dispatched, Pedrarias ordered Hernandez de Cordoba beheaded in the Plaza Mayor of Leon, which he himself had designed two years earlier. Once Hernandez de Cordoba was eliminated, Pedrarias became governor of Leon, the provincial capital of Nicaragua.⁸⁸

As for Oviedo, the King granted him -- his "loyal vassal" --the privilege of displaying on his coat of arms the four stars of the Cruz del Sur -- "so that they may testify to and publicize [Oviedo's] undoubtable exploits and great services rendered to Us in the New Sphere of the Indies".⁸⁹

I. The Last Province in Central America

Narratives about the clash between good and evil played a central role in the formation of identity until the end of conquest in Central America. The province of Costa Rica was "pacified" years after the treacherous fights for territorial control among conquerors had come to an end in the rest of Central America. Accordingly, narrative accounts authored by colonial Costa Ricans were less sharp -- in tone and content -- than those out of Nicaragua, or even Guatemala. But the difference between them was one of degrees, not essence. Accounts by Juan Vazquez de Coronado, conqueror of Costa Rica, for example, follow the same story-line as those by Balboa and Pedrarias.

In his letter of 1562 to Philip II, for example, Vazquez Coronado told his king about how he had served him faithfully against all odds. He had overcome the tribulations of the rainy season, as well as lack of funds, an onerous debt, the bellicosity of the local Indians, and most importantly, the disobedience and betrayal of certain Spaniards.

The conqueror also wrote the President of the Audiencia of Guatemala, relating the dutiful manner in which he executed the Requerimiento -- a legal requirement for a just war -- before declaring hostilities. And he reported that he took care of the wounded after battle. Indeed, his obedience to the king was so meticulous it naturally faded into benevolence towards the Indians and their chiefs.

I sent for the caciques [chiefs] ... [they] arrived and rendered service to Your Majesty. I charged the corregidor of Nicoya to look after the caciques and commanded that they not be asked for anything. I also told the vicar to travel some twenty leagues to indoctrinate them. And I supplied them with provisions and other things with which they left very contentedly.⁹⁰

In a later account to the king, Vazquez de Coronado was more explicit on this point.

I gave [the cacique] Acerri two hundred pesos in clothing and goods, and I treated him with great love and benevolence, for he was the first cacique who came to see me. This was so efficacious that it was publicized throughout the land, and the cacique of Oricci came to render obedience and to recognize his serfdom.⁹¹

Exceptions, of course, had to be made, but they were carefully justified. Thus, Vazquez de Coronado related to the king that

the most harmful to the pacification of this province is a cacique called Garabito who in the beginning gave Your Majesty due recognition, but later rebelled. Nor is he content with sacrificing a soldier he apprehended from Lincenciate Cavallon and coming out armed to kill him, and with having committed other insults. He also exhorts and threatens others not to render the obedience they owe Your Majesty, and not to recognize God our Lord. Accordingly, I have judged him. He is condemned to death; and war shall be made on him, as a person who has rebelled.⁹²

In the end, however, Vazquez de Coronado was rewarded by God, who chose "to heal" his men. As he gained a reputation for

fidelity and self-abnegation, Vazquez Coronado's identity became firmly established. In other words, as time went on, the contrast between him and other Spaniards became increasingly sharp. "I shall serve until I die; I shall spend until no one dares lend me anymore; I shall labor until my body loses its soul," he wrote the President of the Audiencia in Guatemala.

Displays of self-abnegation, then, remained central to the process of identity-formation in a hierarchical society. But the accounts of the conqueror of Costa Rica also contained the beginnings of a seemingly inconsequential theme; a theme that would recur time and again, gradually developing into the story of Costa Rican exceptionalism.

This theme of exceptionalism was fully developed in the nineteenth century into a national story depicting Costa Rica as the Central American exception. In this story, the other nations of the region, particularly neighboring Nicaragua, were violent and corrupt, while Costa Rica, though impoverished and neglected during the colonial period, was also from the start law-abiding and peaceable. Thus, the genesis of Costa Rica's identity-formation can be traced back to the narrative accounts of its conquerors -- accounts which, crafted in the discourse of good and evil, sought to exalt the self-abnegation of an individual. Referring to the Spaniards he recruited in the neighboring province, the conqueror of Costa Rica wrote: "they all leave me; and they do well,

because they feel they will not be remunerated".⁹³

Nicaraguans, then, were merely human; unwilling, like men everywhere, to sacrifice for anything other than self-interest. The Costa Rican, in contrast, was prepared to sacrifice 'til death for God and King.

Conclusion

In sixteenth-century Central America, if acquisition and maintenance of social identity was the central objective of politics, narrative was its principal means. A conqueror who triumphed both on the battlefield and in the field of persuasion, for example, could make his obscure lineage illustrious and his new locality venerable. Conversely, a notable who lost out in a duel of narratives might see his identity blemished, perhaps even destroyed.

In the competitive process of identity-formation, actors as narrators not only opened up the possibility for a redistribution of economic and symbolic resources but became caught in the strictures of their own textual narratives. Simply put, narratives had a recursive effect on those who deployed them, forcing them to conciliate the pursuit of personal ambition with the requirements of the archetypical virtuous identity. And competitors did find ways to engage in keen, even cutthroat competition while simultaneously honoring the dictat for self-abnegation that the discourse of good and evil imposed on all men but the king. As Chapter 3 will show,

self-seeking actors managed through a series of imaginative adaptations of legalistic, religious and martial ceremonies to reach for greater autonomy, honor and wealth, while upholding their image as virtuous beings. The upshot, however, was that they did much more than conciliate the pursuit of power with the preservation of identity. By honoring crown, church and imperial worldview, conquerors and colonists reaffirmed the discourse of good and evil. But they also weakened the de facto power of these institutions.

Indeed, the next two chapters will show that as new variants of such conciliatory practices emerged, they gradually rendered colonial Spanish America a socio-political hybrid characterized at once by high degrees of structuration and deep spontaneity; a competitive system that was sustained by mutually conditioning opposites -- an entrenched aristocratic tradition in which dominant groups were vulnerable to abrupt dislocation; an obdurate, almost liturgical formalism that easily faded into violence; and a hierarchical rigidity that paradoxically engendered suppleness, if not anarchy.

We will see, for example, how an entire system of labor exploitation -- the *encomienda* -- was slowly reformed out of existence. Powerful groups responded forcefully; some lost, and some won. But winners often vanished from the landscape, and losers often clung tenaciously to their social dignity, which they then used to regain partially their lost power.

Moreover, the system of values on which the defunct encomienda had rested, remained intact. And even as colonials became ensnared in relations of mutual suspicion and betrayal, the requisites for the attainment of privileges remained absolute -- faith in God, fidelity to the Crown, and selfless valor. In other words, the constitutive elements of the virtuous social identity were not altered. Actors, however, had to struggle to keep their identities, for as the colonial regime developed, there emerged the distinct possibility of becoming a "no-one".

1. See John Crow, The Epic of Latin America (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 68.
2. Competence and probity alone did not qualify aspirants to the office in charge of this delicate task. If there was an attribute that recommended a candidate well it was trustworthiness. In return, the dignity of the office was exalted, even if its duties often resembled those of a vigilante. For example, the president of the Casa de Contratacion was expected to supervise the embarkation of passengers, making sure that no one would go without a license, and that licenses were authentic.
Bernard Moses, The Establishment of Spanish Rule in America (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, 1965), 20-26; and 30.
3. Ibid., 34.
4. Ibid., 17-19.
5. Mark Burkholder and Lyman Johnson, Colonial Latin America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 72-74.
6. Crow, op. cit., 166.
7. Moses, op. cit., 68-71.
8. James Lockhart and Stuart B. Schwartz, Early Latin America, A history of colonial Spanish America and Brazil (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 105.
9. Crow, op. cit., 167.
10. Ursula Lamb, "Cristobal de Tapia v. Nicolás de Ovando, Residencia Fragment of 1509," The Hispanic American Historical Review, XXXIII, No.3 (August, 1953), 427-441.
11. Ibid.
12. Lewis Hanke, "Free Speech in Sixteenth-Century Spanish America," The Hispanic American Historical Review, XXVI, No. 2 (May, 1946), 135-143.
13. Ibid., 135-143.
14. Ibid.
15. Roberto González Echevarría, Myth and Archive, A theory of Latin American narrative (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 10.

16. Howard Cline, "The Relaciones Geograficas of the Spanish Indies, 1577-1586," The Hispanic American Historical Review, XLIV, No.3 (August, 1964), 341-374.
17. Diego Palacio García, "Relación y Forma que el Licenciado Palacio Oidor de la Real Audiencia de Guatemala, hizo para los que hubieren de visitar, contar, tasar, y repartir en las provincias de este distrito, 1576," published in María del Carmen León Cazares, ed., Carta-relación de Diego García de Palacio a Felipe II Sobre la Provincia de Guatemala, 8 de marzo de 1576 (Mexico: Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico, 1983).
18. James Lockhart and Stuart B. Schwartz, Early Latin America, A History of Spanish America and Brazil (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 120-121.
19. Hanke, op. cit.
20. Cited in Luis Cardoza y Aragón, Guatemala, las líneas de sus mano (Managua: Editorial Nueva Nicaragua, 1985), 232.
21. Hanke, op. cit.
22. Lockhart and Schwartz, op. cit., 103.
23. Henry Wagner, "Three Studies on the Same Subject: Bernal Díaz del Castillo; The Family of Bernal Díaz del Castillo; Notes on Writings By and About Bernal Díaz del Castillo," The Hispanic American Historical Review, 25, 1945, 155-199.
24. Ibid.
25. Robert Chamberlein, "Probanza de Méritos y Servicios of Blas González, Conquistador of Yucatán," The Hispanic American Historical Review, (November, 1948), pp. 526-536.
26. González-Echevarría, op. cit., 44-46.
27. Lockhart, James and Stuart B. Schwartz (1989) Early Latin America, A history of colonial Spanish America and Brazil, New York: Cambridge University Press.
28. Lockhart and Schwartz, op. cit., 79-80.
29. Hector Perez-Brignoli, A Brief History of Central America (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).
30. Hector Perez-Brignoli, A Brief History of Central America (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 34-35.

31. Irwin Blacker and Harry Rosen, The Golden Conquistadores (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1960), 44.

32. Ibid., 45.

33. Ibid., 45.

34. "I am told," he wrote, "that the other sea is very good for canoe navigation, for it is always smooth and never rough like the sea on this side. I believe that there are many islands in that sea. They say that there are many large pearls and that the caciques have baskets of them".

Ibid., 49.

35. "It is a most astonishing thing," Balboa asserted, "and without equal that our Lord has made you the lord of this land. It should not be forgotten that your most Royal Highness will be served by sending me reinforcements. Then, if our Lord favors me, I will discover things so grand, and places where so much gold and such wealth may be had, that a great part of the world might be conquered with it".

Ibid., 49.

36. Ibid., 49.

37. Ibid., 52.

38. Ibid., 52.

39. Ibid., 53.

40. Ibid., 43-54.

41. For a historical narrative of these events see Blacker and Rosen, op. cit., 54.

42. Blacker and Rosen, op. cit., 55-56.

43. Ibid., 56-57.

44. Ibid., 47.

45. Ibid.

46. Ibid., 59.

47. Blacker and Rosen, op. cit., 60.

48. Ibid., 60.

49. Blacker and Rosen, op. cit., 61-62

50. Blacker and Rosen, op. cit., 61-62
51. Between 1532 and 1546 Oviedo lived most of the time in Santo Domingo, where he began his *Historia Natural y General de las Indias*. He came to Tierra Firme when native life and ways were still in existence. Oviedo also clashed at court with Las Casas in acrimonious debates over Indian policy.
Carl Sauer Ortwin, The Early Spanish Main (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 38.
52. Blacker and Rosen, op. cit., 69.
53. Sauers, op. cit., 280.
54. Sauers, op. cit., 279.
55. Gonzálo Fernández De Oviedo, Historia General y Natural de las Indias, Islas y Tierra Firme del Mar Oceano, in Nicaragua en los Cronistas de Indias: Oviedo (Managua: Fondo de Promoción Cultural, Banco de América, Editorial y Litografía San José, 1976), 156.
56. *Ibid.*, 150.
57. *Ibid.*, 150.
58. *Ibid.*, 157-158.
59. James Lockhart and Enrique Otte, eds., Letters and People of the Spanish Indies, Sixteenth Century (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 9-10.
60. Lokhart and Schwartz, op. cit., 78.
61. *Ibid.*, 67-68.
62. Sauer, op. cit., 151.
63. *Ibid.*, 151.
64. Burkholder and Johnson, op. cit., 76.
65. Moses, op. cit., 82-83.
66. Blacker and Rosen, op. cit., 204.
67. Luis Cardoza y Aragón, Guatemala, las líneas de su mano (Managua: Editorial Nueva Nicaragua, 1985), 222-223.
68. *Ibid.*, 223.

69. Ibid., 224.
70. Picon-Salas, op. cit., 70.
71. Lockhart and Otte, op. cit., 11.
72. Ibid., 11.
73. Ibid., 13-14.
74. Oviedo, op. cit., 376.
75. Ibid., 114.
76. Ibid., 115.
77. Ibid., 116-117.
78. Ibid., 117-118.
79. Ibid., 205.
80. Ibid., 138-139.
81. Ibid., 143.
82. Ibid., 157.
83. Ibid., 160-61.
84. The dispute was summarized by the chronicler Oviedo:

[In] the time when Pedrarias was governor of Nicaragua, word came from Spain that when Gil Gonzales Davila discovered that land in the service of the Emperor our lord, he had converted and baptized 32,000 Indians or more; that captain Francisco Fernandez had also baptized some other great number; and that governor Diego Lopez de Salcedo had made strides in the conversion of those people. But since Pedrarias had all three as notorious enemies, and could see that he was being charged of negligence, he wished to do a probanza [proof of merit] stating that their claims were a farce and that these people were not Christians.
85. For the original narrative see Pascual de Andagoya's, which was recently published in Adrián Blazquez, ed., Relación y Documentos (Madrid: Historia 16, 1986).

86. Jorge Eduardo Arellano, "Vida y Muerte de León Viejo," Boletín Nicaraguense de Bibliografía y Documentación, No. 57, (May-July, 1988), 13-20.
87. Oviedo, op. cit., 311.
88. Ibid., 15.
89. Eduardo Pérez-Valle, Nicaragua en los Cronistas de Indias: Oviedo (Managua: Fondo de Promoción Cultural, Banco de América, Editorial y Litografía San José, 1976), 2.
90. For Vazquez de Coronado's text see Cartas de Relación Sobre la Conquista de Costa Rica (San José: Academia de Geografía e Historia de Costa Rica, 1964).
91. Ibid.
92. Ibid.
93. Ibid.

CHAPTER 3

Dramaturgical Obedience and Central Authority: Weak Absolutism

The historical foundations of Central American society are inextricably entwined with the identity-formation of localities and corporate groups. As we saw in Chapter 2, fidelity and obedience to king and church were the constitutive attributes of virtuous identity throughout the conquest and initial phase of colonization -- a period during which the regnant worldview held socio-political order to be a reflection of a vast, spiritual universe. This worldview manifested itself most pervasively in the discourse of good and evil, and as Chapter 2 showed, conquerors and colonists used this discourse to craft narratives which proved them self-abnegating -- and thus worthy of royal trust and recognition -- while pursuing self-interest.

The present chapter examines more closely the recursive effect of these textual narratives on the behavior of colonials; and argues that if colonials adapted to the divide-and-rule methods of the crown by using narrative to dupe the king's agents, they also used narrative to dupe themselves. Illustrative of such adaptive practices was the ritualization of the "Requerimiento", or requirement -- a legal prerequisite for a "just war" against Indians and for the taking of war-slaves. Meant to offer the "heathen" a choice between hostilities and peace, the Requerimiento often went unheard

because conquerors read the text far away from the battle ground.

The widespread ritualistic conciliation of fidelity and the pursuit of self-interest, I argue here, both idealized sovereign power and caused its de facto erosion. Hence the historical pattern of oscillation on the part of the central authority, as self-declared absolute monarchs either dictated laws that partially revoked preceding decrees, or issued one exemption after another. In this way, for example, Indian slavery and the Encomienda were very gradually reformed out of existence. But even as the crown succeeded in its assault on these institutions, Central Americans used narratives to pressure the crown for exemptions; and the crown, by accepting at face value the ceremonial compliance of the appellants, was able to grant them such favors without appearing to contradict itself in the process.

The historical irony of this pattern of oscillation becomes apparent if we recall that narratives were initially deployed by rivals in response to the crown's deliberate policy of divide and rule, as monarchs, caught in the traditional fear of combined feudal powers, encouraged their subjects overseas to inform on one another. Indeed, no sovereign could even begin to exercise power without first studying the colonial narrative accounts that led to great theological debates and to the intrigues that plagued the royal court. Through its avid collection of intelligence, a

legalistic, centralizing sovereign averted paralysis throughout the sixteenth century -- the formative period of colonial society. But even as the legalistic, centralizing character of sovereign power was reasserted in the transmission of information, the crown grew increasingly vulnerable to pressures associated with identity-formation and the attendant competition over privileges. This chapter shows the ways in which those who struggled for socio-political identity and privilege reduced the sovereign's autonomy in the area where it mattered most: the treatment of Indians, both as "souls" and laborers.

But this chapter also shows that the crown's vacillation represented only the most glaring expression of a broader, structural contradiction: Colonial society, though rigidly hierarchical in structure and dogmatic in outlook, was rarely in repose. Indeed, conclusive political settlements were unusual, if not impossible in this seemingly immutable world. This chapter suggests that the illusion of immutability, like the growing intensity and inconclusiveness of colonial politics, was due to the adaptations made by crown and colonists. At once imaginative and pragmatic, a series of adaptive narrational practices prevented systemic breakdown, but also heightened intra-elite suspicion. For as we shall see, these practices, which gave paramount importance to image in competitions over identity and privilege, also entrenched the discourse of good and evil.

a. Hesitant Power

The spiritual nature of the Indians and their treatment at the hand of the conquerors was from the start the subject of intense debate among Spanish theologians and jurists. One school of medieval thought argued that a Christian ruler serving the pope could legitimately declare war on "infidels" who rejected papal authority. But an opposing school found this claim inadequate. A third school soon emerged to justify conquest and rule, according to which war was just if,

the natives sought to prevent the Spaniards from living among them in peace, opposed the preaching of the gospel, or sought to return converts to idolatry. In addition, the Spaniards could intervene to save innocent people from cannibalism or other "unjust death" or to aid native friends and allies. The eminent humanist and translator of Aristotle, Dr. Juan Gines' de Sepulveda, was more direct. Employing Aristotle's theory of natural slavery, Sepulveda argued that the natives' natural inferiority, idolatries and other sins justified war to civilize them. That is, the barbarity that constituted the natives' very nature vindicated their conquest and even enslavement. Moreover, war would facilitate their conversion to Christianity.¹

These debates, to be sure, influenced royal Indian policy. But so too did conquerors and colonists, who took slaves of war, as well as the so-called "slaves of rescue" -- Indian servants who passed from the hands of their Indian masters into those of Spaniards. Thus, when the queen issued an anti-slavery decree in 1530, the municipal council of Guatemala reacted swiftly with a letter to the Crown. The colonists of Guatemala

wrote,

In this land, more than in any other, it is most insufferable that [war] slaves are not permitted, for the people here are indomitable and obstinate; and in order to subject them to Your Majesty's service, it is necessary that they think that their sacrifices and many other excesses which they commit daily shall not be tolerated. As for the slaves the Indians themselves hold, giving such slaves to Spaniards saves them from being sacrificed to their idols, and from being eaten, as it is their custom. In addition, the great majority of these slaves, by moving among Spaniards, are converted to the Catholic faith and shall become good Christians. Above all, however, the King will lose a considerable sum in gold pesos, for the Spaniards have only begun to enjoy the fruits given them by Indians who hand them some slaves for labor and for the extraction of gold, which now shall cease because of Your Majesty's order.²

To reinforce its letter, the municipal council sent an eloquent envoy who, in the name of the city of Santiago and other cities and villas of Guatemala, personally reiterated the letter's "petition" before the monarchs. The letter and the envoy's efforts combined to produce a favorable result: the crown amended its anti-slavist decree by allowing conquistadores in Guatemala to take "rescue-slaves". Moreover, this partial revocation of a royal decree by the monarchs themselves was soon followed by a royal decree that allowed for the taking of war-slaves, thus completing the de facto rescission of the original decree.³

In this process of gradual, reflexive annulment, ritual and narrative, on the one hand, enabled the crown to reassert

its unquestionable authority while yielding to pressures from its subjects, and on the other, allowed those subjects to conciliate self-abnegating submission and self-interested ambition. Take the practice I call dramaturgical obedience. Though embedded in the ceremonial and liturgical strictures of fidelity to king and church, dramaturgical obedience made space for the exercise of discretionary judgement, and paradoxically, for spontaneity. Above all, the practitioner of dramaturgical obedience exalted faithful submission to God and king while pursuing an independent course, both in moments of great uncertainty, like during the conquest, and in the more settled period of colonial government.

One instance of dramaturgical obedience was the act of compliance with the Requerimiento -- a document drawn by jurists and theologians, which conquerors were "required" to read to the "pagans" before battle. The notion of the Requerimiento was rooted in the tradition of the Reconquista -- an experience of centuries which engendered, as J. H. Elliott noted, "an elaborate code of rules about the 'just war', and the rights of the victors over the vanquished population, including the right to enslave it".⁴

In the Iberian peninsula, the Requerimiento had been presented to the Moorish infidel, offering him the "choice" of Christianity and Spanish rule. It is noteworthy that the "infidel" at least grasped the literal sense of the offer, since he was likely to understand Castilian Spanish and was

familiar with Christian dogma. In the Indies, however, the document made no sense at all to the natives, who spoke an entirely different language, both literally and figuratively.

If the Requerimiento had little to do with the Indians, it had everything to do with the internal conflicts of the conquerors -- conflicts engendered by their shared worldview and its discourse. The crown, for example, proscribed enslavement of the Indians. But as competition among bidders for discovery contracts grew keener, so did the need to resolve the conflict between material interest and spiritual obligation. No definitive solution was found, for every possible solution derived from the view of the conquest as an enterprise both temporal and spiritual. And it was precisely this view that gave rise to one contradiction after another. The Queen, for example, issued a provision which prohibited the capture or injury of Indians, whether living on islands or mainland, but made an exception of a "certain people called Cannibals" -- first identified and named by Columbus in the language of good and evil.

The Queen's provision read:

If said Cannibals continue to resist and do not wish to admit and receive to their lands the Captains and men who may be on such voyages by my orders not to hear them in order to be taught our Sacred Catholic Faith and to be in my service and obedience, they may be captured and taken to these my Kingdoms and Domains and to other parts and places to be sold.⁵

The Queen, then, was caught in the duality of royal discourse, which was so pervasive it presented an opening for Spaniards whose identity was tied up with a tradition of conflict with feudal lords in Iberia. These foes of the lords were the powerful religious orders whose members were often born themselves to noble families but had been barred from inheritance by the law of primogeniture.⁶

It was the Dominican friars, for example, who first went up directly against powerful colonists with a sermon preached on the last Sunday of Advent in 1511. Before a congregation of the governor, officials, and citizens of Santo Domingo, the preacher -- Montesino -- asserted that they were living in mortal sin because of their treatment of the Indians, who should become their Christian brothers. The preacher "thundered" at the congregation:

Tell me, by what right do you keep these Indians in cruel servitude? On what authority have you waged a detestable war against these people, who dwelt quietly and peacefully on their own land?... Are these not men? Have they not rational souls?⁷

The colonists retaliated by sending protests to Spain, and asking for the recall of the Dominicans. The friars, in response, sent Montesino to the Spanish Court to plead the case of the natives. He got limited official hearing, but the terms of the debate were set. Indeed, the Dominicans questioned even the crown's right to conquer and rule over the Indies. In classical fashion, the king, whose rule was

supposed to be more moral and benevolent than that of "pagans", responded by convening scholars to discuss the issue. The discussants concluded that the papacy could (as it had already done), grant control over the pagans to the Christian monarchs who then bore the responsibility to convert them. If the pagans rejected Christianity and fealty to the Castilian Crown, the conquerors could declare and prosecute a "just war".⁸

The Requerimiento, a procedural precondition and legal prerequisite to a just war, read as follows:

I ---, servant of the high and mighty kings of Castile and Leon, civilizers of barbarous nations, their messenger and captain, notify and make known to you, in the best way I can, that God our Lord, one and eternal created the heavens and the earth, and one man and one woman, from whom you and we and all the people of the earth were and are descendants, procreated, and all those who shall come after us. But the vast numbers of generations which have proceeded from them, in the course of more than five thousand years that have elapsed since the creation of the world, made it necessary that some of the human race should disperse in one direction and some in another, and that they should divide themselves into many kingdoms and provinces, as they could sustain and preserve themselves in one alone.

All these people were given in charge, by God our Lord, to one person, named St. Peter, who was thus made lord and superior of all the people on earth and head of the whole human lineage, whom all should obey, wherever they might live and whatever might be their law, sect or belief. He gave him also the whole world for his service and jurisdiction, and though he desired that he should establish his chair in Rome, as a place most convenient for governing the world, yet he permitted that he might establish his chair in any other part of the world, and judge and govern all

the nations, Christians, Moors, Jews, Gentiles, and whatever other sect or belief might be. This person was denominated Pope, that is to say, admirable, supreme, father and guardian, because he is father and governor of all mankind. This holy father was obeyed and honored as lord, king, and superior of the universe by those who lived in his time, and in like manner has been obeyed and honored by all those who have been elected to the Pontificate, and thus it has continued unto the present day, and will continue until the end of the world.

One of these pontiffs of whom I have spoken, as lord of the world, made a donation of these islands and continents, of the ocean, seas, and all that they contain, to the Catholic kings of Castile, who at the time were Ferdinand and Isabella of glorious memory, and to their successors, our sovereigns, according to the tenor of certain papers drawn up for the purpose (which you may see if you desire). Thus his majesty is king and sovereign of these islands and continents by virtue of the said donation; and as king and sovereign certain islands and almost all to whom this has been notified have received his majesty and obeyed and served him. And, moreover, like good subjects and with good will and without any resistance or delay, the moment they were informed of the foregoing, they obeyed all the religious men sent among them to preach and teach our Holy Faith; and these of their free and cheerful will, without any condition or reward, became Christians, and continue so to be. And his majesty received them kindly and benignantly, and ordered that they should be treated like his other subjects and vassals: you also are required and obliged to do the same. Therefore in the best manner I can, I pray and entreat you that you consider well what I have said, and that you take whatever time is reasonable to understand and deliberate upon it, and that you recognize the church for sovereign and superior of the universal world, and the supreme Pontiff, called Pope, in her name, and his majesty in his place, as superior and sovereign king of the islands and Terra Firma, by virtue of the said donation; and that you consent that these religious fathers declare and preach to you the foregoing. And if you shall do so lo, you will do well and will do that to which you are bounden and obliged; and his majesty, and I in his name, will receive you with all due love and charity, and will leave you, your wives and children free from servitude,

that you may freely do with these and with yourselves whatever you please and think proper, as have done the inhabitants of the other islands. And besides this, his majesty will give you many privileges and exemptions and grant you many favours. if you do not do this, or wickedly and intentionally delay to do so, I certify to you that by the aid of God I will powerfully invade and make war upon you in all parts and modes that I can, and will subdue you to the yoke and obedience of the church and of his majesty, and I will take your wives and children and make slaves of them, and sell them as such, and dispose of them as his majesty may command; and I will take your effects and I will do you all the harm and injury in my power, as vassals who will not obey or receive their sovereign and who resist and oppose him. And I protest that the deaths and disasters which may in this manner be occasioned will be the fault of yourselves and not of his majesty, nor of me, nor of the cavaliers who accompany me. And of what I here tell you and require of you, I call upon the notary here present to give me his signed testimonial.⁹

The Requerimiento, then, was a story within a story, depicting the initial phase of the conquest as an integral part of the history of the world. The inner story told of the divine creation, the subsequent vicissitudes of the human race, the delegation of power by God to the pope, and the donation of the new territories made by the pope to the monarchs of Castile. The outer story related the dependence of the sovereigns on an indomitable but faithful conqueror. Accordingly, the Requerimiento conveyed a sense of inexorability. Just as Church and King obeyed God's dictat, the conqueror obeyed Church and King. Indeed, the actions of the conqueror could only be judged by the quality and precision of his obedience. Hence the legalistic nature of his

obligation in the fulfillment of the Requerimiento.

The Requerimiento, however, also conveyed a sense of profound uncertainty. The "heathen" would either accept the truth of a story being told to them for the first time, or reject it. Their "choice" would decide the fate of all involved. Once in process, the Requerimiento often turned into ceremonial offering of free choice; or more broadly, a kind of martial liturgy in which the "heathen" were but a symbolic representation of mankind's central dilemma: redemption or perdition. Thus, expeditionary captains, obedient to their Sovereign and fearful of God, adhered to the ceremony of the Requerimiento before engaging in battle with the Indians. Pedro de Alvarado declared in Guatemala,

Let it be known [to Calil Balam] that our coming is beneficial for his people because we bring tidings of the true God and Christian Religion, sent by the Pope -- the Vicar of Jesus Christ, God and Man -- and the Emperor King of Spain, so that you may become Christians peacefully, of your own free will; but should you refuse the peace we offer, then the death and destruction that will follow will be entirely of your own account.¹⁰

And Gil González executed the Requerimiento in his conquest of Nicaragua; Oviedo, the chronicler we encountered in Chapter 2, in turn related the conqueror's display of valor and fealty.

[González] begged [the chief] to receive him in his pueblo with his Indians and all his people without fear; that he would tell him many other great things about this God, the knowledge of which would

lead to much pleasure; but that if he did not wish to do this, and refused to be a vassal of the Christians' great King, then he should come out to the battlefield.¹¹

But the reading of the Requerimiento's legalistic and theological narrative was for the benefit not of the "pagan" but of the faithful. The Requerimiento, for example, was frequently read far away from the Indians about to be engaged in battle, or without the aid of a translator. The Requerimiento

was read to trees and empty huts when no Indians were to be found. Captains muttered its theological phrases into their beards on the edge of sleeping Indian settlements, or even a league away before starting the formal attack, and at times some leather-lunged Spanish notary hurled its sonorous phrases after the Indians as they fled into the mountains. Once it was read in camp before the soldiers to the beat of the drum. Ship captains would sometimes have the document read from the deck as they approached an island, and at night would send out enslaving expeditions, whose leaders would shout the traditional Castilian war cry "Santiago!" rather than read the Requirement before they attacked the near-by villages.¹²

This self-serving ritualization of the Requerimiento, however, did not result in socio-political quiescence. Instead, it reaffirmed the ideological entwinement of the temporal and the spiritual, as well as the notion that fidelity to the Crown was indispensable to the formation of virtuous identity. In other words, it trapped the sovereign in the duality that justified the imperial quest; and it trapped the subjects of

the Crown into the pattern whereby the privileges constitutive of social identity were granted on the basis of obedience.

Accordingly, the Crown had to contend with criticism of the conquest and to honor the claims made by conquerors -- who in turn, as practitioners of the *requerimiento*, were exposed to attacks from rivals. At every step, sovereign and people alike were caught in the duality of their discourse. On the one hand, the Spaniards' perception of the encounter between themselves and the Indians was shaped by the dogmatic language they used to describe it; by the vocabulary of faith through which they apprehended reality. According to this perception, the new infidels should surrender their "scandalous" customs and ceremonies -- idolatry, nudity, human sacrifice, cannibalism, and frequent bathing; and embrace the Christians and their "sacred" rites. But on the other hand, not even the conviction of dogma brought calm, for even its rites led inexorably to internal contradiction. Baptism of the Indians, for instance, forced the Church to provide the sacraments of marriage, confession, communion and confirmation.¹³

And the more Christian Indians seemed, the more their fate encouraged debate among Spaniards. The exploitation of Indian labor, the cornerstone of the colonial economy for most of the sixteenth century, posed the quintessential dilemma. Repeatedly, the Crown became involved in debates that were at once theological, moral and juridical. No mere academic

exercises, these debates put at stake royal policy on issues such as enslavement, servitude, trusteeship, and labor drafts -- in other words, the very fate of vanquished and conqueror alike. Both Indians and Spaniards employed as best they could the discourse of the debates to craft narratives which in turn served as claims for their rights and privileges. Succintly put, the more coherent their shared discourse was rendered by competitive pressures, the greater the capability of actors to pursue deeply conflictual goals within a common systemic context.

Thus, even though the Requerimiento broke the paralysis induced by royal suspicion of its conquistadores and the conquistadores' fear of a mistrustful sovereign, it did not lead to political quiescence. Chroniclers, even those who were advocates of forced Indian labor, used the actual practice of the Requerimiento to attack their rivals.¹⁴

The crown, for its part, issued corrective instructions. In Guatemala, the crown decreed that the bishop and governor were to go together, or alone if one or the other was absent or indisposed, and supervise the requerimiento done to the Indians in arms. If neither the bishop nor the governor was able to attend, they were to name two fully-trusted clerics or priests, both of good conscience, as observers of the requerimiento (conducted by the captain through "faithful" interpreters). The procedure was also to take place before a scribe and witnesses; and once completed, the Indians were to

be questioned and examined by the bishop and the governor, who would determine whether a "just war" could be waged against the rebels. Should they find in the affirmative, then they would declare war, and the King would grant license to the local Spaniards to commence hostilities, as well as allow them to take and sell war-slaves.¹⁵

But the Requerimiento, for us bizarre and odious, was eminently pragmatic, perhaps more so than any modern political device characteristic of the "rational" era -- say, the negotiation table. Succintly put, the requerimiento enabled emperor and conqueror temporarily to transcend the most intractable contradictions of an empire embedded in the age of faith. Specifically, it justified the taking of war-slaves at a time when the spiritual nature of the Indians had yet to be determined. Indeed, the Inquisition was initially non-existent in Spanish America, and was quite moderate after its introduction, precisely because of this indeterminacy of the Indian soul. Of course, inquisitorial tasks were limited in the colonies because Iberian emigrants were carefully scrutinized by the House of Trade authorities before departure for the New World. And as the historian John Crow wrote, "sometimes priests came aboard a parting ship to make a final check. A man could be a syphilitic or a criminal and still remain aboard, but if there was the slightest doubt as to the orthodoxy of his faith he was thrown off".¹⁶

But the most compelling reason for the late-arrival of

the Holy Tribunal in the New World had to do with the spiritual nature of the Indians. The Inquisition

was never allowed to touch [the Indians]. It was considered that since the natives had had no previous opportunity to know the true faith they should not be held so strictly accountable for their mistakes. These slips were not sins but errors, and corrections, not inquisitorial penalties, should be administered. For many years after the conquest, in fact, there was a difference of opinion among the Spaniards as to whether the Indian, with his limited mind and soul, was worthy of sharing in all the sacred rites of the Church. Discussion on this point became so bitter that in 1537 Pope Paul III issued a special bull stating that the native Americans were henceforth to be considered by all as rational human beings capable of receiving the holy sacraments the same as any white man.¹⁷

The pragmatic effect of ritual becomes clear if we consider that the requerimiento made possible the taking of war-slaves before the special papal bull was issued. Indeed, the Requerimiento took into account the "technical" considerations that precluded the need for the Inquisition, yet at the same time retained the coercive power of the institution and modified the execution of that power along functional lines. The Inquisition, by definition, could not produce an enslaved labor force,¹⁸ since the punishment for heresy was death (the only crime thus punishable). In contrast, the Requerimiento could, and did, produce a pool of slave labor.

Put another way, the Requerimiento, which I have previously called a kind of martial liturgy, conciliated the temporal and spiritual duties and aspirations of the crown

with those of the conquistadores. Hence the simultaneous preservation of the principles justifying the status quo and the de facto modification of the status quo itself. And hence the rarity of conclusive settlements. Guatemala's exemption from the anti-slavist decree, for example, soon evoked opposition -- opposition which merely posed anew some of the central contradictions that the requerimiento had supposedly resolved. Consider the protestations from the Franciscans of Mexico:

Oh Catholic Prince, is this the prize that your vassals expected from your royal hands? Is this the treasure that the Church expected from the sheep commended to you? We cannot grasp the spirit that moved the man who gave the account to your Council which in turn led [the Council] to grant such cruelty. Nor can we imagine how peremptory were the reasons of that man who was able to persuade such wise and lucid gentlemen as those who are members of your Council to grant such a thing.¹⁹

Note that the profound question of spiritual duty is posed as a clash between two types of human character -- one benevolent and erudite, the other suspect at best, evil at worst. Thus framed, the question does not challenge royal authority; it merely suggests that in the battle between the universal forces of good and evil, the benevolent sovereign can be duped, albeit mysteriously. The political and the moral, once more, blur into one another; and once more, politico-moral struggles take the form of struggles over identity-creation and destruction. The protesters, for example, argued that

while the Council permitted the "just" enslavement of otherwise indomitable Indians, conquerors and settlers were avaricious. And it was avarice, the protesters further contended, that led Spaniards to enter in an exchange transaction with Indian chiefs, whereby the latter would be forgiven tribute after handing over Indian commoners to the former.

b. Discourse Modified, Discourse Entrenched

In the conflicts that arose over the Requerimiento and the taking of war-slaves, character became central once again, as in earlier stages of the colonial period. In the discourse of good and evil, character accounted for avarice; and character, too, accounted for the kind of devious eloquence that might triumph over benign wisdom. In a letter written from the city of Granada, Nicaragua, Bartolome de las Casas expressed astonishment at the ability of those who had persuaded the Council in Spain to allow the taking of war-slaves in Guatemala. "How can such malice in those who inform [the Council] deceive such an eminent and admirable wisdom [as that possessed by the Council's members]?"

The censure of the friars led to royal vacillation, as the queen reversed herself by allowing slave-wars while prohibiting rescue-slaves. Soon thereafter, the queen reversed herself further in a decree sent to Honduras forbidding Christians to remove Indian slaves from the province, except

for one or two in their personal service. Finally, within a few years, the monarchs, in response to anti-slavist accounts of the the treatment of Indians in Guatemala, recinded the royal permission for the taking of rescue-slaves.

The taking of war-slaves, however, remained legal in Guatemala, even though, as already mentioned, the pope issued his bull Sublimis Deus, declaring the Indians "truly men" and thus capable of Christianization, confirming their right to property, and prohibiting their enslavement and the seizure of their property.

In colonial Central America, core contradictions, such as those regarding the status and treatment of Indians, went unresolved. Yet they did not fundamentally threaten the social order. Rather, conflictual relations pervaded the system. Differing views on how best to indoctrinate Indians, for example, fomented the keen rivalry between Dominican preachers and Franciscan mendicants. In Guatemala, the Franciscan did not oppose the use of violence in the "conversion" of the Indians, while the Dominicans argued that the conquest should be carried out peacefully. This unresolved dispute between the two orders, in turn, shaped the rivals' social identities, and divided their followers into camps.

Indeed, absent the capacity to resolve contradictions, and present strong identities, acrimonious debates between rival groups often extended into the larger society. Thus, when a Franciscan student of the Indian languages Quiche,

Cakchiquel and Tzutujil discovered that all three used the word "idol" to denote Supreme Being, and replaced it with "God" in his newly-printed catechism, the Dominicans immediately took to the pulpit and attacked the Franciscan's use of the word. The Franciscans, in turn, defended the catechism just as fervently. The streets and plazas were soon filled with discussions and disputes on the matter; the two orders resorted to lawyers, wrote long documents, presented witnesses, and wrote one report after another. Both orders overwhelmed the Audiencia of Guatemala and the bishop, and both protested for what they deemed "unfavorable" treatment.²⁰

More importantly, both orders continued to argue on the Indian question. In 1542, when the Crown promulgated the New Laws, according to which all forms of slavery were proscribed, it charged the Dominicans of Guatemala, not the Franciscans, with the task of distributing copies of the Laws among religious orders and monasteries so that they might publicize their content among the Indians. In typical fashion, the crown also commanded the orders to inform on violators.²¹

The New Laws not only prohibited Indian slavery but also the assignement of new encomiendas. The Laws, moreover, stipulated that extant encomiendas would revert to the Crown after the death of their incumbents. In Peru, Encomenderos rebelled, but not in Guatemala. Nonetheless, Guatemalans were stunned, and soon wrote the king, "We are scandalized, as if we had been told to cut off our heads".

Guatemalans blamed the "scandalous" ordinances on the "scandalous" Bartolomé de las Casas. But if one villanous man was to blame, another virtuous man could set things right: the king. Thus, the conquerors and settlers of Guatemala reminded their sovereign of the heroic services they had rendered him, asked to be heard, and demanded: "Pay us Your Majesty what You owe us, and grant us great favors".²²

The emancipation of slaves, however, proceeded rapidly under the leadership of a new governor bent on executing the sovereign's latest wish. The Cabildo wrote the king, asking him to consider that slaves had been taken in the first place with his permission. The Cabildo also complained, more than once, about the manner in which the ordinances were enforced by the governor.

The appellants were trapped in the kind of argumentation that might have proved effective during time of conquest and war, when the Requerimiento allowed them to take slaves of war because it allowed them to deploy the discourse of good and evil against the Indians. But given the ongoing broader debate over the proper treatment of Indians, taking war-slaves was one thing, keeping them quite another. Absent a ritual of faith, the best the Guatemalans could do for themselves was to reiterate the duties of the monarch, the evils of his official representative, and the merits of their own deeds. In short, they deployed the discourse of good and evil against one another, much as rivalling conquerors had done in the early

phase of colonization.

Spanish theologians, too, were caught in the past; embroiled in an old debate. On one side stood advocates of conquest and forced conversion, like the humanist Sepulveda, who justified both with reference to the papal donation and Aristotle's doctrine of natural slavery, whose consequence, he argued, was to end idolatry, cannibalism, and human sacrifice. On the other side stood opponents, the most notable being Las Casas, who maintained that the natives had the "capacity" to become Christianized peacefully and live like Spaniards.

And as always, the king was the arbiter who finally entered the controversy by convening a panel of theologians to resolve the debate. He also ordered a suspension of conquest activities until the issue was resolved. But, once more, there was no conclusive resolution.²³ Instead, the traditional granting of exemptions to Spaniards who were engaged in conquest was resumed. The freedom of the Indian was established as a general principle, but this principle did not protect Indians who tried to repel Spanish aggression.

To repeat, in the Kingdom of Guatemala, as elsewhere in the colonies, the taking and keeping of war-slaves remained two different matters, with the Requerimiento making the former possible. As late as 1580, for example, a violent encounter between conquerors and Indians in the Kingdom of Guatemala led to a particular suspension of the anti-slavery ordinances. Significantly, the underlying causes of the

encounter were framed by the conquerors in the discourse of good and evil introduced almost a century earlier by Christopher Columbus to differentiate among Indians. Specifically, the rebellious Indians in question -- the Chontales of the province of Nicaragua -- were referred to as "Caribbeans" who, as the king had been informed,

eat human flesh, live in the blindness of idolatry, robbing and killing their indigenous neighbors who are at peace and some Spaniards as well. However, given the harshness of the territory, it is impossible to punish them [who would go after them?]. But by making them [the Chontales] slaves, then there would be people willing to penetrate the land [the interior]; and thus [the Chontales] would begin to be retrieved and live among Christians.²⁴

The discourse of good and evil, once again, was used by conquerors and colonists to pressure the crown, even after the Church had acknowledged the Indians' full humanity. And even as the correlation of forces shifted against conquerors and colonists and in favor of the crown (as the possibility of a feudal class disappeared), the former extracted new, albeit partial concessions from the latter. The sovereign power of a legalistic, centralising empire reversed itself on several occasions regarding its anti-slavery ordinances; and once it stopped reversing itself, it continued to allow for frequent exceptions to its dictat.

In the case of the indomitable Chontales people, the king

and his council, taking note of the fact that the frightful reports about this tribe were written by self-interested parties, decided that an exception was to be made regarding anti-slavery laws if the Audiencia of Guatemala found such reports to be accurate. In other words, the sovereign, as arbiter, chose not only to allow for yet another exception, but also to devolve responsibility to his officials abroad for a final decision.²⁵

Exceptions to the anti-slavery ordinances continued to be made for as long as hostilities broke out, which is to say, until the middle of the seventeenth century. But the sovereign was not altogether impotent. Sovereign authority, to be sure, remained profoundly vulnerable to the discourse of good and evil. Yet sovereign authority enhanced its degrees of freedom precisely by making discursive adaptations which in turn enabled it to modify the rituals that mediated between discourse and action, worldview and policy.

The sovereign, for example, was able to decree: a) that the taking of war-slaves was an exception to a rule, and not the corollary of a just war; and b) that even if war-slaves could be taken, they could no longer be held in perpetuity. These changes in law were attended by changes in the rituals of conquest. In 1573, the King ordered there would be no more "conquests", only "pacifications". Consequently, the Requerimiento, the ritual of the "just war", gave way to the naive theatricality of the "hide, spring, and persuade"

approach; the Christian ambush, one might call it, whereby the conquerors, as instructed by the sovereign, would hide from the Indians, then reveal themselves peacefully and commence indoctrination.

c. Sovereign Power: Weak Yet Indispensable

Between 1542 and 1600 the Crown made several attempts to abolish the enforced labor of Encomiendas -- a system of trusteeship established by a crown which, long suspicious of Iberian feudal lords, was careful to separate the right to receive Indian tribute from the control of Indian labor. Under the Encomienda, Indians were direct vassals of the crown, which meant that conquerors and colonists seeking Indian labor had to obtain license from the crown.²⁶ After 1549, the institution of trusteeship no longer included the right to Indian labor. Rather,

the trustee was to be merely a passive recipient of tribute payments from a given number of Indian villages, but with this tribute -- set by royal officials and supervised by the crown -- went neither the right to live near his Indians nor to use their labor nor to sit in judgement over them. The trust carried no rights over land... Moreover, the grant of tribute was personal and temporary; it applied to the colonist so honored and his son. After the first filial generation, the grant reverted to the king, and the descendants of the original recipient had no claim upon it.²⁷

Moreover, after the middle of the sixteenth century, the crown

began the system of allotting natives to certain tasks -- agricultural, mining, construction. Known as the "repartimiento de trabajo", or allotment of labor, this system, like the earlier enslavement of Indians and the nominally defunct Encomienda, depended for legitimation on the discourse of good and evil. The repartimiento was designed to prevent Indians from returning to "indolence and idolatry".²⁸ Thus, the laborer was to work a stipulated number of days and to be paid specific wages; and the employer, in order to receive a quota of Indians, had to state his case before the authorities, who in turn had to decide if the work he wanted performed was "for the good of the commonwealth".²⁹

By the end of the sixteenth century the number of private encomiendas had already decreased significantly in the two most densely populated regions of Mexico and Peru. Many of these encomiendas

had lapsed to the Crown, and those which remained had become merely sources of "pensions" for a few privileged aristocrats. The encomienda in these colonies was no longer a labor system, that phase of it having been replaced by the allotment or repartimiento. However, the encomienda was not formally abolished until 1720.³⁰

In Central America, repartimientos survived into the nineteenth century, providing labor for wheat farming and indigo production, even though their use in the latter activity was illegal. As for the Encomienda, even as it lost force, its advocates continued to struggle for partial favor.

Indeed, they clung tenaciously to the worldview that had made the Encomienda viable in the first place; and they continued to employ the tactics which attended the process of identity-formation and destruction within the context of that worldview.

Recall that from the outset of the conquest and colonization period monarchs were anxious to learn in detail about their distant realm across the ocean and to exercise as much control over it as possible. To this end, we saw that they encouraged their colonial officials to inform on one another. By the middle of the sixteenth century, narrative letters constituted a traditional and extensive practice which fixed communication, or more precisely, revelation, as the axis of political struggle. Monarchs were anxious to hear even from those they could not favor at a specific point in time, and competitors believed that to be heard was to fight, and to be believed was to triumph. Hence the importance of being able to address to sovereign. Put another way, the right of such address was tantamount to possession of a virtuous identity, since such identity carried the right to speak.

In the Kingdom of Guatemala, as elsewhere in the colonies, this right was exercised most efficiently by the cabildos, which clamored for "favours" on behalf of their cities and "vecinos," or citizens. The historical records of the cabildos show that if their members understood such "favours" as an expression of royal beneficence, they also

believed that in the royal person this virtue was inextricable from wisdom, so that a worthy supplicant could expect to find justice in the sovereign. Hence the stream of correspondence produced by Central American cabildos in their incessant attempts not only to "prove" themselves deserving of Indian labor but also to "reveal" the character flaws of colonial officers in charge of allotting such labor. In their demands to be "heard", members of the municipal government of Guatemala, for instance, attacked Bartolome de las Casas and the Dominicans as "apasionados", or fiery, on the Indian question.³¹

But the cabildo documents in which colonials demanded to be heard, never doubted the beneficence and wisdom of the monarch and his close advisors. Consider the letter to Charles V, written in 1552 by the great chronicler Bernal Diaz in his capacity as member of the cabildo of Guatemala City.

Sacred Caesarean Catholic Majesty:

I believe your Royal Council of the Indies there will have heard of me and how I served your majesty from when I was very young until now when I am in senescence. As such a loyal servant, and maintaining the fidelity to which I am obliged, and because I am your councilman in this city of Guatemala, and for many other reasons that exist, it is well to inform you what is being done in these lands as to their government and the administration of justice. I know for sure that your majesty and those of your Royal Council of the Indies believe that the orders you send are carried out and fulfilled, which orders are very just, to the benefit of the natives as well as of the Spaniards and the general good of the country.³²

If beneficence and wisdom were seen as the constitutive virtues of royal identity, the virtue of fidelity was constitutive of a cabildo's identity, particularly in the case of Guatemala City, which prided itself on its alacrity to "obey" sovereign power.

State policy itself turned on the notion that rewards went to those who were loyal; punishment to the disloyal. That a loyal collectivity or one of its members should suffer under an unjust government was patently wrong. In the passage below, the narrator stresses the difference between loyal Guatemala and its disloyal governor.

Your majesty ... this land stands in need of justice, because when it was completely without order it was much better managed, for the natives as well as for its proper perpetuation; and seeing this, I am so bold as to give this account, so that matters will not go further in such fashion. I was at the royal court only a year ago, but when I left here for Spain, Licenciado Cerrato had just come to this province as president of the Audiencia, and by first appearances, he gave signs of doing justice; of course the citizens of this city and province always have been and remain such loyal servants, that with half a letter from your majesty they bow down to the ground in unison, as has always been seen in their actions, unlike [Governor] Cerrato ... [emphasis added].³³

The practice of informing the monarch, as during the initial phase of the conquest, still embroiled all who either wished or needed to participate in politics.

We understand he has written to your majesty [claiming] that he has worked and worked, and

served and served, and we imagine that both your majesty and those of your royal council have given him credence. At any rate, he showed good signs at first, and for that reason when I was at the royal court there was nothing to report about what he had done up until then, and so I am not at fault for saying nothing at that time. But if I didn't inform you what is going on now I would be greatly at fault [emphasis added].

At certain turning points, to be sure, the correlation of forces might overwhelmingly support one narrator and his camp while rendering the reports and appeals of their rivals futile. But as a collective practice, narrative letters remained a vital institution which legitimated monarchical authority by reaffirming the notion that failures of justice originated not with royal decrees in Spain, but with disobedient royal officials in the Indies.

Concerning the tribute quotas, your majesty ordered Cerrato that the towns be inspected ... and then, in conformity with the nature of each town and its special characteristics, a tribute should be assigned that the town can comfortably pay to maintain its encomendero. But your majesty, everything has been done contrary to your royal command, for none of the above things were inspected; Cerrato set the quotas sitting in his rooms here, following I don't know what account or listing, so that he did injustices to some towns, and left others unhappy ... Your majesty orders that governors should give preference to conquerors and married settlers, and help to arrange the marriage of orphaned daughters of conquerors, and should sustain the poor with the patronage of these lands. What more just command could there be than this? But your majesty, Cerrato has acted as if when you issued that command, you had said: 'As to all the good positions that there should be or should fall vacant in those provinces, be sure you give them to your relatives.' To two brothers of his and a granddaughter whom he married off here,

and to a son-in-law, and to his employees and friends, he has given the best encomiendas available in this province. In truth, any one of them alone yields more income than the total of everything he has given in this city to conquerors.³⁴

Indeed, the gap between royal intent and its execution by colonial officials reinforced the unity of credibility and power, which meant that political struggles were, as always, battles for persuasion. Eloquence was to be feared in a foe as much as military prowess.

Let me tell you Your Majesty, from what I know of him he has such a command of rhetoric, and such prettified and savory words, that I feel sure he will know how to gild what he does with the pen; your majesty and your royal councilors will believe that it is as he has written and informed you, and that everything is being done as your majesty orders ...³⁵

Attempts to unmask a rival by showing him to be undeserving of his good reputation remained crucial to political competition.

And in all this, the good old man is saying that he does justice. With Your Majesty he already has gained the reputation of so doing; but he never considers that it is much worse to give a single one of those encomiendas to his relatives who used to work at their trades in Spain, and take them away from poor people who have richly deserved them by shedding their sweat and blood. And also, your majesty, when some poor conqueror, perhaps married, with wife and children, comes to him to ask for help to maintain them, he is very indecorous in attending to his requests (and in other affairs too, for that matter), and answers with a fierce expression on his face and a way of wiggling in his

chair that would detract from the presence of a man without many pretensions, much less the president of an Audiencia, and he says to him, 'Who ordered you to come to conquer? Was it his majesty? Then show me his letter. Go on with you, and let what you have stolen be enough.' In this fashion he responds, and with other insults as well...

Narrative, it seems in retrospect, engulfed socio-political life; and yet, ultimately, its limits were drawn precisely. Attacks on the reputations of rivals, for example, also served as opportunities to emphasize the ireproachability of the royal person, and to reiterate the point, in an un-self-conscious manner, that encroachments on royal authority -- so jealously guarded by the monarchs -- could only have a ruinous effect.

Oh sacred majesty, how just and good are the royal orders you send to this province, and how officials mold them here and do what they wish! I say this because I see how the friars are ambitious to rule and command in this land, and Cerrato desires to enrich himself and his relatives while keeping his fame as a good judge, and some of the judges have been involved in some deceits in I don't know what accounts, and they know that the friars have heard about and know their motives, so they don't want them to inform your majesty, but to write praising the members of the Royal Audiencia as good judges. The upshot is that the judges let themselves be ruled, and friars decree your royal justice and jurisdiction ...

Then, in the closing sentences, the narrator's fearful suspicion takes on an urgent tone that reveals much about the milieu in which the narrative was crafted.

I implore your majesty not to allow this letter to come back here into the hands of Cerrato, because other letters that the council of this city has written on matters of your royal service have been returned.³⁶

d. Intra-elite suspicion

Six years later, Díaz del Castillo wrote to the king again. By then, the "villanous" Cerrato was no longer President. Díaz, however, was still calling into question the behavior of royal officials in an effort to preserve what he saw as his rightful property. This was no exercise in futility. The voluminous record of royal decrees issued for application in various cities of Central America indicates that the crown responded quickly and forcefully when informed of "anomalies" in the conduct of its officials. Indeed, the intricate letters of informants were read carefully in Spain. Often, the king recapitulated in his decrees the charges and countercharges of the narrative account to which he was responding; the king, moreover, wrote as if following the story-line of his correspondents' accounts, which typically pitted a virtuous colonist against a perfidious and greedy government official. Thus, corrective royal decrees more often than not addressed exactly the complaint being lodged against officials. In addition, visitors arrived frequently in the various provinces of the Kingdom of Guatemala to investigate charges levelled against officials by local elites.³⁷

In Díaz del Castillo's latest narrative, the new villain

was the royal factor, who had purchased lands from Indian chiefs in Diaz' encomiendas. One of the letter's principal objectives was by then a recurring one -- to dispute the honesty of an adversary before the king, that august Solomonic arbiter who, far away in Spain, should be properly informed if he was to pass fair judgement.

For your royal majesty's information, the factor, in partnership with a ---, bought certain lands from the chiefs of these towns I mentioned, without informing me of it as their encomendero, so that I would not disturb the sale. And since the chiefs believed the lands were of a size that around fifty bushels of wheat could be planted there, and no more, and did not know the extent of twelve caballerias, which is what they agreed to in the bill of sale, and since now enough land is being taken from them to make up the twelve caballerias, and more than twelve, they disapprove of the sale, and demand that it be annulled because of the great deceit in it. And here in your royal Audiencia they are suing for justice and returning the money that was given them for the land.³⁸

The narrator's skill was remarkable. For instance, one of his most subtle purposes was to evoke in the sovereign -- the source of all authority -- fear of disorder.

The chiefs are doing this because truly they are very angry over the bad deeds they have received, such that the chiefs say that it is because of the factor that the houses I mentioned have been deserted, over twenty of them. If it hadn't been for me and the Dominican friars who reside in the town, more people would have left; but now they have stopped going.³⁹

The narrator, in short, sought to convey a sense of mortal

danger to the social structure -- a sense that the carefully-designed collectivities of the pueblos might disintegrate; and to portray himself and the friars as the champions of corporate and organic unity. Indeed, local elites, particularly those represented in cabildos, gradually developed this intuitive approach into a tactic which allowed them to retain their sense of fidelity to the crown while freeing them to struggle against royal officials. As we shall see in Chapter 6, by the end of the eighteenth century and the turn of the nineteenth, cabildos used their clients to organize and lead popular mobilizations which, if successfully executed, provided local elites with leverage to challenge officers of the crown while retaining their own image of loyal and obedient subjects of the sovereign. And as we will see, these nineteenth-century practices, too, heightened the mutual suspicion between cabildos and the government bureaucracy.

This mutual suspicion became rampant in Spanish America, and combined in the sixteenth century to engender official practices that conciliated obedience and independence. Hence the viceregal use of ritual and ceremony to depict unconditional submission to the King while engaging in non-compliance -- what I earlier called dramaturgical obedience. Caught between the exigencies of public opinion and an unpopular royal edict, and knowing in advance that he himself, or more likely a dangerous rival, would inform the king, a viceroy would follow the practice of "obezco pero no cumplo,"

or "I obey but do not comply."

"If the Crown persisted in sending over a law which was contrary to the fundamental 'interests' of the colonists," wrote the historian John Crow,

the viceroy would simply not enforce it. While an open challenge to the royal authority was unthinkable, furtive disobedience mixed with an outwards show of respect became a widespread fact.

After a time this became an established practice of viceregal rule, and was so generally recognized by all in the colonies that a special ceremony was held to celebrate it. When a royal statute considered to be contrary to the colonial interest arrived, the viceroy or the president of the supreme court would read it solemnly, and then placing it over his head as a token of submission and humbleness, would say in a loud voice 'Se acata pero no se cumple' -- it shall be respected but not enforced. This act satisfied both the principle of submission to the king, and the necessity of realism in colonial government. The common people referred to such royal statutes as 'unconsecrated hosts'.⁴⁰

That people should refer to royal statutes that were vitiated by the practice as "unconsecrated hosts" is quite significant. The faithful believe that the body of Christ is literally present in the consecrated host, but will feed the unconsecrated host to a child as if it were a treat. Absent the requisite ritual, the sacrament does not "happen" in a particular instance, but the sacrament as such remains inviolate in all its mystery and sanctity. Monarchical authority was not challenged by the people; they merely exerted pressure on the viceroy not to comply -- they

persuaded the viceroy as priest not to consecrate the host.

The sacramental analogy, moreover, captures precisely the beauty and horror that delegated authority simultaneously holds out to the ruler and to his executive agent. On the one hand, there is the practical flexibility that obtains when authority is handed down, in this case from heaven to emperor to viceroy. The benefits of such flexibility are obvious and mutual. On the other hand, there is the instability that comes from the temptation -- real or imagined -- to usurp power. The giver of authority suspects, perhaps fears, that delegation may be transformed into usurpation in the short-term, and worse, legitimation of autonomy in the long-term. Conversely, the agent or representative of the authority-giver also fears constantly -- fears misunderstanding, disinformation, conflict, innovation. Facing the challenges of opportunity and crisis, the agent of authority can be paralyzed by fear, even though his powers were broadly drawn in the first place precisely to endow him with relative autonomy. Hence the functionality of "obedezco pero no cumplo" to sovereign and viceroy alike. And hence the widespread use of the practice even beyond viceregal cities.

Through this narrational variant of traditional discourse, viceroys, captain-generals, and governors "enacted" their obedience even as they failed to comply -- they enacted the yet-unwritten but inevitable narrative account of their behavior. From the perspective of the officials, behavior

turned into performance; material for narrative. From the perspective of the king, the practitioner confirmed the sanctity of royal authority and the notion of fidelity as virtue, while simultaneously allowing for his own digression from royal injunction. Simply put, in dramaturgical obedience, there was neither disregard nor desecration; only devout pragmatism.

However, failure to carry out royal edicts courted strife if not danger, as a vigilant crown stood guard against possible encroachments on its prerogatives. As we saw in Chapter 2, early on in the conquest, King Ferdinand had allowed for the practice of "obedezco pero no cumplo". In this sense, the practice was legitimate. However, no general law was ever passed institutionalizing the practice as a general principle of proxy governance. Particular instances were always vulnerable to examination by the crown. So that an official who engaged in the practice was almost doomed to have it dredged up in his Residencia, and might even prompt a general Visita.

Both the Residencia and the Visita, as we have seen, normally elicited a cacophony of charges and countercharges, so that official proceedings turned into mediating mechanisms for regal mistrust, on one hand, and political competition, on the other. Put another way, the vigilant crown provided the judges and investigators; competitors provided loaded information. Not suprisingly, such political competition

turned not only on inquisition but on imaginative persuasion; and was but a step away from conflict. Political ritual, yet again, gave rise to contingency.

e. The Deepening Power of Appearances

The importance of appearances increased as the colonial social structure took form. Self-interested narrators, for example, endowed towns with personal attributes, which in turn became inextricable from the character of their encomenderos, on the one hand, and the tenets of religious faith on the other. In short, narrators blurred the line between an individual's virtue and that of his proximate collectivity.

Catholic royal majesty, these towns are very fertile, given to good Christianity and holy doctrine, and they have very good churches and rich ornaments, with many singers and music of every kind. In all these provinces there are no towns better treated nor which are called on for less tribute, and two Dominicans are among them continually; there are devout local Indian women who have a place to retreat to live apart, with income assigned for their maintenance. It is not right that such towns should receive harassment.⁴¹

Virtue made sense only within the context of an intangible universe predicated on pure faith. But virtue and faith turned increasingly emblematic in manifestation the more they became tied to politics. Put another way, the impalpable essence of virtue and faith became highly dependent on their earthly display, as collective identities constantly tried to defend

the integrity of their convictions from the attacks of rivals.

Narrators also employed the discourse of good and evil to shape the genealogical identity of the self -- the individual as a link in a chain. The passage below shows how the very identity of the individual was tied up with the belief in loyal service to the crown; and how individual loyalty was but a continuation of ancestral virtue. In fact, the passage reveals meritorious deeds as a crucial component of familial patrimony, and personal comportment as more than an individual interest.

I want to give account of who I am so that your majesty might deign to do me fuller favors. I am the son of Francisco Diaz, the Gallant, God rest him, who was your councilman in Medina del Campo, and I myself am your councilman in this city. At present I am your faithful ejecutor, by order of the Royal Audiencia and by vote of the council. I am quite closely related to your former judge, God rest him, Licenciado Gutierrez Velasquez, and I have served your majesty in these parts for the last forty years; I took part in the discovery and conquest of Mexico with the Marques del Valle, which fact has been confirmed before now in your royal council of the Indies, and don Fray Bartoleme de las Casas, former bishop of Chiapas, also knows it well. Now again I beg that you condescend to grant me the loyal ejecutoria of this land, that is, of this city, since I am such an old servant of yours and my father and relatives have always served you, and for this I will be most grateful.⁴²

Remembrance was at the service of political competition because competition served identity. Bernal Díaz del Castillo,

for example, wrote his chronicle of the conquest of Mexico in order to challenge the veracity of an alternative account in which his deeds and that of others were obscured by the exploits of Cortés. The chronicle, which was sent to Philip II, is thought to have been completed around 1568; considered by Central Americans to be the genesis of their historiography.⁴³ Indeed, the chronicle itself stakes its claim to credibility by affirming its author's membership in two collective identities, one familial, the other localist -- the city of Santiago.

I, Bernal Diaz del Castillo, citizen and governor of the most loyal city of Santiago de Guatemala, one of the first discoverors and conquerors of New Spain and its provinces, and of the Cape of Honduras and Higueras, native of the most noble and famous city of Medina del Campo, and son of its former governor Francisco Diaz del Castillo, known as the Courteous -- and his legal wife Maria Diez Rejon -- may their souls rest in glory! -- tell you the story of myself and my comrades; all true conquerors who served His Majesty in the discovery, conquest, pacification, and settlement of the provinces of New Spain; one of the finest regions in the New World yet discovered, this expedition being undertaken by our own efforts, and without His Majesty's Knowledge.

If remembrance served politics, it also shaped the expectations of generations of practitioners. The chronicle, which reveals a world at once highly structured and riddled with contingencies, fomented mistrust by detailing the intricacies of previous betrayals. Rumors, whether distorted or accurate, abounded and were never detached from a political

agenda. Actors could afford neither to believe nor to disregard them completely. Embroiled in intrigues, actors reached out to friends and relatives to form alliances, thus reinforcing the importance of family ties while further entrenching suspicion of "others". Again, the chronicle played a central role in this dynamic.

Written not merely to obtain future favors, but also to impose the chronicler's memory on the historical record, the chronicle is the most ambitious attempt at affirmation of identity. It seeks to establish "The Truth" before the sovereign, in the expectation that this truth will bring recognition of merit to its deserving narrator and his heirs. Thus history becomes a family affair. But in so doing, the chronicle also infuses history with new life; it dredges up old conflicts and marshalls them in the quest for new privileges, which is to say, the preservation of identity. Thus, Díaz del Castillo must return to the past if he is to move forward. And the past is a maze of intrigue, suspicion and betrayals.⁴⁴

Throughout the colonial centuries, political struggles were rarely easily settled, and remained a constant part of life, incorporating a broad range of passions, rancor being only the most obvious.⁴⁵ But even though enmities ran deep, alliances were fluid. Encomenderos might denounce "scandalous" friars one moment, then portray them as benefactors the next. Conquistadores might fail in resisting the ascendance of

newcomers, then quickly turn around and arrange marital alliances between the hated parvenus and their own illustrious families. And alliances in and of themselves did not guarantee the outcome of competition. Familial ties, for example, were an asset in one situation, a calamity in another. Why did Bernal Díaz del Castillo, a prominent participant in the conquest of Mexico, end up in Guatemala? Because while he may have been a trustworthy member of the Cortés faction, he was also related to the Velasquez family. So that in the eyes of Cortés, Díaz del Castillo was ultimately a "relative and compatriot of the enemy".⁴⁶

In this world of mistrust, actors not only spun alliances out of blood ties, but also tenaciously fought for the preservation of their genealogical identity. The chronicler Díaz del Castillo, as we have seen, wrote histories and letters to record, demonstrate, and publicize his virtue and meritorious deeds, which he presented as an extension of his parents' luster; and by the same token, he staked claims for his descendants on the basis of his own accomplished life.

The crown proved susceptible to this kind of pressure. For all claims to privilege were based on demonstrable moral virtue, in turn evinced by social honor -- the sine qua non of the family's genealogical identity. Indeed, royal policy oscillated under pressure from conquerors and colonists because the crown, like any political actor, had to bow to those who managed to further their self-interest while

adhering to strict rules of appearance.

The chronicler Díaz del Castillo, as we shall see, successfully advanced his familial claims to privilege because he proved quite adept at the practice whereby subjects pressured the crown into granting them favors and exemptions while submitting to the sovereign. Put another way, in the very act of seeking an amendment to the rulings of a legalistic, formalist and centralizing sovereign, subjects displayed their unquestioning submission; and in the very act of yielding to their pressures, the sovereign reasserted his absolute authority.

As discussed in Chapter 2, the two principal legal instruments used by subjects to pressure the crown were the "relaciones de servicios" (narration of services) and the probanza de méritos (proof of merits), both of which were at base narrative accounts. Both, turn, served as stored memory in the writing of chronicles.

Centuries later, Anglo-Saxon scholars have been at once amused and repelled by the narcissistic exaggerations of the narrative accounts through which colonists constructed and destroyed identities and competed for royal favors. "Writers," complained the distinguished modern historian Henry Wagner, "used their imaginations too freely."

Moreover, these writers obtained a great deal of their information from actors who, in life as in remembrance, took liberties with the truth. "As time went on," Wagner also tells

us,

all the conquistadores became hidalgos and many claimed the honor who only came after the conquest ... [In addition] the figures of their companions faded from their memories; only their own remained. This trait is noticeable in the petitions of the men who sought from the emperor grants of coats of arms. Each seems to have been the most important man of the conquest.⁴⁷

According to Wagner, the chronicler and conqueror Bernal Diaz del Castillo was among the many who succumbed to fantastic personalism.

It is true that [Diaz] did not forget his companions; he extolled their prowess and passed lightly over their vices. But it was always I, I. One cannot imagine how Cortes could have conquered the country without Diaz by his side to advise him and fight for him.⁴⁸

f. Appearances, History, and Privilege

The imaginative egoism of the chronicles and other narrative accounts, however, takes on different meaning if we bear in mind that in a context of religious faith and political mistrust, actors set out to construct and destroy identities through the demonstration and refutation of moral virtue. Actors bereft of identity could not claim, let alone obtain, privileges from the sovereign. Hence their keen concern with images and appearances. Let us turn, once again, to Díaz del Castillo and his family for illustration.

By establishing an identity through the effective narration of his meritorius deeds -- in probanzas and relaciones -- the conqueror asserted his own moral worth, as well as that of his family. Thus, the father of the conqueror, the conqueror himself, and his descendants, all sought rewards in recognition of the services rendered by a single man to sovereign and God. Indeed, the requests made by the father led to a bureaucratic confusion, the upshot of which was the denial by the fiscal of Valladolid that Díaz del Castillo was a conqueror at all. Nonetheless, the ongoing campaign of persuasion launched by Díaz ended in triumph time and again. Not only did he secure for himself three Guatemalan towns in encomienda only two years before the New Laws were issued, but he continued to gain privileges afterwards. These ranged from the intangible, such as royal trust, to emblems. The president of the council of Indies, for example, personally instructed Díaz del Castillo to give account of anything he saw in Guatemala not in conformity with the royal service. Three times Díaz del Castillo wrote the Council with such accounts. Díaz, moreover, gained the right to bring in a certain amount of goods free of duty; a government position for himself; the right to bear arms, for himself and two servants; another government position for himself; and a corregimiento for the man who should marry his daughter. Finally, the conqueror's son petitioned the king for a coat of arms, which was granted.⁴⁹

Appearances were crucial, and if sovereign and competitive subjects came to rely on one another in keeping them, hybrid institutions emerged from this mutual dependence. These institutions embodied the de facto compromise struck in a complicated, ad hoc fashion between the crown and the conquerors, as each party sought to project the appearance of that particular virtue crucial to their social identity -- benevolent legalism for the crown, valorous loyalty for the conqueror and colonist. The origins of the socio-economic institution of the hacienda, for example, are deeply embedded in this ancient compromise between these socio-cultural identities. The historical formation of the hacienda system, moreover, is inextricable from the practices whereby the parties to this compromise put it into effect.

Thus, the son of Bernal Díaz del Castillo -- as the descendant of a heroic conqueror and loyal settler -- "petitioned" the king for the right to cultivate idle lands in the pueblo of San Juan Chaloma, which also happened to be part of his father's encomienda. The king, in turn, granted the favor, though not to the father -- the conqueror, encomendero, and persistently eloquent petitioner -- but to his son and his descendants.⁵⁰

The old conqueror, who had lived history knowing that the telling would count as much as the living when it came to claiming his rewards, was perfectly satisfied. For he perceived his identity as inextricable, on the one hand, from

the luster of his ancestors and, on the other, from the privileges of his descendants.

The mentality of Díaz del Castillo is merely illustrative of the encomenderos' sense of identity, in turn the principal determinant of tactical innovations that were to have systemic consequences. Encomenderos, for example, knew that they could well lose their encomiendas, so they tried to guarantee their rights to "siembras", or cultivated fields, which were hereditary. Recall that title to an encomienda was not granted by the crown in perpetuity. In contrast, the siembras within the encomienda -- the cultivations -- belonged to the encomendero and his heirs. Thus, when time came for an encomendero had to surrender the title to a new recipient, the latter had to purchase the siembras from the former or his heirs.⁵¹

Land within an encomienda could be used for cultivation only if the land belonged to the crown and the crown in turn ceded it to the encomendero, or if the encomendero purchased it directly from its rightful Indian owners. The son of the conqueror and chronicler Díaz del Castillo, we just saw, received land within his father's encomienda from the king in recognition of familial virtue. But he also purchased lands from their Indian proprietors.

Both paths were frequently taken by encomenderos as escape routes from the legal restriction which stipulated that an encomienda was to remain in the family for no more than two

or three "lives" (generations). And both paths led to the formation of a powerful and resilient economic institution: the family hacienda. For the hacienda developed within the context of the encomienda, even though the juridical conceptualization of the encomienda was principally dedicated to the separation of power through the separation of land and labor. Like any other innovation, this separation had to be "imagined". And as we saw in a previous discussion, in this case the "imagining" was done by monarchs in the thrall of memory and suspicion -- princes whose ancestors had ingrained in them both a mistrust of feudal lords and a sense of imperial duty which could not be fulfilled without the greed and intrepidity of would-be lords.

The construction and destruction of archetypal identities by means of narrative accounts, and the centrality of such accounts to political competition, reflected the contradiction between the crown's paralyzing suspicion and its inexorable expansionism. Recall the crown's consistent policy of lending an ear to all its subjects in the colonies. Competition over privilege on the basis of identity, however, also shifted radical mistrust from the relationship between king and conquerors to the conquerors and colonists themselves. Thus, families could become very wealthy and powerful but they neither could nor would combine against the crown.

Conclusion

Conquerors, settlers, members of the church, and the crown were embroiled throughout the sixteenth century in an intense fight over the question of labor exploitation. All contenders were determined to exercise their respective prerogatives. The conquerors and colonists felt deserving of recognition, and eventually aspired to seigneurial status. Clerics felt it their duty to put an end to the mortal sin of brutality often perpetrated on the Indians "commended" to Spaniards. And the crown was bent on relinquishing not one iota of its patrimonial jurisdiction. Everywhere violence seemed imminent, and in Peru, the battle broke out into a civil war, which the crown ultimately won.⁵²

The system, however, was gradually reformed out of existence. Encomiendas could still be found in the eighteenth century, but its economic significance had virtually disappeared by the end of the sixteenth. In the struggle over the exploitation of Indian labor, the major elements of colonial politics came into play -- regal suspicion, with its Residencias and Visitas; and self-seeking local actors and royal representatives with their ritualized demonstrations of obedience.

At base, all parties to the dispute were impelled by the exigencies of identity; and shared in a discourse that constrained and freed them simultaneously, for all used this discourse to craft narratives in order to settle the dispute

in their favor. The Reconquista, as we have seen, engendered the discourse of the "just war," which in turn gave contextual meaning to the Requerimiento. And conquerors were able to introduce the discourse of the just war in the Indies because of the distinction made earlier by Columbus between "good" and "evil" Indians. At the same time, critical sermons preached by friars began an intense and ongoing debate on the nature and treatment of the Indians. This debate led to a gradual but profound legislative revolution, embodied in the Laws of Burgos of 1512, The New Laws of 1542, and the Royal Ordinances on Pacification of 1573, each more radical than its predecessor.

Indeed, the Royal Ordinances closed a circle, for they proclaimed that discoveries were not to be called "conquests" any longer. The royal intent was that there should be no pretext for the use of force against Indians. The term "pacification", employed so many years before by Columbus, was now the official term. A crucial rule of "pacification" as issued by the Crown provided that

in areas where the Indians refuse to accept Christian doctrine peacefully, an arrangement should be made with the principal lord who is a proponent of peace so that he will invite the belligerent Indians to his territory on one pretext or another. On this occasion the preachers, together with the Spaniards and friendly Indians, should be hidden nearby. At the opportune moment they should disclose themselves and begin teaching the faith with the aid of interpreters. In order that the Indians may hear the faith with greater awe and reverence, the preachers should carry the

Cross in their hands and should be wearing at least albs or stoles; the Christians are also to be told to listen to the preaching with great respect and veneration, so that by their example the non-believers will be induced to accept instruction. If it seems advisable, the preachers may attract the attention of the non-believers by using music and singers, thereby encouraging them to join in.⁵³

The martial liturgy of the Requerimiento had gradually yielded to naive theatricality. Put another way, if the Requerimiento had been ritualized, now theater was rendered spontaneous. In between these two points in time, the Crown oscillated between protection and exploitation of the Indians, one moment responding to the clamor of conscience, the next responding to the ethic of conquest and spoil. But even as the crown and its encomienda policy oscillated in this way, there was a gradual, at times deliberate weakening of the Encomienda system.

Conversely, the development of the hacienda system can be traced in the history of encomiendas such as that of the Díaz del Castillo, later to become an hacienda called La Concepción, or The Immaculate Conception. The name of the hacienda is not insignificant, for names and titles, as we shall see in chapter 4, became the emblems of Central American identity in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, just as ceremony and ritual became arenas for competition among collective identities -- family clans, guilds, pueblos, and cities, all of which defined themselves as exemplars of virtue. Absent the opportunity to prove themselves virtuous in the struggle to command new jurisdictions and Indian labor,

colonists concentrated their discursive capabilities on the representational formation of identity. Thus, in the interior worlds of "loyal" cities, competitors deployed sermons, processions, oaths, poems, certificates of pedigree, and coats of arms against one another. Indeed, out of such emblems and rituals, Central Americans developed practices which "enacted" the traditional clash between "good" and "evil", in the process rendering their society a hybrid of dogmatism and volatility; ritualism and contingency.

This seeming paradox, as we shall see in chapter 4, cannot be explained without reference to the ongoing adaptations of the political discourse of good and evil, for this was the language not only of friars but of sovereign and subjects; the language not only of sermons, but of royal edicts and competitive narratives. Indeed, this was the language of remembrance and imagination, suspicion and faith. It was colonial politics.

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3. Ibid, 17-18.
4. J. H. Elliot, Imperial Spain (New York: Saint Martin's Press, 1967), 58.
5. Carl Ortwin Sauer, The Early Spanish Main (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 161-62.
6. For a succinct yet illuminating account of the historical alliances of religious orders and popular groups against the nobility, see Gerald Brenan, The Spanish Labyrinth, an Account of the Social and Political Background of the Spanish Civil War (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988).
7. Lewis Hanke, "The Dawn of Conscience in America," in Lewis Hanke, ed., History of Latin American Civilization (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1973), 159-160.
8. Mark Burkholder and Lyman Johnson, Colonial Latin America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 30
9. Irwin Blacker and Harry Rosen, The Golden Conquistadores (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1960), 28-30.
10. George Lovell, Conquest and Survival in Colonial Guatemala: A Historical Geography of the Cuchuman Highlands 1500-1821 (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1985), 62.
11. Gonzalo Fernandez de Oviedo, Historia General y Natural de las Indias, in Eduardo Perez Valle, ed., Nicaragua en los Cronistas de India: Oviedo, (Managua: Fondo de Promoción Cultural, Banco de América, Editorial y Litografía San José, 1976), 167-68.
12. Lewis Hanke, The Spanish Struggle for Justice in the Conquest of America (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1965), 34.
13. Mark Burkholder and Lyman Johnson, Colonial Latin America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 86.
14. Oviedo, op. cit., 171.
15. Zavala, op. cit., 19.

16. John Crow, The Epic of Latin America (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 209.

17. Ibid., 210.

18. "If the guilty party was a condemned heretic he was advised 'to reconcile himself to the Catholic faith. If he did this, he was hanged and his body was burned. If he did not, he was burned alive'. This burning was carried out with solemn auto de fe or "manifestation of the faith", and could take place only in Mexico City or Lima. People often gathered from miles around to be present at these horrible spectacles. There was a great procession "to the sound of trumpet and drum" which file slowly to the quemadero, or stake, where the execution was carried out".

John Crow, The Epic of Latin America (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 210-211.

19. Zavala, op. cit., 21

20. Ramón Salazar, Historia del desenvolvimiento intelectual de Guatemala, Epoca colonial (Guatemala: Biblioteca de Cultura Popular, Editorial del Ministerio de Educación Pública, 1951), 161-165.

21. Zavala, op. cit., 27-28.

22. Ibid., 29.

23. Burkholder and Johnson, op. cit., 63.

24. Zavala, op. cit., 61-62.

25. Ibid., 62.

26. Eric Wolf, Sons of the Shaking Earth, The People of Mexico and Guatemala -- Their Land, History, and Culture (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1959), p.191.

27. Eric Wolf, Sons of the Shaking Earth, The People of Mexico and Guatemala (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1959), 190-191.

28. George W. Lovell, Conquest and Survival in Colonial Guatemala: A Historical Geography of the Cuchumatán Highlands, 1500-1821 (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1985), 104.

29. Crow, op. cit., 161.

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31. These attacks can be found in cabildo letters, the originals of which have been published in Javier Ortiz de la Tabla, et al., eds., Cartas de Cabildos Hispanoamericanos, Audiencia de Guatemala (Sevilla: Publicaciones de la Diputación Provincial de Sevilla; Publicaciones de la Escuela de Estudios Hispano-Americanos, 1984).
32. James Lockhart and Enrique Otte, eds., Letters and People of the Spanish Indies, Sixteenth Century (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 73.
33. Lockhart and Otte, op. cit., 73-74.
34. Lockhart and Otte, op. cit., 74-75.
35. Ibid., 76-77.
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37. For texts, see Federico Arguello Solorzáno and Carlos Molina Arguello, eds., Monumenta Centroamericanae Histórica, Colección de Documentos y Materiales Para el Estudio de la Historia y de la Vida de los Pueblos de la America Central (Managua: Instituto Centroamericano de Historia, Universidad Centroamericana, 1965).
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41. Lockhart and Otte, op. cit., 81.
42. Lockhart and Otte, op. cit., 82.
43. Salazar, Historia del desenvolvimiento, op. cit.
44. Bernal Diaz del Castillo, The Conquest of New Spain (London: Penguin Books, 1963), 51-52.
45. Bernal Díaz del Castillo, The Conquest of New Spain (London: Penguin Books, 1963), 52.
46. Lockhart and Otte, op. cit., 72-73.
47. Henry Wagner, "Three Studies on the Same Subject: Bernal Díaz del Castillo; The Family of Bernal Díaz del Castillo; Notes on the Writings by and About Bernal Díaz del Castillo," The Hispanic American Historical Review, XXV, no.2 (May 1945), 155-199.

48. Ibid.

49. Wagner, op. cit., 155-212.

50. Zavala, op. cit., 74.

51. Ibid., 73.

52. See Claudio Veliz, The Centralist Tradition of Latin America (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980).

53. Royal Ordinances on "Pacification," 1573, in Lewis Hanke, ed., History of Latin American Civilization, Sources and Interpretations, Volume One, The Colonial Experience (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1973).

CHAPTER 4

The Depth of Emblems and the Complexities of Emblematic Culture

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the conquest of territories and control of Indian labor were no longer the great material stakes of Central American politics.¹ Political contestation, in fact, seemed to lose its vitality;² and at first glance, the objects of contention appear to have been little more than an endless series of trivialities -- from ceremonial seating arrangements to symbolic roles in the pageantry of municipalities.

This deep concern of Spanish American colonials with formalism and status has long been noted by historians. Charles Gibson described the mature colonial period as a time in which,

insignificant matters assumed significance. In religion, the vestments, the details of ritual, the degree of obeisance to an archbishop, the route to be followed by a procession became more important than the basic tenets of religion. In the state, protocol, hierarchy, rank, and its symbols became more important than government. In drama and poetry, the intricacies of a contrived syntax prevailed over and obliterated meaning. In architecture, external decoration was prized above plan and structure. In an excess of categorization, late colonial analysts identified ethnic types that had no real meaning in the society, as between a white person whose great-grandfather had been a Negro and one whose great-great-grand-father had been a negro. Trivialities were exalted. Everywhere prominent issues were petty ones. Personal relations were governed by etiquette and intrigue. Formalities were the subject of endless discussions and controversy.³

This chapter, however, argues that Central American colonials valued rank, titles, and ceremonial roles because these became an increasingly essential part of the discourse of good and evil traditionally used to craft competitive narratives. As the conquest phase came to an end, and as conflicts over the Indian question subsided, colonials looked for alternative ways to "narrate" their struggles on behalf of virtue and honor, and thus demonstrate their moral worth. In short, they looked for alternative ways to construct archetypal identities.

Accordingly, every insignia and gesture was endowed with political meaning, and became politically usable. Badges, titles, oaths, and pageantry, much like the words of sermons and the letters from cabildos to the king, became part of the discourse used to engrave on the evanescent body of time the narratives that created the virtuous self and pit it against its foe. Chapter 4 demonstrated the paramountcy of appearances in colonial identity-formation and political competition during the sixteenth century. This chapter shows that in the subsequent centuries Central American social groups became emblematic in nature -- they understood themselves as collective selves in which appearance and substance faded into one another, as did the individual and the collectivity. By the end of the eighteenth century, the Kingdom of Guatemala was a world of emblems.

In the emblematic world, consequential matters appeared

to be keenly personal, yet the protagonists of socio-political drama -- long accustomed to claiming the right to exalted identity on the basis of self-abnegation -- were no longer individuals but collective selves which derived their "amor propio", or self-esteem as social honor, from their members' avowed dedication to socio-moral virtues. Competition became the domain of proud families, guilds, barrios, pueblos, villas, and cities.

Previous chapters also showed that if appearances were crucial to competitive narratives in the sixteenth century, these narratives in turn had a recursive effect on the lives of colonials. The contradictory exigencies of self-abnegating identity and self-interest, we saw in Chapter 3, led to the development of dramaturgical obedience. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as the present chapter demonstrates, the recursiveness of narratives acted differently upon identity: now, to attain "notability" was, quite literally, to prevail over rivals. Historical events were the force behind this narcissistic turn. The central narrative of the sixteenth century had come to end: the conquest of Indians and territory was over.

Colonial society by the late eighteenth century was itself split into two realms: in one dwelled the "visible", in the other the "no-ones". The visible lived by the rules and regulations of their corporate identities: the honest artisan, for example, was governed by his guild, the Indian by the

authorities of his pueblo. The no-one, in contrast, belonged to no corporation and obeyed no law. He was bereft of social identity because he was without ties to the state, and was seen as having no code of conduct.

The discourse of good and evil at once explained and legitimated this split by treating social status as a reflection of moral worth. "Notables" were preeminent -- most visible among men -- because they were most deserving. And collective identities such as the guild and the pueblo were "morally" distinct from amorphous and indeterminate groups -- scattered settlements, racial hybrids, and the "class" of illegitimate sons.

This society held up a mirror to its face. Its competitive narratives and their collective enactment were now intended not just as missives for the metropolis but also as inwardly-directed displays of relative superiority. Rival families, guilds, and localities watched themselves and judged one another as they asserted their claims to identity and status. Indeed, the profound divisions between elites, on the one hand, and between elites and the anonymous, on the other, were exarcebated by their reflexive story-telling. In this sense, competition entrenched micro-rigidity by rendering identities obdurate.

But competition itself was also the cause of increasing macro-fluidity, as competitors relied more heavily on the transformative potency of symbolic prowess to ascend in the

social hierarchy. Dominance was neither a foregone conclusion nor irrevocable; and precipitous descent into the moral "darkness" of anonymity was not an uncommon occurrence.

a. Collective Identity in The Kingdom of Guatemala

By the end of the eighteenth century, the Kingdom of Guatemala (also known as the Captain Generalcy), a territory of approximately 582 thousand square kilometers, was sparsely populated by an estimated million "souls", most of whom were Indians and mestizos (the offsprings of unions between Indians and Europeans). In global terms, Indians were by far the more numerous, perhaps twice as many as the mestizos; while the Europeans may not have exceeded fifty thousand at the turn of the nineteenth century. There were, however, local variations in the proportions. In what today is Guatemala, the vast majority were Indians; in El Salvador, mestizos and Indians were almost equal in number; and if in Nicaragua and Honduras mestizos were preponderant, in Costa Rica, mestizos and Europeans were the bulk of the population.⁴

Almost half the entire population of the Kingdom was concentrated in the province of Guatemala, which was replete with Indian pueblos, mestizo villas, and "caserios", or settlements of scattered houses. Even the population of Guatemala's capital city, though estimated at no more than forty thousand, was much larger, for example, than that of San Salvador or León -- each at a maximum of twenty thousand.⁵

Cities, guilds, barrios, pueblos, and villas, lived under the protection of a patron saint.⁶ The image of this protector was inextricable from that of the collectivity, which in turn proved its moral worth through expressions of devotion to its patron. Veneration of the patron saint was organized and financed by confraternities and brotherhoods, though the former also became a kind of defense fund, used to pay for tribute, bribes, debts and feasts. In addition, wealthy confraternities engaged in agrarian enterprise, and served as banks to outside borrowers.⁷ Travelling through Guatemala, Thomas Cage (1625-1637) wrote that:

Every company or sodality of the saints or of the Virgin has two or three mayordomos who collect from the town alms for the maintaining of the sodality. They also gather eggs about the town for the priest every week, and give him an account of the gatherings, and allow him every month, or fortnight, two crowns for a Mass to be sung to the saint.⁸

By 1774, the diocese of Guatemala (which also included the faithful of El Salvador) had almost 2,000 confraternities and brotherhoods. These confraternities and brotherhoods, with their rituals and rules, shaped the identities of pueblos and barrios, but the typical pueblo also had a defining occupation -- gardeners, servants, artisans⁹ -- and was in close proximity to a villa or to a city.

As pueblo and city expanded, they often became attached. Via this process of convergence, the city, for example, might become the centre of a new, larger city, and the pueblo a

barrio.¹⁰ A typical city thus became at once a coherent assortment of smaller neighborhoods and a locality with a distinctive identity.

The barrios of the peripheries became both self-affirming and mimetic of the city, or greater neighborhood. A barrio not only had its own patron saint, but its own miniature centre or plaza, and its own church. This was true of the barrios that began as Indian pueblos and of those that were founded by the creole artisanal "middle" classes as well. An artisanal barrio, although positioned between the centre of the "principals" and the "afueras" (the outlying areas) of the Indian pueblos,¹¹ had its own identity, and lived under the protection of an emblematic image. Moreover, the boundaries separating barrios from one another were clearly drawn, for they were determined not only by the occupation of its members, as in Europe, but also by their members' race and social rank: Indian, mestizo and creole laborers and craftsmen formed separate communities.¹²

Notable families, too, were identified with their neighborhoods. During the conquest and colonization period, they struggled for a residential place in the centre of the city. This distinction entailed proximity to the impassive concentrations of prestige -- to the "principal" buildings, such as the seat of the municipal cabildo, and of course, the cathedral, which invariably received pride of place as per royal ordinance.

As time passed, the neighborhoods of the centre expanded, as extended kin inexorably sought proximity. Brothers and cousins established their residences nearby. Daughters married, but rarely ventured beyond parental reach; orphaned children were given refuge; and room was made for the beds of the elderly and of the invalids as frequently as for the cradles of infants.

Orphans and other unfortunate relatives -- those of scant or no property of their own; unmarried female sisters; and widows (especially those still rearing minors) -- were among the subordinate kin who formed part of the paterfamilias' clientela, or network of clients.¹³ Included, too, in the "clientela", albeit in a lower category, were the paterfamilias' house-servants and their families; and the peons who worked on his haciendas, including their dependents. The clientela might also integrate an entire family struggling against indigence -- perhaps the father prematurely deceased, the mother an ambulatory vendor of vegetables and fruits.

A notable paterfamilias was bound by familial stories of his ancestors' honor and virtue to provide counsel and solace to his clients. And frequently, he became godfather to many if not to all of his clients' children, a bond which entailed a series of paternal obligations. Indeed, as godfather, he intervened at every crucial point of the subordinate life-history -- christening, first communion, wedding, economic adversity, illness, and burial.¹⁴

The identity of a notable clan became gradually entwined with that of its neighborhood, as those who lived in close familiarity forged alliances on the basis of what they believed to be deep yet self-evident knowledge of one another. Even in the midst of their bloodless wars of succession, when credible candidates vied for control of the patriarchal seat, clans dealt with one another as if with transparent identities -- selves who were ultimately incapable of taking either friend or foe by surprise. In the city of Granada, for example, to say "los de arriba" -- "those from the upper side" -- and "los de la encrucijada" -- "those from the crossroads" -- was to evoke the very content of two major opposing identities which pitted one alliance of families and neighbors against another.¹⁵

The house of a prominent clan bore the family crest on its facade to signify its very self. The crest -- the badge of the family's "amor propio", or self-esteem as social honor -- reminded passersby of the family's ancestral luster. But the crest also exposed the family's honor to detriment by daring alert rivals to keep a watchful eye on the conduct of the clan's fallible members. Familial worth, in fact, was constantly at stake in the interplay between ancestral legacy and the daily adherence to its dictates by the living generations. Succinctly put, an individual life-history began in reverse: a clan, it was believed, impressed at birth its distinctive features -- its story -- upon its members. An

hidalgo, we saw in previous chapters, was literally a "son of something or someone".

Long after the Encomienda lost its economic importance, an hidalgo still was seen as having been born in possession of the particular qualities which his forebears had displayed consistently in their dealings with partners, allies, neighbors and friends. This ancestral legacy -- inscribed in the narrative of the family within the context of its locality -- was one and the same with the attributes of the hidalgo: so long as he carried on tradition, he tended to his own identity and defended his familial self-esteem, thus remaining wealthy, even when poor. Indeed, inherited acknowledgement of virtuousness from the community was a form of capital, and to be renowned, say, for unfailing honesty, was to own a small fortune -- a trust extracted through rigorous familial integrity from the evanescence of time.

The exhibition of virtue was a natural deed, at once an emanation from emblematic being and an aspiring gesture through which the familial self reached for additional privileges. From one generation to the next, the descendants of conquistadores and founders, even if they suffered reversals of fortune, as it so often occurred, retained their identities as "sons of conquerors", for they struggled to remain members of a lineage that was privileged, even if materially impoverished.¹⁶ This applied to the hidalgos of the Kingdom of Guatemala, even though titles of nobility proved

nearly unattainable to them.¹⁷

Preservation of a family's emblematic identity, as with pecuniary wealth, entailed both a privilege and a burden: a notable paterfamilias had to be prepared to go to extremes in the protection of the name associated with his family's defining virtue. Indeed, clans which assumed the virtue of munificence as their familial emblem were frequently led to impoverishment by their own unstoppable property donations to the church.¹⁸

As with family clans, urban centers had "lineages", and continued to compete for the titles of recognition which elevated them in the world hierarchy. Cities were the most illustrious, for their lineage presumably originated in the conquista, when they were founded exclusively for Spaniards and their descendants. By the third decade of the seventeenth century, the major cities and towns of Spanish America were positioned in a clear rank order. The viceregal capitals of Mexico City and Lima were at the apex, followed in importance by Bogotá, Guatemala, and Santo Domingo. The third rank included Panamá, Quito, Cuzco, Guadalajara, La Plata, and Santiago de Chile.¹⁹

Once the conquista was completed, no more "cities", senso strictu, were built in the Kingdom of Guatemala; the twelve cities mentioned in the census of 1778 had all been founded in the sixteenth century. Of these twelve, the most important were Santiago de los Caballeros (Antigua), San Salvador, León,

Granada, Comayagua, Ciudad Real de Chiapas, and Cartago.²⁰ And among these cities of the Kingdom, Santiago de los Caballeros was preeminent. The city, after its devastation by an earthquake in the sixteenth century, had been designed by the military architect of Felipe II, whose previous accomplishments included the fortress El Morro in Havana and the Castillo de San Juan in Veracruz.

In addition, Santiago had a hospital, and a school for arts, philosophy, theology and Latin grammar. By the early decades of the seventeenth century, the school awarded the equivalent of university decrees. And in 1652, the cabildo requested permission from the King to found a university with donations made to the Dominicans by a military notable. Carlos II granted the request. In 1680 the University was inaugurated. As in its previous, less formal incarnation, the University now operated under the protection of the "Holy Inquisition".

By then, the first printing press had arrived in Guatemala, brought in through the efforts of a friar determined to disseminate religious ideas. Shrines, convents and churches -- the petrified gestures of devotion (and not infrequently, priestly greed) -- were built as time passed.

Prestige and power concentrated in Guatemala City as in no other city in the Kingdom. Other cities -- in competitive awe -- told of the capital's greatness. The capital was the seat of the Kingdom's preeminent cabildo -- established by

the most powerful conquistadores in the area. Guatemala City was also the seat of the archdiocese, with jurisdiction over the dioceses of San Salvador, Comayagua, Leon and Ciudad Real. The bishop of Guatemala was the highest ecclesiastical authority in the Kingdom; second in the colonial government only to the Capitan General. The Bishop, for instance, exercised the power of reportage, as he was the one to direct to Spain both ecclesiastical disputes and secular conflicts involving the church.²¹

These ecclesiastical disputes were frequent because the church herself was embroiled in the struggle for preeminence. In the universities, Franciscans were pitted against Dominicans, and Dominicans against Jesuits; and in the bishoprics, all friars and orders against the secular clergy. Significantly, as religious orders struggled against one another for preeminence, they set out to write their own collective biographies. There were Dominican narratives of the Dominicans' history in Mexico and Guatemala; and there were Franciscan narratives. The most voluminous, of course, was the historiography of the Jesuits, as they gained predominance over all the other orders -- be it in the urban centers or in remote rural areas.²²

Church and state, too, jockeyed for status. Visits by inquisitors to the viceroy, for example, had to be carefully recorded, noting exactly the manner in which the latter received the former. Was he standing or seated? Ceremonies and

reverences became the stakes of keen competition. If one power deemed another's ceremonial gesture insufficiently respectful, then an acrimonious dispute was likely to ensue. Disputes over seating arrangements in the ceremonies of Holy Week, for example, often had to be subjected to royal arbitration.²³

Conflict was particularly keen in Guatemala City, which in addition to the being the seat of the archdiocese, was the seat of the Capitanía General of Guatemala and of the Real Audiencia. The former was presided over by the Captain General, who was charged with the military defense of the Kingdom. The Audiencia was a high tribunal which, as in the rest of Spanish America, was most exalted in rank. The Captain General also bore the title of President, for he presided over the Audiencia as well. However, it was the judges of appeal who settled the disputes brought to the Audiencia by the authorities and the cabildos from throughout the Kingdom.

These hearings were imbued with dignity, since eloquence and solemnity were an overriding concern to the appellants, who, after long and taxing journeys, would finally make their presentations to the magistrates, the prosecutor, the alguacil mayor (marshall), and the officials called the "Lawyer of the Poor" and the "Defender of Indians".²⁴

Like Guatemala City, the capital cities of the various intendancies -- Ciudad Real de Chiapas (part of what is today Mexico), San Salvador, Comayagua (Honduras), and León (Nicaragua, which exercised partial authority over Costa Rica)

-- were distinguished by the presence of the jurisdiction's military, ecclesiastical and civil governments. These cities constantly reminded themselves that they were residence to the Intendants (and after 1812, to the Provincial Deputations, which were created by the Cortes of Cadiz. Just as the Capitan General was president of the Real Audiencia in the Kingdom, the Intendants presided over the Diputaciones).

And all the villas, pueblos and cities of the Kingdom of Guatemala, spontaneously preoccupied with "appearances", sought to provide palpable evidence of their collective dedication to loyalty and duty. Hence the incessant construction of churches. Sonsonate (Salvador), for example, came to have seven churches though only one priest -- an impressive number, even in comparison to Leon, which had eight churches in addition to the cathedral.²⁵

But the fact remained that it was in Guatemala City that none other than the alguacil mayor of the Audiencia kept vigil over the mores of inhabitants. It was in Guatemala City that the only university in the isthmus, San Carlos de Guatemala, was located. And it was in Guatemala City that the power and prestige inherent in the "Consulado de Comercio", the merchants' guild, resided. Indeed, the creation of the Consulado in 1793 solidified the regional dominance of merchants and businessmen centered in Guatemala city. The "provincials" -- Salvadorans, Nicaraguans, Hondurans and Costa Ricans -- bitterly resented the Guatemalans. "They adorn us

with prices that keep us more naked than adorned" quipped Nicaraguans, while the Intendant of San Salvador remarked on the "tyranny of Guatemala City over the provinces".²⁶

b. Evil Vs. Good and Social Invisibility

If identity was genealogical and collective, then, belonging neither to family nor to guild, neither to a Spanish city nor to an Indian pueblo, was to be "un nadie", a no-one - - a soul dispossessed of a social body, of a corporate identity. A no-one was to be neither pitied nor respected, only feared, for he was ruled neither by cabildo nor church.

As the perfect opposite of hidalgos and notables, the no-ones were the orphans of the emblematic world. Succintly put, the no-one was the object neither of "assault" nor "envy," and as such, he became irrelevant to the law. Irrelevance released the no-one from the bonds of gratitude and fealty that were meant to bind government and subject.²⁷ However, as Chapter 5 shows, this freedom also rendered the no-one exceedingly vulnerable to the charge of "immorality" during moments of political turbulence, when the "decent" would be pitted against the "indecent;" the "reputable" against the "disreputable"; and the "honest" against the "dishonest."

Racial and social ambiguity often went hand in hand with the loss of identity. Illustrative of the former was the mestizo --the offspring of an union between Indian and European. Illustrative of the latter was the ladino, whose

family, even with little or no Indian blood, lost all wealth, status and luster. In the Kingdom of Guatemala, the colonial authorities, in an attempt to force "ladinos" to become laborers on the haciendas, often denied them the right to found villas (which never exceeded a total of fifteen).²⁸ As a result, ladinos led precarious lives in minute settlements which they erected on the peripheries of villas and pueblos, the latter being inhabited solely by Indians. The peripheral settlements of the ladinos, like those of Indians who abandoned their pueblos, had neither church nor political governance, whereas a pueblo had its own patron saint, cabildo, church and plaza. Already by the mid sixteenth century the Crown saw in mestizos a threat to the highly structured social order; and by the turn of the seventeenth century, mestizos were seen as a "vicious and lost" people of "evil inclinations and customs".²⁹ Loss of identity, in short, had led to the construction of an archetypically evil identity: the mestizo.

But perhaps the purest embodiment of the no-one was the Indian who deserted his pueblo, disappeared from the parochial register and became a vagabond without name or credibility. Seen as agents of evil, these vagabonds received such labels as "diabolical" and "scandalous".³⁰ According to the Geographical-Moral Description of the Province of San Salvador, written in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, there were many such vagabonds in that province. Most

frequently, they were seeking escape from dictatorial Indian mayors and abusive priests. If they became laborers and administrators of haciendas, they might come to be judged "honorable and hard-working" by Spaniards; and they themselves frequently came to look with disdain upon their former pueblo communities. The clerical author of the Geographical-Moral Description, however, found these escapees "perverted and dissolute, fearful neither of God nor King"; capable of exploiting other Indians with flagrant "immorality," going so far as to invade and take administrative control of entire pueblos.³¹

The Indian vagabond who became successfully settled through such aggressivity regained more than his visibility: once a roaming no-one, he was now a notable in an emblematic community of Indians. As such, he became stronger even than the "hybrids" who dwelt precariously between the extremes of notability and anonymity, somewhere along the infinite steps of social ambiguity.

The quintessential hybrid was the illegitimate son, who was frequently, though not invariably, racially mixed; and whose social-moral identity was by definition indeterminate. In Guatemala City, a high number of illegitimate children were either born dead or abandoned. These children were usually the offspring of poor women and artisan males, who were allowed to marry only if they had a shop of their own, or secure employment.³² Bastard sons, together with the recently

converted to Christianity, and those lacking "moral credentials," for example, were categorically excluded from the Colegio de Abogados, or College of Lawyers -- an academy which received its title of royal approval in 1810, and took as its emblematic patrons the Virgin of Nuestra Señora de las Mercedes Redención de Cautivos and the Glorious San Ibo.³³

Although the region's inability to find a stable "motor" crop rendered all groups vulnerable to socio-economic dislocation, lack of moral constancy was seen as the primary cause of a gradual or even precipitous descent into the penumbra of social ambiguity which led ultimately to the terrifying darkness of anonymity. In 1807, according to El Salvador's Intendant, the members of the highest class, Spaniards, whether "peninsulares" (born in Spain) or creoles (offspring born in American of European Spaniards), belonged to one of two categories: a) the first order, and b) the common condition. Those who belonged to the latter, the Intendant lamented,

rarely [ascended] to the category of the former, unless aided by commerce; but the former [descended] into the latter with excessive frequency. Deviation from mores and customs, and a weak innate bent toward occupation ultimately [reduced] innumerable [Spaniards] to a state of obscurity and moral insignificance, where, amidst their troubles, they [were] happy to find an honest, industrious mulatta to provide them with the absolute necessities of life.³⁴

These no-ones -- vagabonds, displaced laborers, beggars, and

the ladinos and mestizos living in the scattered shacks on the peripheries of pueblos, villas and cities -- could become members of a paterfamilias' clientela. Indeed, clientelism was pervasive in a world where the giving of alms was but the most minimal gesture of the charitable self. Beggars sat on the steps of the cathedral because they were certain to receive alms from more than one honest vecino (citizen-neighbor) on his way to church. And the honest vecinos felt compelled to dispense alms not so much by the poignant wretchedness of the beseechers, as by the discreet but watchful glances they gave one another -- Christian fellows watching out for insufficient benefaction in their ceremonial rivals.

Indian pueblos, in contrast, had their own municipal government and were ultimately subject only to the monarch. As for artisanal guilds, they were accorded the respect owed to notable paterfamilias.³⁵ Master craftsmen were often accorded the honorific of Don. And since a guild continuously vindicated its collective reputation through emblematic competition, its individual members were regarded highly.

c. Self-delusion: Skin Color as Emblem of Familial Worth

The ongoing arrival of peninsular Spaniards suspicious of the moral quality of colonials, in combination with the scarcity of local titles of nobility, led to the deepening importance of physical appearance. In the seventeenth century, newly-arrived peninsulars began to claim superiority over

creoles on the basis of "limpieza de sangre," or cleanliness of blood.

This notion of racial purity was rooted in the peninsula itself, where Spaniards came to look upon anyone with Moorish or Jewish blood in his veins as "impure" -- a descendant of contaminated ancestors and a breeder of contaminated descendants. After the Reconquista, Spanish society, obsessed with such purity, became enveloped in an atmosphere of suspicion in which rumors and accusations aimed at an individual could damage the reputation of an entire family. The Crown itself discriminated against those of tainted blood by demanding that aspirants to bureaucratic or ecclesiastical posts produce a certificate of limpieza de sangre.³⁶ The notion of limpieza de sangre, though important in the colonies from the start, became central to its system of socio-political competition in the seventeenth century. If in the sixteenth century even a lowly Spaniard in the Indies felt deserving of a share of the conquista's spoils by virtue of his cleanliness of blood, in the seventeenth, newly-arrived peninsulars saw in creoles racial and moral degeneration incarnate. This condition, moreover, disqualified "creoles" as aspirants to bureaucratic and ecclesiastical positions.

The word "criollo", or creole, was first used among the Spanish mendicant orders -- religious pledged to humility -- as a derogatory label for local Spaniards. Indeed, the internal divisions of the church deepened as universities

graduated more and more creoles, and as many of these chose to go both into the secular clergy and the regular orders. Conflict over the highest positions became particularly keen, as European clerics and friars believed themselves superior to creoles by virtue of their birth in the peninsula. By the early seventeenth century it was necessary to institute the *alternativa*, an arrangement previously used in the peninsula to settle regionalist conflicts among the Orders. Under the "alternativa", provincial religious superiors were elected first from one party and then from the other in turn.³⁷

In this world of images, creoles responded in kind to attacks on their dignity. They applied the derogatory label "gachupín" and "chapelón" to Spaniards, thus ridiculing the Spaniards' garments and shoes. And they reached for irrefutable proof of their genealogical purity. Such proof was not always within the grasp of creoles who had been in the colonies for decades.³⁸ In the eighteenth century, however, the crown, already in financial crisis, sold certificates of "white" blood. The certificates were known as *cedulas de gracias al sacar*, literally meaning "decree of thanks for getting out..."; the remainder of the phrase implying "out of the colored ranks".³⁹

The certificate attesting to *limpieza de sangre* was more than a legal pre-requisite to office; it was a brief story of genealogical identity, merging through remembrance and imaginative power the history of the conquest with that of a

family. The bearer, the certificate claimed, had been born into a line of ancestors whose lives had been exemplary -- good Spaniards; soldiers who had captured glory in the conquista; founders who had persevered under conditions of extraordinary hardship; colonists who although alienated from their monarch by an immense ocean, nonetheless had remained dutiful subjects. Thus, if the family was a primary inscriber of character, the family's certified *limpieza de sangre* was, in principle, the link between illustrious past and prosperous future. Mayoralties, for example, belonged exclusively to the descendants of Spaniards. And though by the end of the eighteenth-century, it had become commonplace to buy and bargain for certification of *limpieza de sangre*, the certificate remained a major concern of notables and parvenus alike, including among the latter the very mestizos against whom it was meant to discriminate. The certificate became one more emblem of profound significance, as it attested to the meritorious past of the family in question, and allowed its bearers to bequeath the advantages owed to the virtuous. Thus, in a colonial regime in which titles of nobility were scarce, the certificate was used routinely as prima facie evidence of superiority, which in itself was offered as justification for further deferential treatment. "His parents and all his ancestors," a typical tittle declared, "have always been reputed as noble Spaniards, and as such have always obtained honorable employment in the political, the

military, and the ecclesiastic realms".⁴⁰

Purchasing power alone, however, could not render credible a certificate of "limpieza de sangre". The title itself had to be purified, as it were, through the incessant formation of marital alliances which by joining luster, privilege and wealth enabled sagacious notable paterfamilias to preserve their clan's social dignity amidst financial instability. Such instability was an integral part of eighteenth-century society, when the traditional hacienda owner became but one type in a diversified economic elite. By the turn of the nineteenth century, this elite included the commercial hacienda-owners, who produced for export but did not market their agricultural goods; the merchants, who did not own an hacienda but thrived in commerce; and finally, the hacienda-owner merchants. The latter type engaged both in trade and agriculture; normally kept residence in the city (almost one and the same with his commercial house); and was the wealthiest among notables.⁴¹

The permutations of mutually advantageous marital unions were many. A creole merchant family established in the isthmus since mid-eighteenth century, for instance, might have made a name for itself, and finally be entrenched in local politics (the *cabildo*), but also be facing a reversal of fortune. In this case, the paterfamilias was likely to arrange the marriage of a daughter, a sister, or a niece to a Spanish parvenú who would bring to the union not only the

entrepreneurial spirit characteristic of first-generation colonists, but also valuable business contacts in Iberian ports; the distinction of birth in the mother country; and his indisputable "limpieza de sangre".⁴²

In return, the parvenú would gain entry into the cabildo, and thus become a "son of the conquerors" -- he would step into an exclusive realm of prestige and influence, where notables forged alliances amongst themselves; bequeathed their seats to the next generation, or sold them to worthy bidders; and exercised their attendant privileges. Merely to invoke descentance from conquerors, for example, carried great weight in pleas to the crown, such pleas being the ultimate recourse for the subjects of empire.⁴³

Limpieza de sangre -- indispensable to the signification of familial worth -- was co-determined by several criteria, as can be gleaned from formal statements of priestly merit, which typically began with a mechanical praise along the following lines: "Legitimate son of a legitimate marriage...a descendant on both sides of original Spaniards settled in that Province [León, Nicaragua], all of distinguished and unblemished nobility, Christians by tradition and clean of all mala raza [bad race]."⁴⁴

The certificate -- with its connotations of ancestral merit -- served as stable point of reference for the adaptive responses of groups to a changing world. Indeed, these responses, if successful, enabled the new to become old, and

the old to survive. In Guatemala City, as in Granada, León, San Salvador and other major cities of the isthmus, for example, newly-arrived but increasingly powerful families struggled for a residential place in the centre.

d. Collective Ennoblement

The value of royal titles awarded to communities only increased with time, as it became clear that the Crown, loath to create a class of potentates in the Indies, gave out titles of nobility quite rarely.⁴⁵ Emblematic competition, however, persisted via representational politics, which the cabildo regulated within a locality's interior world, populated by notable families, brotherhoods, guilds, barrios, and Indian pueblos. The cabildo, for example, assigned town lots, whose locations signified the status of the recipients, and it governed municipal ceremonies -- from oaths to processions.⁴⁶

At stake in residential location and in ceremonial display was "visibility", or "notability", which in the mature colonial period, as the encomienda declined in importance, became more valuable. A cabildo, for instance, might accord recognition to a local notable "for the principal role" played by his "devotion" in the rites of worship of the city's patron saint, as well as in relief efforts during times of pestilence. Cabildos also made preparations for the royal feasts, taking care to specify every ceremonial detail, for crucial assignments of honor were at stake, including the

honor of bearing the royal standard in procession.

Finally, through its official utterances, decrees and ceremonies, the cabildo enabled its larger community to display the central constitutive element of sound moral character in a collectivity: fidelity to the monarchy. Such display was essential to all communities, regardless of their rank in the administrative hierarchy, precisely because it was a prerequisite for ascent. On the basis of its cabildo's proven fealty -- through display and narrative -- a Villa might be promoted by the monarch to the rank of city, just like a pueblo might be elevated to the rank of villa.⁴⁷ And a villa or a city which under the leadership of its cabildo displayed similar moral fortitude in the face of turmoil might be rewarded with the title of "Very Noble and Loyal." For their part, city cabildos strove for the rank of "Excellency."

The cabildo remained "ordinary" throughout the fulfillment of its normal administrative duties, but when forced by unforeseen events to make a momentous choice, it immediately became an "open" institution.⁴⁸ A cabildo abierto convened the "notables", or local elites, as the municipal authorities were expected to consult with the "honest" and "reputable" vecinos, meaning the "principals", and the "conspicuous" (political, military, ecclesiastical and intellectual notables), who were often accompanied by clients and allies. In short, the cabildo, whether open or closed, assured the elites access to power, and for this reason, they

were not to be ignored by emerging potentates, not even in gesture, lest they injure the honor of established "personages".

But the regular cabildo, through its regulation of symbolic competition, and the open cabildo, through its very operational logic, linked normative injunction to power by making membership the domain of the virtuous identity. Accordingly, in the face of difficulty and uncertainty, the "open" cabildo presumably stood not vulnerable and exposed, but impregnable, like a fortress of prestige and honorability. In brief, the reputations of notables and that of their municipality became one and the same; and propriety, dignity and socio-political order their shared concerns. Open cabildos decided on the founding of new settlements, the renovation of old ones, and the transfer of cities that had suffered a catastrophe. In the Kingdom of Guatemala, the latter was typically an earthquake.

e. Identity and the Struggle for Ascent

The crucial importance of insignias, representational displays, "position", and rank came into full play during moments of crisis. In 1773, a little over two hundred years after the reconstruction of the capital of the Kingdom of Guatemala, the magnificent city was partially devastated by yet another earthquake. The city's inhabitants immediately engaged in a bitterly acrimonious debate regarding their

city's possible transfer to a new site.

The earthquake coincided with a shift in Spanish colonial administrative policy. Bourbon reformers, though concerned with the safety of the population, also perceived the catastrophe as a tactical opening. With the local elite rendered weak by the earthquake, the moment seemed ideal for a reformist offensive that sought the redistribution of privilege among various groups in order to increase royal authority. Once reasserted, this authority could be brought to bear on the "arbitration" of rights and duties so as to restore "harmony" to a society marked by inequalities.⁴⁹

Toward these ends, the crown instructed its officials in Guatemala to organize an exodus to a new and safer site, and to enforce it manu militari if necessary. But no sooner had the decree been issued than heightened rivalry broke out into the open between old and new social groups. Among the latter, merchant families championed the decision most aggressively. Among the former, the church, artisanal guilds, Indian pueblos and many of the most illustrious creole families dug in their heels in defiance of the local authorities.

To explain the heightened competition, as well as the fact that a chasm could occur at all in a world increasingly in flux, it is necessary to understand that the identities of some of those involved were literally tied to the structures which remained standing among the ruins, while for others precisely the opposite was true. New merchant families, for

example, favored the move, as it would not only afford them new business opportunities but also cover them with the luster of "founders."

The value of this distinction cannot to be underestimated. An old logic entered into a mutually-reinforcing relationship with the rising aspirations of the new merchants. For some time the leading exponents of commercial interests had been at odds with creole members of the cabildo, who unyieldingly opposed the former's efforts to hold meetings independent of civic authority. As "notables", however, the merchants would be in a much stronger position to attend the open cabildo, a prospect which was desirable from a strategic perspective.

The distinction, moreover, would help fulfill a prerequisite for membership in the very consulado, or guild, the merchants were so intent on creating. The Consulado would require its principal officers -- prior, syndic, two consuls and nine councilors -- to be "men of known wealth, of good reputation, and practiced and intelligent in matters of commerce".⁵⁰

The clergy, on the other hand, vehemently opposed the transfer of the city, fearful that the parvenus would invade its financial turf. And indeed, the merchants gradually became creditors to the colonials, a role formerly played by the ecclesiastical institutions which were left holding considerable mortgages on deserted residential properties.⁵¹

Resistance was especially strong among the artisanal guilds, a stance which was in great part determined by the financial inability of artisans to bear the cost of starting anew. As it turned out, many guilds came close to "total extinction". Their members were forced "to close their shops, abandon their homes, and carry with them their families, possessions and working tools, only to find themselves, after a long and taxing journey, in a city where they could not even obtain shelter".⁵²

But guilds did form in the new capital. And it is in these new guilds that a fuller explanation can be gleaned for the seeming recalcitrance of those that stayed behind. In the new capital, as in the old, craftsmen and artists were organized into guilds by the cabildo, which regulated their activities in an effort to protect the vecinos from the business of tradesmen who lacked "moral backing".⁵³ The guild, in turn, enmeshed the craftsman as social and moral being with the quality of his craft; and the guild itself was held together as a collective identity by its continuous attempt to become one and the same with a stamp of virtue.

Master craftsmen were organized collectively to set quality control standards, work-rules, and recruitment and training procedures and even to limit product-lines. To prevent levels of competition that would endanger the group's status, they sought to limit individual freedom in the market.⁵⁴

And if the notable family had its hidalgos and its crest, the

guild had not only its master craftsman and its rules, standards, and exams, but also an "imagen titular," or emblematic image -- invariably a patron saint. The imagen titular of the pyrotechnics was Nuestra Senora de la Concepcion; the silversmiths relied on San Eloy, and the cobblers on San Crispin and San Crispiano. These moral exemplars not only protected the guilds from calamity, but endowed with meaning the guilds' vows of dedication to the habits and customs of "buena vida" -- righteous life. (Often, the guilds guaranteed fulfillment of their claims to high moral standing by keeping a deposit in the royal coffer).⁵⁵

It is no accident, then, that guilds, on the one hand, forbade advertising, and on the other, as Eric Wolf put it, "competed fiercely with one another for the lesser stakes of prestige and privilege, with the merchant guild (consulado) occupying top rank in status and power".⁵⁶

The so-called "lesser" stakes of prestige and privilege were in fact the vocabulary of competition. They signaled -- advertised -- the history or story of the guild to the community. In this form of advertisement, a guild's story both forced it to adhere to the strictures of identity and freed it to compete with others in the symbolic field. Advertising, in short, was inherent to the making and unmaking of reputations; it was immanent in the clash of identities, in turn entwined with work and production.⁵⁷

Thus, guilds also sought official recognition from the

ecclesiastical cabildo, and petitioned this authoritative body for the right to build their own church altars.⁵⁸ The altar was crucial to the reputation of a guild, for it was at the altar that it put forth its ceremonial gestures and utterances. At the altar, for instance, it exalted its emblematic icon, and renewed its vows. At the altar, too, its "veedores" (overseers) took their oaths of duty; and its new master craftsman made his pledge of honesty to the community. Word then spread among the community, detailing the ritual, which at once retold an old story and integrated new actors into a narrative of duty and promise.

For a guild, then, abandoning its altar entailed abandoning at once the central emblem of its biography and its most concrete means for further struggles over recognition. Relatedly, also at risk was the guild's intangible fortune: its emblematic reputation and the attendant communal trust. On the new site, for example, guild members might succumb to the temptations that come of turmoil and extreme need. Moreover, relations with the cabildo might suffer irretrievable damage, for the old cabildo might break up under pressure and likely reconstitute itself to incorporate ascending parvenus who were ignorant of the guild's reputation. In short, departure would have entailed a threat to the future of the guild's emblematic self.

The creole guilds were not alone in their resistance. For instance, Jocotenango, the near-by Indian pueblo of masons,

had to be compelled to resettle.⁵⁹ And as with the guilds, this pueblo's stance was only partially determined by fear of economic loss. The pueblo was being uprooted from the intricate world in which time and again it had proved itself worthy of moral identity. To understand that world is not only to comprehend the resistance of the guilds and the pueblos, but also the resentful hesitancy of the old notable clans, and the alacrity of the new merchant families. Indeed, the optimistic expectations of the latter were realized early on, as an integral part of the construction project. Hindered by shortages of labor and supplies, the task proved remarkably difficult for the founders and settlers. Its magnitude, moreover, was immense: the new capital, if it was to retain the exalted rank of its ancestor, would have to meet the costly requisites detailed in the Royal Decree of 1775. The instructions contained therein were in fact virtually identical to the royal specifications of two hundred years back. And over the next forty years, the realization of the project -- socially and functionally defined -- led to an outcome almost identical to the royal designs. For not only was the experience acquired in previous construction projects relished, but the hierarchical principle was reasserted, so that the centre remained the point of highest concentration of prestige and comfort. (The one clear sign of greater enlightenment achieved by the ilustrados in the new capital, was a decrease in the illiteracy rate).⁶⁰

The construction project reached such exuberant costs it actually began to compete for resources with the military defense of the Atlantic Coast from European pirates.⁶¹ Nevertheless, it advanced; partially driven by emblematic competitiveness. The paterfamilias of the Aycinenas, a newly arrived merchant clan whose name was becoming associated with the virtue of munificence, was chosen by the Captain General of the Kingdom to help found the new capital and to form part of its cabildo. The paterfamilias' contributions and donations to the project not only proved worthy of the clan's emerging reputation for generosity but enhanced it. At considerable expense, Aycinena conquered the respect and admiration of fellow notables, who "ceded" to him the southern area of the plaza mayor, where he established both his residence and his commercial house. The Crown, too, rewarded the the Aycinena family, by granting its patriarch a title of nobility. He accepted only that of marquis, as he did not feel financially able to bear with dignity the corresponding duties of a more exalted one.⁶²

In a single stroke, the notable conquered the three signs of preeminence that were the prize at the core of founding myths: a title of nobility, a seat in the municipal cabildo, and a residential position in the centre of the capital of the Kingdom. This was no easy task. In San Salvador, for example, the cabildo held open session in 1775 to deal with the crisis which erupted when a group of peninsular merchants bid for the

cabildo's vacant offices. Apprehension had spread rapidly among local creoles, themselves descendants of Spaniards, as they were convinced that the peninsulares would use their cabildo positions to gain control of local commercial and political life. When the peninsulars tried to attend the open cabildo, they were "repulsed with fists".⁶³

It also stands to reason, however, that the local notables would have been offended by the outsiders' financial bid for power, which, by itself, did not satisfy the requirements of the emblematic world. At that time, for example, even the spirit of the Enlightenment addressed autochthonous noblemen through the old signs of distinction, as the Crown extended them deferences in recognition of their aristocratic origins and as part of their rightful patrimony of honor and status. The Royal decree of September 11 of 1776 unambiguously declared that they were entitled to aspire to "public dignities and offices," and were "owed all the preeminences, be they ecclesiastical or secular." And in his decree of June 5, 1778, the King acceded to the proposal by the Dean of the Colegio Tridentino of Guatemala, to "endow [the Colegio] with twelve fellowships for chiefs or noblemen from [those] provinces so that they [might] be educated and instructed in virtue and letters." In principle, all natives were eligible to attend the university; in practice only noblemen were admitted.⁶⁴

Such were the structures which the Aycinena paterfamilias

negotiated to attain complete triumph for his clan in Guatemala. The notable even secured himself a place in the Merchant Guild of Guatemala, which, like its older counterparts in Mexico and Peru, enjoyed monopolistic privileges, finally granted by the crown in 1793 as part of a greater effort to combat economic depression in the colonies. Nine new merchant guilds were created to this end. As part of its privileges and duties, the Merchant Guild of Guatemala supervised the Kingdom's commerce and administered mercantile justice. Its membership included, as per royal ordinance, an equal number of merchants and planters, even though the former, mostly peninsulars, had initially petitioned for the right to organize themselves as a guild independent of civil authority, thus seeking autonomy from the capital's municipal government (cabildo), which was dominated by creoles closely allied with producers.⁶⁵ In short, perhaps unwittingly, the crown forced economic competitors not only to coexist within the bounds of the guild, but created the possibility for overlap in the memberships of two extremely powerful institutions: the Cabildo (municipal government) and the Consulado (Merchant Guild) of Guatemala.

Aycinena embodied this nexus. The death of the now-illustrious Aycinena in 1796 caused the first explicit conflict between two rivalling institutions to which he had belonged -- the Cabildo and the Consulado. The latter proposed

that two representatives from each institution carry the body to the sepulcher, but the [cabildo] demanded the exclusive privilege. The Captain General finally decreed that the matter did not allow extended debate and the view of the Consulado would have to prevail.⁶⁶

f. Competition, Imaginative Power and Visibility

In the emblematic world almost any opportunity to affirm virtuousness -- the fundamental justification of visibility -- could provoke intense competition among collective selves. As in Baroque literature and art, in emblematic competition the world was theater. Competitive theater, in fact, was the product of a collective imagination whose boundaries blurred with those of the unself-conscious life. Consider this seemingly insignificant incident. At end of the 18th century, word reached Nicaragua that the Most Illustrious Senor Don José Domas -- recently appointed President Governor and Captain General of the Kingdom of Guatemala, and Field Marshall of the Royal Armies -- was finally embarked on the journey that would take him from Panama to his official post in Guatemala. According to a narrative of the day, in the city of Granada, the "Very Noble Cabildo" and the "Loyal City" quickly agreed to dispatch an offer of hospitality to the personage, who graciously accepted the invitation.⁶⁷

"The fatigue, tribulations, expenses and works involved in the preparation of his welcome," remarked the anonymous narrator, "were more than considerable".⁶⁸ The "Señor Coronel de Milicias," for example, reached into his own "peculio"

(personal savings) to outfit his battalion with new uniforms, a task which engaged all the local tailors. In the meantime, numerous disputes broke out among the notable family clans of Nicaragua, as each claimed that their home was ideally appointed to receive the President Governor and Captain General.

According to the narrator, the notables, whom he called "magnates," were simply motivated by their need to manifest the generosity and obedience that were the salient attributes of "Loyal Subjects."⁶⁹ However, through their gestures, these notables were at once evincing the generosity and obedience of their clans and striving for ennoblement, in turn derived from ceremonial prominence. This simultanéity of display and bidding obtained not only in the case of the "magnates" but also of the villas and vecinos along the route to be travelled by the Most Illustrious Señor. Eager for visibility, vecinos spontaneously joined the entourage of the personage, to "accompany" him in his journey. But as the charismatic entourage approached the city of Granada, the disputes grew more intense among the notables, whose competing claims to the company of the visiting personage threatened to disrupt the dignity of the visit. Indeed, to restore decorum, it became necessary to bring to bear upon the quarreling notables the authority of the Nicaraguan Intendant, who, together with his wife, also "accompanied" the Most Illustrious Señor as he finally arrived in the city of Granada --in his trail a crowd

of approximately one thousand people basking in the glory of his indisputable preeminence.⁷⁰

Imaginative power was essential to competition among cities, too. In fact, cities were "endowed" with personalities whose attributes varied according to the imaginative resources and strategies they deployed in their quest for prominence. Poetic contests staged by cities, for example, were common throughout Spanish America because verbal prowess concentrated in the major learning centers. But just as not all poets excelled to the same degree, not all cities produced poets. Other resources had to be marshalled.

In the Kingdom of Guatemala, cities strove for distinction through religious processions, funerals, official feasts and architectural magnificence. If León was renowned for its funerals, for example, Costa Rica simply fell quite short of the regional standard. In 1801, the governor wrote a textual exposition on this matter to the President of of the Audiencia in Guatemala City. "The funeral of greatest pomp [in Costa Rica] is less than the simplest one in other parts," the Governor asserted as he began an unsparingly detailed description of a typically humble burial in his province -- itself known as the "poorest" and most "neglected" of the Central American provinces.⁷¹

León also excelled in discursive competition. As in other cities whose identities were tied to their institutions of higher learning, in León displays of oratorical prowess became

as important as processions and funerals in competition. And since education was the turf of the clergy, the most renowned orators, in Leon as elsewhere in the Kingdom, were the "sacred orators" --priests who taught at seminaries and at the university, and whose reputations had been earned by poignant eulogies, compelling sermons and persuasive lectures on morality.

The sacred orators of León, for example, demonstrated their transformative prowess by conciliating the progressive spirit of the Enlightenment with the immutable aspects of the Christian worldview. They contended that man was an eminently transformable creature because while his fall from grace had precipitated his descent into the dark chaos of ignorance, his ascent back to the "light" (a light he could not entirely forget) was the genesis of science and of a new being. Scientific knowledge and virtuousness, in fact, were mutually identified in the talks of the sacred orators.⁷²

The sacred orators even discovered an escape route from the obscurity of their local confines. Salvation and science, they claimed, were universal in nature, so that an oratorical journey back to the origins of the universal tradition, say, to the ancient tribes of Israel, was at once an affirmation of local distinction and the expression of a proprietary claim to grandeur, albeit distant and eternal. As elsewhere in the Spanish colonies, exhibitions of intimate familiarity with ideas and things foreign became frequent and pervasive among

learned notables. Thus a startled Baron Humboldt declared that the Enlightenment was perceptible even in "the jungles of America".⁷³

And it was the sacred orators who staged theaters of will only steps away from the sepulcher. In their eulogies, for example, the orators typically cast into oblivion the specificity of the life-history coming to a close. Recollection of actual experience was rendered immaterial to memory. Memory -- whether in the ritualized farewell to the dead, or in the more spontaneous political mobilization of the living -- consisted not so much in recollection as in the protean blend of autochthonous imagination and moral ideology. Indeed, masterful wielding of "letters" enabled orators to make one "part" of the moral world bow to another. "Illustrious births, titles, dignities, decorated talents and virtues," a renowned orator declaimed at the eulogy of a simple friar, "have all come to give their most authentic testimony of appreciation for a humble but virtuous brother." This human collection of badges -- "the nobility" -- served as the collective arbiter of "social virtue". And this arbiter of social virtue, the orator declared, could not deny that the "conduct" of the deceased had been its "paragon".⁷⁴

In the funeral oration the significant moments of the local world were also frequently fused with their analogues in universal history: time and distance between, say, the city of Leon and the ancient tribes of Israel, the Greek city-states,

and the Roman republic were obliterated. In the estimation of the orators, these ancients had been the protagonists of the early moral struggles that constituted the very genesis of civilization, by which the notables meant Western civilization, and whose history they read as an unfolding of progressive stages in the moral development of humanity. Accordingly, it was among Israelite personages, Greek philosophers and patricians, and Roman senators and emperors that a skillful orator invariably looked both for the quintessential villains and the exemplars of virtue that would animate the narrative of his eulogy.

In death, as in birth, the "Individual" was yet to be. A successful funeral oration was one which managed to identify the departed with the eternally great, or to trace his lineage, as it were. Once again, virtue was lineage, and lineage was identity. And a skillful orator could turn a meritorious life into an expression of archtypical morality, thus shedding glory on the emblematic selves to which the deceased had belonged on earth.⁷⁵ Moreover, as the orator's fame spread throughout the province, the reputation of his colegio (college) grew, thus adding further to the prestige of his city. The eulogist had excelled among the local masters, and succeeded in the ultimate accomplishment: the orator had exalted the dead, and in the process robbed the dead of the emotional attention of the mourners.

It was from the high ground conquered by their sacred

orators that the people in the city of Leon, rich and poor alike, frequently derided the rival city of Granada -- a port of entry and exit to the Caribbean -- as an incorregible contrabandist. Prosperous Granada was the target of similar rumors originating in Guatemala City, where trade monopolists hoped that by encouraging the colonial authorities' hostile vigilance of Granada's commerce they might choke off both licit and illicit competition.

Exaggerated but not entirely unfounded, the characterization wounded the sensibilities of the aggrieved city. This "black calumny," the Granadines contended, was part of an insidious campaign not only to perturb public tranquility but to "cover Granada with ignomy, making no exception as to classes or hierarchy; treating all the vecinos as inclined to engage in the infamous illicit commerce".⁷⁶

Conclusion

By the end of the eighteenth century, the family clans, guilds, barrios, Indian pueblos, mestizo villas and cities of the Kingdom of Guatemala constituted overlapping miniature worlds embedded in a vast moral universe. If consequential matters appeared to be keenly personal, in fact the protagonists were not individuals but collective identities, which derived their amor propio, or social honor, from their members' avowed dedication to virtues of morality.

Interest, rank, and the very "visibility" of social

beings flowed from emblematic identity. At first glance, emblematic identity might even appear to have been perpetuated by a hermetic circularity. For emblematic selves reaffirmed their identity by staking public claim to titles and privileges in the very act of embracing attendant obligations. Through their oratorical utterances and ceremonial gesticulations, for example, elites revealed not only their expressive skill and representational prowess but asserted their stories of virtuousness and their moral pretensions; they defended their right to visibility on the political stage. Succinctly put, proud display and competitive political bidding were enacted simultaneously.

Thus, to be a witness to self-expression was to become at once that "self's" fellow and its rival. Respect for a self's emblematic virtue, say, munificence, was universally shared, and unlike consumer tastes, or psychological make-up, inalterable. Consequently, a self's enacted dedication to that emblem, though a sine qua non of competition, invariably evoked in others the solidarity and sympathy required by both quotidian and momentous transactions and struggles of the hierarchical order. At the same time, however, the accomplishments attained by that self in the pursuit of its emblematic duty elicited covetous admiration, and generated new efforts to expand the frontiers of possible ennoblement. Thus the potential both for competition and stability emanated ceaselessly from emblematic existence.

The dynamic of stable competition was anchored in reciprocal sources of meaning: a city's quest for ascent in the administrative hierarchy, for instance, and the search for ennoblement among the selves of its interior world -- say, families and guilds -- incited, justified and reinforced one another. The discrete outcomes of competition, however, were not predetermined. Continuity, to be sure, was always possible because competitive tactics were derived from the emblematic identity of the tactician; and that identity, in turn, was often preserved during moments of contention through successful execution of tactical designs. But dislocation was also a perennial danger to competitors, precisely because of the simultaneity of display and bidding.

As we will see in Chapter 5, the more acute competition became at critical points, the more the boundaries blurred between ceremonial and spontaneous behavior, discourse of fidelity and tactical pronouncement, narrative and scheme, theatrical script and unruly improvisation. Indeed, imagination, passion and rationality were deliberately blended by contenders. And as we will also see, belief in the potency of oratorical and ceremonial expression was attended by a belief in the possibility of profound, deliberate erasures in human consciousness: a definitive political victory, actors presumed, might well end in the eradication from collective memory of words that had been uttered with great passion, and of intentions that had been harbored for long whiles. Like

mere chalk-lines on a slate, statements and calculations were to be wiped out. Indeed, Chapter 5 advances the claim that competitive expressions, even when based on imagined "facts", as was so frequently the case, provided the emotional illusion of conciliating rational calculation in the face of necessity and opportunity, on the one hand, and the proscriptions dictated by the social norms of identity, on the other. In short, it made possible the creation of new variants of dramaturgical obedience, which, in the early decades of the nineteenth century, combined with a monarchical crisis of authority to deliver Central America into the age of violence, with its perennial oscillation between civil war and dictatorship.

1. 17th-century creoles, afraid of "slipping back" into the "rootless" middle groups, did appeal to the Crown for assistance. Successful appeals resulted in new encomienda grants. But there was a secular decline in their numbers.

Murdo MacLeod, Spanish Central America, A Socioeconomic History, 1520-1720 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 292-293.

2. By the end of the sixteenth century the Kingdom of Guatemala had a stable political organization. The Audiencia, a high tribunal located in Guatemala, had jurisdiction over the territory from Chiapas down to Costa Rica. The president of the Audiencia was also the Captain General and Governor of the Kingdom, which was made up of four gobernaciones (provinces), seven alcaldias mayores, and eleven corregimientos. Local interests were represented in the cabildo, whose members were selected through direct election by landowners, though purchase of a seat became possible in 1591.

Hector Pérez-Brignoli, A Brief History of Central America (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 37-38.

3. Charles Gibson, Spain in America (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1966), 133-134.

4. Severo Martínez-Pelaez, "La Capitanía General de Guatemala, La tierra, los hombres, las comunicaciones," in Centroamérica I, (Mexico: Instituto de Investigaciones Dr. José María Luís Mora, 1988), 65-72.

5. Ibid., 72.

6. For example, on August 14, 1782, the clergy, the people and the Ayuntamiento of Cartago, Costa Rica, petitioned the visiting Monseñor Tristán to ratify the patronato of the Virgen de los Angeles "over" the city. The petition was granted, and the attendant obligations were specified. August 2 was to become a holiday; a special liturgy was to be created for that day; and the practice of the "pasada" was to be instated.

Ricardo Blanco Segura, "San Lorenzo de Tristán Esmenola, XXXIV Obispo de Nicaragua y Costa Rica," Revista Conservadora del Pensamiento Centroamericano, XXVI, No. 128 (May 1971), 42.

7. Miles Wortman, Government and Society in Central America (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 43-44.

8. Pérez-Brignoli, op. cit., 51.

9. Wortman, op. cit., 67.

10. In 1812, for example, Jalteba still retained its identity as a pueblo located on the outskirts of the city of Granada; but relations between them were so close that the pueblo was a de facto neighborhood of the city and would gradually become formally acknowledged as such.

"DIARIO, De lo ocurrido al Batallón de Olancho, Caribes, Compañía del Jícaro y Esquadrón de Segovia al mando del General en Gefe, don Pedro Gutierrez, salieron de Tegucigalpa el día 30 de marzo y llegaron a Masaya el 18 de abril -- 1812".

Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, X, No. 1 (April, 1948), 33-43.

11. This was the case of Comayagua (Honduras), as described by José Reina Valenzuela in "Comayagua, La Vida Colonial a Fines del Siglo XVIII," in Centroamérica I, (Mexico: Instituto de Investigaciones Dr. José María Luís Mora, 1988), 228-229.

12. Egardo Buitrago, "La Vivienda y la Ciudad en Nicaragua," Boletín Nicaraguense de Bibliografía y Documentación, 55, (November, 1987 -- September, 1988).

13. José Coronel Urtecho, Reflexiones sobre la historia de Nicaragua; de Gainza a Somoza, Vol. I, (Leon: 1962).

14. Ibid.

15. José Coronel Urtecho, "Paradojas de las Intervenciones de Valle y Arce en Nicaragua", in Revista Conservadora del Pensamiento Centroamericano, XXVIII, No. 140 (May, 1972).

16. Wortman, op. cit., 65-66.

17. Diane Balmori, Stuart F. Voss, and Miles Wortman, Notable Family Networks in Latin America (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984).

18. Ibid.

19. Burkholder and Johnson, op. cit., 176.

20. Martínez Pelaez, op. cit., 72.

21. Wortman, op. cit., 42.

22. Mariano Picón-Salas, De la Conquista a la Independencia (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, Colección Popular, 1985), 108-109.

23. Ibid, 110.

24. Gabriel Ureña-Morales, "Estructura Política del Reino de Guatemala," in Centro América en las Vísperas de la Independencia (San José: Academia de Geografía e Historia de Costa Rica, Imprenta Trejos Hnos., 1971).
25. María Bozzoli de Wille, "La Diferenciación Social de Centroamérica al Final del Siglo XVIII y Durante las Primeras Decadas del Siglo XIX," in Centro América en las Vísperas de la Independencia (San José: Academia de Geografía e Historia de Costa Rica, Imprenta Trejos, Hnos., 1971), 85-97.
26. Hector Perez-Brignoli, op. cit., 58.
27. Manuel Abad y Queipo, "The Forgotten Masses," in Troy S. Floyd, ed., The Bourbon Reformers and Spanish Civilization, Builders or Destroyers? (Boston: D.C. Heath and Company, 1966).
A Spaniard, Abad y Queipo (1751-1825) was a reformist priest who served in Honduras from 1779 to 1794, then was transferred to Michoacan, where he was appointed bishop in 1810.
28. Martínez Pelaez, op. cit., 73.
29. Burkholder and Johnson, op. cit., 196.
30. Robert Smith, "Forced Labor in the Guatemalan Indigo Works", The Hispanic American Historical Review, Volume 36, no.3 (August 1956), 319-328.
31. Collado, et al, eds., op. cit., 203-4.
32. Inge Langenberg, "La Estructura Urbana y el cambio social en la ciudad de Guatemala a fines de la época colonial, 1773-1824," in Stephen Webre, ed., La Sociedad Colonial en Guatemala: estudios regionales y locales (Antigua: Centro de Investigaciones Regionales de Mesoamérica, 1989), 229.
33. J.J. Pardo, Miscelánea Histórica, Guatemala, siglos 16 a 19, vida, costumbres, sociedad (Guatemala: Editorial Universitaria, Colección Realidad Nuestra, 1978), 112.
34. "Situación de la Provincia de San Salvador Descrita por su Intendente en el Año de 1807, Antonio Gutierrez y Ulloa," in Centroamérica I (Mexico: Instituto de Investigaciones Dr. José María Luís Mora, 1988), 180-81
35. José Coronel Urtecho, Reflexiones sobre la historia de Nicaragua; de Gainza a Somoza, Vol. I. (León: 1962).

36. Jonathan Kandell, La Capital, The Biography of Mexico City (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1990), 215-216.
37. Lockhart and Schwartz, op. cit., 155.
38. Kandell, op. cit., 216.
39. Crow, op. cit., 259.
40. Jorge Eduardo Arellano, Historia de la Universidad de León, Epoca Colonial, Vol.I, (León: Editorial Universitaria, UNAN, 1973).
41. Coronel Urtecho, op. cit.
42. Balmori, Voss, and Wortman, op. cit., 58-65.
43. Wortman, op. cit., 66.
44. Arellano, op. cit.
45. The crown bestowed the title of marquis on both Cortes and Pizarro, but subsequently granted few titles of nobility until the 1680's. By the end of the sixteenth century, only six titles had been granted to residents in Mexico, five to Spaniards, and one, the conde de Moctezuma, to a mestizo descendant of the Aztec royal family. Residents of Peru received more titles, probably due to mineral riches being funneled to Spain through the City of Kings until the late seventeenth century. By mid eighteenth century, more than eighty five titles had been granted to residents in Peru, and twenty-seven to residents in Mexico.

Titles of nobility were even more rare in Central America. By the end of the eighteenth century, only the Aycinena family had received a marquisate.

Burkholder and Johnson, op. cit., p.188.
46. Burkholder and Johnson, op. cit., 76-80.
47. This royal prerogative proved one of the most valuable assets of Spanish statecraft. San Salvador (Salvador) first became a Villa, then a city in the sixteenth century.
48. Ureña Morales, op. cit.
49. Inge Langenberg, "La estructura urbana y el cambio social en la ciudad de Guatemala a fines de la época colonial, 1773-1824," in Stephen Webre, ed., La Sociedad Colonial en Guatemala: estudios regionales y locales (Antigua: Centro de Investigaciones Regionales de Mesoamérica, 1989).

50. Ralph Lee Woodward Jr., Class, Privilege and Economic Development, The Consulado de Comercio of Guatemala, 1793-1871 (Chapel Hill: 1966), 10.
51. Wortman, op. cit., 158-159.
52. Carlos Melendez Chaverri, "Los Problemas de la Vida Cultural en el Reino de Guatemala en la Epoca de la Ilustración", in Centro América en las Vísperas de la Independencia (San José: Academia de Geografía e Historia, 1971), 180-81.
53. Pardo, op. cit. 31.
54. Burkholder and Johnson, op. cit., 168.
55. Pardo, op. cit., 31.
56. Eric Wolf, Sons of the Shaking Earth, The People of Mexico and Guatemala, Their Land, History, and Culture (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1959), 184.
57. An analogous phenomenon occurred in the rural economy. As Wolf wrote about the hacienda: "[shows of grandeur] ... underlined the owner's dominance over his workers, it enhanced his self-esteem, it impressed others ... An hacendado's display was a public demonstration of his credit rating, an assertion that -- in the midst of an economy starved for capital -- he deserved credit because his enterprise was capable of generating capital and wealth". Ibid., 209.
58. Pardo, op. cit., 31
59. Wortman, op. cit., 160.
60. Langenberg, op. cit., 223.
61. Bozzoli de Wille, op. cit., 80.
62. David Chandler, "La Oligarquía Guatemalteca: La Familia," in Carmen Collado et al., eds., Centroamérica I (Mexico: Instituto de Investigaciones José María Luis Mora, 1988), 167-168.
63. Wortman, op. cit., 125.
64. Arellano, op. cit.
65. Woodward, op. cit., 3-12.
66. Woodward, op. cit., 120.

67. For the complete narrative see "Anónimo, Relación de 1794", in the Revista Conservadora, I, No. 1 (August, 1960), 11.

68. The language of the text is not very refined, which might seem to indicate that the author was either a minor notable whose education was not the best, or an auto-didact, perhaps an important and ambitious member of a notable's clientela.

69. *Ibid.*, 11.

70. *Ibid.*, 11.

71. Máximo Soto Hall, "Capítulos de un Libro Inédito," in Revista de Costa Rica en el Siglo XIX, I, No. 32 (San José: Letras Patrias).

72. Speech pronounced in the Seminary of Leon on May 16, 1807, to celebrate the beginning of the term.

73. Melendez, op. cit., 175.

74. Sermon given by Tomás Ruiz, Professor of Philosophy and Vice-rector of the Seminary, on November 27, 1804, "La Sólida Virtud del R.P. Fr. Juan Gómez," in Boletín Nicaraguense de Bibliografía y Documentación, No.55, (November 1987 -- January 1988).

75. "Sermón en los Funerales del Padre Don Rafael Ayesta," delivered by Francisco Ayerdi; cited in Boletín Nicaraguense de Bibliografía y Documentación, #55, Biblioteca Armando Joya Guillén, Banco Central (Managua: November 1987 -- September 1988).

76. José Coronel Urtecho, "Prologuillo Sobre la Historia de la Política de Familia, La Familia Zavala y la Política del Comercio en Centroamérica," in Revista Conservadora, Vol. XXIX, No. 141-42, June-July 1972.

CHAPTER 5

Dramaturgical Obedience at a Turning Point

In the first decade of the nineteenth century, the sovereignty of monarchical Spain was threatened by Napoleonic expansionism. The ensuing crisis reached as far as the colonies, presenting creole elites in the Kingdom of Guatemala with the unavoidable but dangerous task of preparing themselves for what they saw as the imminent French invasion of Spanish America. They believed that preparation was unavoidable because if France prevailed, then the Spanish state would be "decapitated": the king would cease to hold the body politic together. And the task was dangerous because making ready to cope with this event could well compromise Guatemala's emblematic virtue: irreproachable fidelity to that self-same king.

The present chapter argues that creole elites developed new variants of dramaturgical obedience to conciliate the contradictory exigencies of historical identity and conjunctural events. One variant rendered "real" time elastic through prolonged ceremony, diluting the appearance of disloyalty in elaborate ongoing pageantry while gaining in the process additional degrees of freedom for political maneuver. Another was the use of the "cabildo abierto", or open cabildo, to "shorten" real time by staging dramas of inexorable collective ire -- tumultuous crises which in turn "forced"

elites to strike compromises with an "intractable" mass they themselves had mobilized.

Successful exercises of dramaturgical obedience offered alternative accounts -- indeed, an alternative reality -- to the narratives authored by distrustful peninsular officials in the colonies. Tactical pageantry relieved "faithful" localities of the burdens of guilt and accountability, and freed them to pursue their interests. And inexorable collective ire, by "subjugating" the "virtuous" to the "plebs'" dangerous caprice, enabled notable elites to engage in deeds that might otherwise be seen as "treacherous".

No mere manipulation of commonly shared canons, these representational bids, if unsuccessful, brought shame on those who made them. Tactical pageantry, for example, depended on the keen competitiveness that prevailed among the corporate groups that inhabited the interior world of localities. Prolonged ceremony and feast, as we will see, required of these rivals great effort, expense and investment of pride. And this, to be sure, had always been true of colonial pomp. But when part of a tactical deployment, such competition put at stake more than the skill and prowess of local corporations -- it risked their very credibility, which is to say their honor.

Inexorable collective ire, too, entailed risk. In a highly structured society integrated by corporate members of guilds, barrios, pueblos, and family clans, the anonymity of

the "rabble" and the "plebs" incited real apprehension. As Chapter 4 showed, this fear deepened in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as the colonies grew more populous, racial miscegenation accelerated, and significant numbers of "souls" came to live outside the purview of corporations. Given the unpredictability of the plebs, the drama of inexorable collective ire was for elites both an escape route from the constraints of identity, and, potentially, a direct path to spontaneous upheaval. In short, the theater of the open cabildo at once maintained and imperiled the status quo.

Finally, this chapter argues that these variants of dramaturgical obedience, like the older forms, had important systemic consequences. The first consequence had to do with the unchanging locus of legitimacy. Recall that during the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries the competitive practices of colonials idealized sovereign power while contributing to its de facto erosion. Now, in the first decades of the nineteenth century, dramaturgical obedience increased the de facto power of cabildos but did not engender a legitimating ideology to support this gain. In order to dupe the representatives of the crown, colonials continued to dupe themselves first.

The second systemic consequence is related to the first. Creoles' failure to formulate a coherent justification for autonomous action precluded the emergence of durable bonds of solidarity among Central Americans. Simply put, colonials

bowed ever more sincerely to central authority as they pursued localist interests and deepened localist passions.

a. An Oath: Sincere Performance and Performed Sincerity

If the virtue of fidelity to the crown was associated with any one city in Spanish America, it was Guatemala City. The reputation of the capital was tightly bound up with a long history of credible declarations of obedience. This history conditioned the aspirations and plans of its cabildo, whose powerful and competitive creole notables were, on the one hand, frequently at odds with the peninsular officials of the Captain Generalcy, yet, on the other, constant in their resolve to maintain their preeminence among the notables and cities of the Kingdom.

The crisis of the Spanish monarchy in the face of Napoleonic imperial advances tempted the cabildo into trying to extract concessions from the metropolis precisely because it also provided it with an opportunity to affirm its fidelity. In order to accomplish both, and in the classic fashion of the virtuous emblematic self, the cabildo strove for simultaneity of ceremonial gesture and competitive bidding.

The circumstances, however, were far from ideal: the Spanish royal family had become embroiled in a treacherous intra-familial struggle. The heir to the throne, Fernando, Prince of Asturias, also widely known both as "The Beloved"

and "The Desired", plotted a coup with a group of nobles against his father, King Carlos. In their efforts to justify the plot, Fernando and his accomplices even alluded to marital indiscretions on the part of his mother, the Queen. The conspiracy failed, and the King wrote Napoleon to recommend punishment for Fernando, suggesting one of his younger sons as a more worthy heir. But Fernando, in a plea for paternal clemency, denounced his accomplices, and was soon pardoned. Shortly thereafter, on October 18, 1807, French troops marched into Spanish territory. And on March 17, 1808, a multitude assaulted the residential palace of the hated Manuel Godoy -- the right hand of King Carlos, who now abdicated in favor of his son.

But the King soon regretted the abdication, and even as his son issued a decree accepting the crown, the father set out to recover it. In preparation for the struggle with his son, Carlos requested protection from Napoleon, who in turn seized the moment by enticing all the parties to the dispute -- the King, the Queen, and their heir -- to the Palace of Bayona, where Fernando gave up crown, and his father, King Carlos, renounced the throne in favor of Napoleon.

It was Napoleon's intention to seat his brother Joseph on the Spanish throne. On May 2, 1808, however, the Spanish war of independence against Napoleon began in Madrid, as nationals reacted violently to a French attempt to remove any Spanish prince that might rally the nation. Regional juntas

subsequently emerged throughout Spain. The juntas, which fell under the control of local elites through rump elections, did agree to send two deputies to a Supreme Central Government Junta, but resisted attempts by the central government to reduce them to mere defensive entities.

The war against Napoleon also provided a political opportunity for reformers who were bent on correcting King Carlos' "mal gobierno," or bad government. These reformers, like the colonial cabildos which habitually reached for additional power and privilege in the very act of proclaiming their virtue, simultaneously defended Spain from French invasion and levelled oratorical attacks on the "despotism" of the previous twenty years of Spanish history.

As we shall see, this passionate "liberal" discourse, like the example of the juntas, was added to the discursive and tactical resources of creole elites.¹ But the utility of these tactical resources, like the impact of the Napoleonic threat itself, can only be properly understood when examined in the context of the emblematic world. Virtuous identity shaped the cabildos' tactical approach, and the tacticians' dual strategic objective: 1) preservation of that identity through 2) the conquest of additional prestige and power.

In the capital city of the Kingdom of Guatemala, local notables and the cabildo, as integral part of the body politic, were obligated to express unambiguous solidarity with its head, the king. At the same time, however, the cabildo,

obedient to the Junta in Spain only insofar as it governed in the name of the sovereign king, had to prepare for the very real eventuality of the body politic's ultimate "decapitation" by a definitive French victory; and for what the cabildo believed to be an imminent French invasion of their Kingdom.

The notion that state sovereignty and power would spontaneously and irrevocably revert to the Spanish people if this were to happen did not obviate the need for preparedness on the part of colonial cabildos. Not considered fully Spaniards, colonials had every incentive to defend the sovereignty of monarchical Spain. The alternatives were abhorrent: French domination, or, if Spain managed to vindicate its sovereignty, domination by peninsular Spaniards without the symbol of the king.

Preparedness, however, was a complex task for a cabildo that proudly bore the title of "Very Noble and Very Loyal". The task was further complicated by the fact that the highest officials of the empire resided in Guatemala, where they kept a careful eye on creole notables. Mistrustful and disdainful, these officials might well ask: was the cabildo preparing to defend itself from Napoleon, or was it making ready to rebel? And if it did not plan to rebel from the king, could it avoid rebelling from his representatives?

The cabildo clearly needed the flexibility to maneuver in advance for the eventuality of an invasion but without appearing -- and appearances counted a great deal -- to

compromise its emblematic reputation of fidelity. Hence the initial ambivalence of the creole elites of Guatemala City during the monarchical crisis. News of the King's first abdication in favor of his son Fernando reached Guatemala City on June 30, and news of the second abdication in favor of Napoleon on August 13. Guatemala City celebrated the first news with a Te Deum. But it did not carry out a ceremonial oath of fidelity. "During the month of July," the cabildo later explained, "we were devoured by the need to know the state of our affairs in Spain, whose cruel uncertainty wrenched our hearts incessantly ... [finally] on the morning of August 13, the mail arrived with the most unhappy news".²

On that sad day, the Captain General convoked the members of the Real Acuerdo for an evening meeting, and they in turn decided to call for a General Assembly, or Junta of the municipal and ecclesiastical cabildos, and invited notables, including a series of corporate representatives and high royal officials.³

A retrospective description of the Junta's proceedings, presided over by the Captain General, was provided by the municipal cabildo of Guatemala City in its narrative of the events surrounding the oath of fidelity to Fernando VII. The language of the narrative and annexed documents, like the comportment which they depicted, was intended as prima facie evidence of profound sentiment. Loyalty was not only felt, but performed -- first by the protagonists, then by the narrator.

Blurring the distinction between sincere performance and performed sincerity, the cabildo declared with unequivocal self-satisfaction that

The bitter spectacle of that afternoon will give eternal name to Guatemala's fine emotions...The tribulation on our faces; the knot in our throats; the agitated beating of our hearts -- all disclosed the bitter confusion in which we were doing battle...The [Capitan General and President of the Audiencia] began to address the perturbed Junta, but he spoke haltingly because of the pain traversing his chest and drowning his words; his tearful eyes gave the oration that energy which is characteristic of supreme interest and of the most intimate conviction. The [Junta's] unanimous and glorious agreement is a perpetual monument to the honor of Guatemala, whose unquestionable loyalty now crowned years of fidelity, and chained its vassalage to the fate of the beloved King.⁴

Though the loyalty of Guatemala City's cabildo was genuine, its motivations were complex. Already that morning, in an extraordinary session, the cabildo had tried to discuss the king's abdication. The discussion, however, had caused an internal split which revealed the ambivalence of a cabildo determined not only to reaffirm the emblematic reputation of its city, but also to reach for additional power, to which it felt entitled by that very same reputation. Thus, on one side, the mayor proposed a prompt and solemn oath of loyalty and devotion to the Spanish monarchy. On the other, several of the councilmen felt that the gravity of the situation and the unconfirmed status of the news called for prudence. The disagreement on the issue of the oath opened up space for

another important difference of opinion. Certain councilmen boldly proposed the formation of a local junta, albeit one subordinated to the government in Spain. Finally, it was decided that the cabildo would wait to hear from the Captain General.⁵

However, rumors about this discussion reached the Captain General before the Junta began its own session, so that by the time the cabildo members made their entrance in the palace of the Captain Generalcy to participate in the Junta, the angry Captain was prepared to retaliate. He slighted the cabildo with breaches of protocol, and signed a letter in which the cabildo was portrayed as self-proclaimed traitor. The explicit accusation of disloyalty put the cabildo on the defensive, and finally forced it into retreat: its members promised to "erase" the idea of forming a local junta.⁶ Thus the way was cleared for an agreement among the local notables and the colonial authorities. Collectively, they needed to settle on a course of action which would allow them simultaneously to repudiate the royal decree of abdication while preserving intact royal authority. Put another way: they needed to disobey without disavowing their pledge to submission. They discovered the solution to their dilemma in the wording of the decrees themselves, whose lack of authenticity, the Audiencia's prosecutor argued, should be obvious to "any Spaniard familiar with the energy of his own language." The Junta, following this cue, also scrutinized the decrees.⁷

"Meticulous reading", its members concluded, showed that there was a strangeness to the documents' tenor which perhaps exposed a foreigner's "ignorance of our language." As a result, the decrees were totally "unclad" of authority. Guatemala could proceed to "renew" its oath of fidelity to its legitimate sovereign.⁸

Harmony did not prevail for long. On September 13, 1808, the municipal cabildo opened the sealed royal decree of April 10, in which the Council of Indies announced King Carlos' abdication in favor of his son, Fernando The Beloved, and the latter's acceptance. The decree also ordered that royal standards be raised in honor of the new monarch, Fernando VII.⁹ The Captain General, initially convinced that The Beloved had usurped his father's throne, now shifted position, and recommended that the cabildo prepare the oath to the heir, who was also their "Desired". Fernando, the Captain remarked, had been publicly recognized as king not only in Spain but in several of the colonies. "The Very Noble and Loyal City" of Guatemala, he concluded, ought to follow suit -- as it was "expected of its inalterable loyalty."

The Captain's implied criticism wounded the cabildo's sensibility. As a cabildo member put it, the cabildo, "submerged in a most painful trance," had already protested the "scandalous sacrilege" committed against the royal family, and had pledged its submission on August 18, 1808.¹⁰

Nevertheless, the fact remained that the cabildo had not

made the great ceremonial bow to the new King. Not having hurried to pledge its allegiance to Fernando, the cabildo found itself, if not exactly on the defensive, lagging. In response to the Captain General's implied criticism, a cabildo notable pointed out that the city of Guatemala had been prepared from the start to manifest its subservience to Fernando. The cabildo, the notable reminded the Captain, had attended the Te Deum of July 13. The cabildo member also contended that Guatemala was in no way outdone in fealty by those cities which had so promptly pledged their allegiance. Guatemala, the notable explained, had simply thought it prudent to await the traditional royal decree that on momentous occasions rendered explicit the wishes of the sovereign. He even argued that such prudence merely confirmed Guatemala's well-deserved fame for loyal obedience.¹¹

The tense exchange between the Captain General and the cabildo took place within a context of intrigue, vacillation, and heightened oratorical and symbolic struggle. In their conflict with peninsular officials, who were both disdainful and suspicious of creole elites, these elites now echoed the attacks which reformers in Spain levelled at "despotism" by resorting to the potent oratory of the Black Legend, which depicted Spanish tyranny in the Americas. Predictably, peninsular officials felt that the Black Legend wounded their social honor by defiling their ancestral reputation. Indeed, as interpreted by peninsulars, the Black Legend was the very

language of creole treachery.¹²

Also at that time, "pasquines," or broadsides, advocating local governance had begun to appear in the mornings, affixed to church benches and to the houses of peninsulars. And as previously mentioned, the cabildo itself, taking its cue from developments in Spain, had begun to entertain the possibility of forming a local government junta.¹³

But the anonymous broadsides, and the cabildo's vacillation between affirmative statements of fidelity and discussions about self-government, reflected a profound dilemma. On the one hand, the identity of the cabildo was inextricably entwined with its reputation for fidelity. On the other, as the governing body of the preeminent city in the Kingdom, the cabildo had to preserve that identity while simultaneously pursuing three central objectives: resistance to French invasion and rule; suppression of rebellious attempts by other cabildos in the Kingdom; and the conquest of further privileges for itself at a moment of extreme vulnerability for the metropolis to which it owed allegiance.

Though in seeming contradiction, the goals of the cabildo were not beyond conciliation. If tradition demanded obedience, it also offered an opportunity for innovative adaptation. Indeed, as it turned out, by staging a prolonged ceremonial display of its fealty, the cabildo accomplished all its goals. But this option at first seemed a remote possibility. Given the extraordinary circumstances, the Council of Indies in

Spain had cautioned against excessive pageantry. And the cabildo, in a characteristic rush to comply with the commands of the metropolis, immediately decreed that, bearing in mind that The Beloved was a prisoner of the enemy, the oath of fidelity should take place with due gravity. "Even though the accustomed demonstrations of jubilation [were] always a sign of the loyalty with which the city [received] its kings," the cabildo warned that there was to be no "joyous abandonment", which was proscribed by the rules of "decorum" and by the prevalent "anguish".¹⁴

As its fidelity was called into question, however, the cabildo faced yet another dilemma. On the one hand, it was pledged to obey a higher authority, which now commanded its subjects to observe ceremonial restraint. On the other hand, it was sorely tempted to demonstrate through elaborate pageantry -- now forbidden -- that its initial prudence and temperance by no means signified insufficient loyalty. The cabildo, in short, was hopelessly trapped in the conflicting demands of emblematic identity.

Yet, if those who adhere to a code of conduct can persuade themselves that they break its sacrosanct rules not as agents of their own free volition, but as agents of a force which emanates from that code, then actors become free to disobey (which in this case amounted to obedience to a prior rule). They become free to adhere to that older code perhaps even more strictly than under the status quo ex ante. And such

increased rigor, paradoxically, may in turn engender possibilities for indeterminacy.

Thus, the cabildo found a way to convince itself that events, in combination with the rules of fidelity, overwhelmed the Council of Indies' injunction against ceremonial excess. On September 26, a cabildo extraordinary was convened to open a sealed document that had arrived the previous afternoon: it turned out to be a communique from Fernando himself, making reference to his father's initial abdication in his favor and instructing that royal standards be raised in his honor. The members of the cabildo were overjoyed. As they recorded it in the minutes of the cabildo meeting, they took the document in their hands, and adhering to form, "kissed it, read it, rose to their feet, placed it over their heads, and said they obeyed it, and obeyed it as a letter from our King and Natural Senor, may God keep him." Later, the cabildo's narrator would explain that "this was the first letter we saw which had been marked by his august hand, so its receipt was celebrated with ringing of bells".¹⁵

Unexpected receipt of the king's signature, then, shook the resolve of the cabildo to maintain "decorum" and abstain from excessive celebration. But there was more. The unambiguous instruction from The Beloved regarding the royal standards came at a time when worrisome news of French victories over the Spanish armies compelled Guatemalans to offer "incontestable proof" of their city's fidelity.¹⁶

Such proof could only be offered through pomp and ceremony

-- the purest evidence of sentiment. Verbal eloquence by itself would not suffice. As the cabildo's narrator put it, the emotional intensity uniting king and people was such that it eluded even "the most dexterous pen".¹⁷

Moreover, only pomp and ceremony afforded the province of Guatemala and its capital city the opportunity to compete with rival major centers of power like Mexico City in ceremonial magnificence, and thus reassert its own preeminence in the hierarchy of the isthmus. And it was an occasion for the emblematic identities of the city's interior world -- notable family clans, guilds, pueblos and institutions -- to attain distinction through displays of affluence and skill.

The date for the celebration of the oath was set for December 12, to coincide with the holiday commemorating the apparition of Our Lady of Guadalupe.¹⁸ In the meantime, on November 15 of 1808, the cabildo addressed the Supreme Junta in Spain with an important request: representation for the Kingdom of Guatemala, which "as one of the elders of the Monarchy, should, by its many titles, attend the deliberations of [the Junta's] councils." The cabildo also contended that if a Cortes (parliament) were to be convened, Guatemala should send deputies; and that if representation was not forthcoming, then a local junta should be formed to govern the Kingdom. The cabildo, moreover, withheld recognition of the legality of the

Supreme Junta in Spain until Feb. 3, 1809, after it granted the American provinces the right to elect representatives. Ironically, the Supreme Junta granted Guatemala the "honor" of a vocal representative even before the receipt in Spain of the cabildo's "reverential supplication".¹⁹

In the meantime, the "preparations" for the celebration of the oath -- the construction of the "theater" -- turned into spectacles of artistic prowess and generous donations, as collective identities strove to outdo one another in their emotive expressions of fealty, their assertions of pride, and their claims on notability.

The cabildo "invited" the Marquis de Aycinena to assume financial responsibility for the decoration of the gate to the plaza mayor, an honor which, as the narrator of the cabildo put it, "corresponded to his title." And it convoked all the guilds who, represented by their principal master craftsmen, promptly volunteered their work for the solemnization. The names of these "honest artisans" were introduced in the records of the cabildo, for the eyes of "posterity".

Thus began the competition among the emblematic selves, for whom ceremonial salience constituted evidence of the devotion being expressed, as well as its reward. Salience transcended the here-and-now, and no sacrifice was excessive. Thus, in a supreme effort to attain notability, the pueblo of Santa Isabel, contiguous to Guatemala City, built a triumphal carriage whose cost was clearly beyond its means. "Between the

magnificence of the spectacle and the [humble] circumstances of those born to Santa Isabel, there emerged a gap which," the cabildo reasoned, "could only have been bridged by the potency of love and enthusiasm." Accordingly, the cabildo's narrator assured the pueblo of Santa Isabel that its carriage would not only "startle men through eternity", but would be publicly acknowledged in Spain.

The Supreme congress that represents Fernando, when it deigns to read these lines, shall present you before the nation's eyes as a paragon of loyalty, and on account of your zeal shall show greater appreciation for your hopes and for our wishes.²⁰

Not surprisingly, the pueblo of Santa Isabel, in its eagerness to exhibit its carriage, paraded it before the day of the pledge. The carriage was led in procession by "the pueblos" of San Gaspar, Ciudad Vieja and San Pedro de las Huertas. More accurately, denizens of these pueblos took the lead, with the insignias of their brotherhoods and sodalities held aloft. The carriage itself gave pride of place to the pueblo's patron saint: the Holiest Mary, who was venerated in the common parish of Remedios. The Santisima proceeded through the streets, flanked on one side by a bust of the sovereign, and on the other by royal insignias, which were depicted covering two continents. At the foot of the Santisima, two angels held in their hands a sceptre of gold.

Once in procession, the carriage became the object of contestation among the vecinos of Guatemala city, including

notables, all of whom sought a visible role in the pageant. "We all disputed the honor of drawing the carriage; those who succeeded were statisfied, and justifiably so", wrote the cabildo's narrator.

Not to be outdone, the municipal and ecclesiastical cabildos, the Postal Service, and the militia of Olancho struck commemorative coins. The Sacred Order of Preachers, in cooperation with merchants and artisans, decorated the facade of the Santo Domingo church with lights. However, as the cabildo's narrator had to concede, the University of San Carlos, which struck an impressive coin, was the one to "snatch" the city's admiration by "demonstrating" in its ceremonial displays how "ingenious" loyalty can be when directed by "wise knowledge".²¹

"Power, ingenuity, and will" were gradually joined, until the necessary "dignity" was created for the "august theater". The "skill" of artisans built platforms for the notables; the "genius" of artists painted allegorical murals; musicians put on serenades; pyrotechnics complemented the work of musicians and artists; "wealth" provided the carpets, tapestries, silver chandeliers and crystal lanterns. And Guatemala, as the preeminent province of the isthmus -- the one intendancy of the isthmus to retain the distinction of "province" after the Bourbon administrative reforms -- provided the sense of determination that was supposed to attend its rightful leadership. Hence, in the allegorical mural prepared for the

occasion, Chiapas, Nicaragua, Comayagua, San Salvador and Vera-Paz were represented by five kneeling matrons who, dressed in their native colors, offered their hearts to the province of Guatemala -- represented by a matron who held an infant as she fed the hearts of the others to the pyre burning before the image of Fernando The Beloved.²²

The functions lasted ten days. Fireworks, concerts, the ringing of bells, and a military parade preceeded the pledge, which in turn was followed, the next morning, by a Te Deum, attended by the Captain General, the municipal and ecclesiastical cabildos, the religious orders, the military, and university notables. Financed by the Very Noble and Very Loyal City of Guatemala, the Te Deum had at its core an oration that was both a performed expression of genuine sentiment and an intense reminder of the moral forces underlying politics. Externalizing his loyalty to the Spanish King, the preacher kept wiping away his tears with a handkerchief, for he could not utter Fernando's name without breaking out in "unabashed sobbing". His loyalty to the king, however, was merely an extension of his loyalty to the forces of good, as his sermon pitted God's protege, Fernando, against the forces of Hell with its "infernal beast" and its "scheme of discord." As soldier of morality, the preacher now warned that if Fernando's defeat came to pass, it might well evince God's indignation with the sins committed in the Kingdom of Guatemala. A moral reform was therefore urgently needed: no

more homicide and concubinage; no more intoxication and indecent attires.²³

The end of Te Deum led to the procession, which was made up of uniformed caballeros, an orchestra, singing maidens, the cabildo, the "vecindario" (the community), and a triumphal carriage. Once again, the privilege of drawing the carriage was contested, but this time it was granted to the youth of the "aristocracy." However, an effort was made to "distribute" the privilege fairly among the various so-called aristocratic clans of the city: sixteen young men were chosen for the honor -- an honor which would constitute "a new glory for their families".

An attempt at "agreeable competitiveness" was also made by the guilds of carpenters, cobblers, and masons: the three corporations lay collective claim to the preparation and execution of an entire day and night of celebrations, then divided individual tasks amongst themselves. The cobblers got to stage their act in the cabildo's gallery. But other guilds excelled, too. The guild of weavers was given recognition for the suits and horses of its horsemen; the guilds of silversmiths and barbers for their carriages, dances and music. The guilds of sculptors, painters, and pyrotechnics contributed their skills to the celebration, but received special mention for their charity toward inmates, who were served a special meal. The musicians' guild set up two orchestras -- one in the gallery of the cabildo, the other in

the tailors' theater. The guild of tailors also collaborated with the musicians and pyrotechnics to provide an evening of festivities. Less "agreeable" was the competitiveness shown by the Community of Preachers, which distinguished itself for its zeal as best it could -- by refusing to allow any one else to carry the King's bust.²⁴

After the procession, the feasts continued. There were solemn religious services; theatrical improvisations in the plaza; and sermons by orators renowned for "their sacred eloquence".²⁵ This process was a competition among emblematic selves, which ultimately gave substance to their collective claim as citizens to the most cherished kind of visibility and prominence. In this undertaking, according to its own estimation, the capital city of Guatemala had more than succeeded. In the words of the municipal narrator, "[the kingdom of Guatemala], so distant from the Metropolis, never having seen the loving eyes of its monarchs, whose benevolent influence [arrived] from so far away, [had] shown [a] spectacle to the world's face".

As if the world actually had been watching that spectacle, Guatemala was emboldened to issue a warning tacitly directed at Napoleonic France: "You statesmen who are easily frightened, who have wrongly assessed American fidelity, be disabused once and for all, and erase your calculations from your slates, for we have effectively given them the lie".²⁶

If Guatemala City had pledged its fealty to the king amidst a splendor unprecedented in the Kingdom's history,²⁷ its representational efforts appeared to have borne fruit. Fernando VII, while still in captivity, sent all of his colonies a textual oration, bestowing upon them implicit equality with Spain. In this oration, Fernando struck a balance between paternal imploration and assertion of princely pride; and simultaneously praised and challenged the sense of fealty of Spanish Americans. As a supplicant father, Fernando extolled the dutiful suffering that his "children in Spain" were prepared to endure for their independence and his "name;" and he expressed a belief that his children in America, under similar circumstances, "would show equal valor, and sacrifice as much." As a commanding prince, Fernando placed his trust in Spanish Americans, who were seeking equality of privilege with Spaniards; and he eradicated all difference between their respective moral worths.²⁸

From Guatemala to Costa Rica, the response to the oration was the intended one: declarations of renewed allegiance; elaborate ceremonies expressing both the solemnity and the jubilation of the occasion; and spontaneous outpourings of "affection". A note of hysteria ran through the official narrations of the feasts.

The King's oration ratified emotionally what the Supreme Central Junta of Spain had already decreed in his name on January 22, 1809: The Spanish possessions in America were

integral parts of the monarchy. The Central Junta, in addition, approved the report of the Council of the Indies of November 21, 1808, which recommended "granting to the American dominions representation near the sovereign, and the privilege of forming by deputies a part of the aforesaid junta". Accordingly, the provinces of Guatemala were now invited "to choose their deputy to reside at court as member of the governing junta".²⁹

This decree further specified that Nueva Espana (Mexico), Peru, Nueva Granada, Buenos Aires, Venezuela, Cuba, Puerto Rico, Guatemala and Philippines, as viceroyalties, captain generalcies and independent provinces could each send one representative. Thus the Spanish Junta would be composed of ten creoles and thirty Spaniards.

The electoral procedure was as complicated as it was revelatory of a political culture embedded in a worldview at once aristocratic and moralistic. In the Kingdom of Guatemala, the cabildos of the capitals elected three men of renowned probity, talent, and education. Each cabildo then held a raffle to select a finalist from among its three elected notables: a blindfolded boy retrieved the name of the winner from the ballot box. In the next step, the President (Captain General) of the Kingdom selected from among all the finalists in the Kingdom the three he considered most worthy of the honor at stake, and from among these three, the vocal representative for the Kingdom was finally chosen -- again, at

random. The procedure took eight months.³⁰

On January 24, 1809, the cabildo of Guatemala, even as it pledged its obedience to the Supreme Central Government Junta in Spain, expressed its indignation at the suspicion with which Spaniards had treated creoles for centuries. According to the cabildo,

America has been defamed from the moment of its discovery; they have treated her as a violent part of the monarchy; as anxious to rupture the bonds which tie her to the metropolis. It has been believed, unjustly! that the Spanish spirit became degraded in these parts [Spanish America]. Our parents, as if they had become denaturalized the moment they set foot on these Kingdoms, have suffered such disdain for generations, and have been excluded from government.³¹

In truth, the creole elite controlled a substantial share of colonial posts; their dissatisfaction with any ostensible bias in the allocation of such posts reflected a more profound discontent. According to the cabildo, peninsular mistrust of Spanish America had led to a belief not only in the need to rule the colonies with an iron hand, but "to exalt the reputations" of the colonial authorities to such extreme that the "complaints" and "sobs" of the New World could not be heard. Such mistrust, the cabildo asserted, was unjustifiable, for neither contempt nor harshness had maintained the American colonies united to the metropolis; rather, loyalty and affection were the bonds. Indeed, according to the cabildo, revision of this false premise by the "Paternal and Just

Government" of the new monarch would lead inexorably to the rapid progress of Spanish America.³²

In short, the notables, not for a moment defying the monarchy, repudiated the "exalted reputations" of the monarchy's officials -- those shadows which so obscured local emblematic identities and their just grievances; and which made members of collective identities feel as if they might as well join the no-ones in the abyss of moral anonymity.

From the creole perspective, the demonstrable sentiments of the cabildos, guilds, and pueblos rendered this injustice readily apparent. The notables anticipated that the imminent profound "revision" of official policy would not only redress this injustice but remove the mistrust between the metropolis and its former colonies, so that "Spain" could be redefined in practice to match the broader boundaries demarcated by the Spanish Central Junta in recent declarations.

Representation in the Cortes, creoles hoped, would be a first step in this direction. The General and Extraordinary Cortes were hastily convened,³³ so that Americans initially had to be represented by proxies.³⁴ In its instructions to its delegate to the Parliament at Cádiz, the Guatemala cabildo called for the formation of a special commission of two "censors" who would draft a "catechism" of the virtues and obligations required of citizens.³⁵ In the Cádiz Constitution, electoral procedures required the benediction of the church precisely Spaniards and Spanish-Americans could not fathom

politics and morality, or ritual and practice as separate. Elections to Cortes, for example, were to take place on church grounds; masses were to follow certain acts of the electoral process; and a clergyman familiar with his parish was to serve on the local registration committee in order to assess the moral worth of each potential citizen.³⁶

Electors assembled in Guatemala in March of 1810 to give their deputy general powers and, most significantly, to swear allegiance to the king and to Spain.³⁷ On July 24, 1810, the cabildo of Guatemala named its representative at Spanish Cortes; and a few weeks later, the Cabildo gave the representative his instructions. On September 24, 1810, the General and Extraordinary Cortes (Parliament) of Spain inaugurated their sessions. The kingdom of Guatemala was represented by substitutes until the arrival of Guatemala's representative on August 24, 1811.

The representative for the province of Guatemala brought to parliament very clear instructions from his cabildo. These instructions were both constitutionalist and profoundly conventional. They read,

That in all of Spain -- both in its European and American parts -- one religion is to preserved inviolable, the true religion of Jesus crucified, Catholic, apostolic, and Roman, as it has been 'til now by the grace of God our Lord. That the monarchy is to be affirmed constantly, recognizing the senor don Fernando VII (may God keep him) as King and Sovereign, and in his absence, his legitimate heirs. That in order to prevent despotism from disgracing at any time our Majesty and from

oppressing the peoples [various provinces of the nation], a formal constitution be demanded and instituted whereby the rights of the peoples will be reestablished. That the nation shall always take an active part in the deliberations of state, in the crafting of laws, and in all other matters of government, and that in this as in all other things the Americas shall be considered an essential part of the Monarchy, safeguarding [America's] rights and civil liberties as much as those of the peninsula, without any distinction whatsoever.³⁸

Representatives of the various cabildos from the Kingdom of Guatemala also brought with them their practices of emblematic competition. As incontrovertible evidence of their loyalty to the Spanish monarchy, they distributed the commemorative coins which their localities struck on the occasion of Ferdinand's ascent to the throne. On the basis of their proven loyalty, they sought titles of distinction for their constituencies -- the same titles they had sought from the king not too long ago. And they excelled in the oratorical struggles that so divided the Cortes. These passionate exchanges between liberals and conservatives were conducted before representatives of the social hierarchy: political and religious dignitaries, and a general public, whose emotive responses affected the outcome of the unfolding struggle.³⁹ As debaters branded one another with names that wounded their social honor and their sense of righteousness, the galleries shouted either approbation or censure.

One recurring theme at the Parliament was the "Black Legend" of Spanish imperialism. In its latest form, the Black Legend was crafted by "enlightened" Europe, and depicted

colonial subjects everywhere as engaged in a struggle against the obscurantism of retrograde and tyrannical peninsulars. This interpretation, which became central to the discourse of creole notables,⁴⁰ was deeply offensive to peninsulars in the colonies, who interpreted it as a sign of American disloyalty.⁴¹ And in Spain, it was the leading liberals who felt compelled to counter the Black Legend with a White version of the history of the Spanish Empire, in turn based on the stereotypical characterization which Spanish conservatives provided during the debates in the Parliament.⁴²

The effect of speeches made in these open meetings reached beyond the Parliament, as minutes were published and widely propagated throughout Spain. Newspaper editorials, for example, frequently resorted to ridicule in their attacks on American delegates.⁴³ Thus, the ancestral split between peninsular Spaniards and creoles transcended divisions between left and right; and the narrative of the Black Legend -- a story first told in the conquest phase by friars deploying the discourse of good and evil -- was now pitted against its newly-crafted opposite: the White Legend.

b. Open Cabildos: Theater, Violence, and Power

Colonial cabildos self-consciously influenced the Spanish Parliament to their own advantage. It was the cabildos that provided instructions for the representatives to the Parliament, which in turn drafted a Constitution that further

strengthened both the cabildos and the role played in them by creoles. According to the Constitution of 1812, the cabildos were to assume a wide range of responsibilities, from matters pertaining to the internal policing of their villas and cities, to their finances. And cabildo offices would be contestable in popular elections.⁴⁴

But even before the Constitution was promulgated, Parliament unwittingly influenced the cabildos by example. In the Parliament, colonials learned anew the power of "the public"; and from this lesson derived an important consequence: open cabildos -- an institution that had been revived in the colonies to include local elites -- were now to become the theater in which those elites would stage their mobilizational dramas.

Incorporating the amorphous "plebs" they so feared, the elites of the Kingdom of Guatemala would now use the cabildo to stage moralist campaigns and displays of incxerable collective ire that spilled into the streets. In these dramas, audiences were dramatis personae, and the personae were also scriptwriters who expressed their outrage in the social idiom of the discourse of good and evil. Like their ancestors, now these animated audiences spoke in terms of honor and disgrace, virtue and vice, as friction between peninsular officials and creole elites persisted under the rule of the Spanish Junta General.

Guatemala's Tribunal of Vigilance, instituted by the

Captain General, disciplined those "disloyal" to the Crown. In 1810, the Tribunal indicted a group of Salvadoran notables, who though they did not propose independence, for years had complained of the "lack of tact" with which they were treated by the colonial authorities in Guatemala and in El Salvador. Their complaint was levelled both at the Intendant of San Salvador and at the archbishop of Guatemala. The Intendant, they saw merely as a reflection of his superior, the Captain General, whose very identity, in turn, was tied to his reputation for irreproachable fealty. The Archbishop they deemed arrogant and disrespectful of Salvadoran clerics.⁴⁵ In either case, these creole elites located the fundamental problem, once again, not with the king or the monarchical system, but with the character of officials -- the intransigent Captain General, and the disdainful prelate.

The Supreme Government in Spain put an end to the Tribunal of Vigilance in its order of February 20, 1811. Nevertheless, tension between peninsulars and creole notables intensified, as did their mutual efforts to pit their own righteousness against the other's "evil" and "profligacy." Peninsulars living in America wrote manichean letters on their own behalf to their allies in Spain (letters which were published in newspapers), while prelates pointed to signs of divine indignation with disobedient creoles.⁴⁶ Creole priests, for their part, preached sermons in "ambiguous" terms, thus fomenting "malicious rumors", the prelates complained.

Throughout, however, the cabildo of Guatemala city, which in its struggle for equality with Spaniards had given a set of "liberal" instructions to its delegate to the Parliament at Cadiz, behaved within the strictures of its traditional identity: more than ever, it spoke and acted as the Very Noble and Very Loyal cabildo of the capital of the Kingdom. In an official letter of November 12, 1811, the cabildo notified all the urban centers of the isthmus that Napoleon -- "the fallacious politico" -- had dispatched many "emissaries" to America. These emissaries, the Guatemalan cabildo warned, would travel "a thousand paths" to persuade "the fortunate lands of Columbus" to sever their bond with their "legitimate and natural metropolis." The letter also affirmed that word had been received that Napoleon, in his "shamelessness", had sent a "most vile" agent to "perturb" the "loyal Kingdom" [of Guatemala], which, "as an exemplar of moderation in all of America, was the object of Europe's admiration".

The attack, framed in highly-pitched tone and in the traditional discourse of good and evil, was also directed at Mexican revolutionaries, who, in "their altered imagination" were unable to see "the serpents and vultures that [tore] at their own entrails". At any rate, the Guatemalans reasoned, these "malevolent men...[were] only nomadic fugitives, fleeing, as if they could, from themselves, the legitimate children of Cain; wandering in the wild and in the jungles".⁴⁷

The language of the cabildo left no room for doubt: its

members, so frequently engaged in struggle with the Captain General, were at that moment his allies. "The patriotic zeal of the supreme chief of this Kingdom, the Excelentísimo Señor Don Jose de Bustamante, does not tire," they warned the other cabildos of the isthmus,

It does not fatigue. Nor shall it slumber, or break its shoe-strings in its hunt for that astute fox [the Napoleonic agent]. Instead, it shall roar, like the lion's cubs, and seize its prey, embracing it in such a way that no one can retrieve it.⁴⁸

Virtuous identity shaped vision, and both in turn determined tactical approach. As the most "faithful" of the faithful, and as the preeminent among the prominent in the Kingdom, the cabildo of Guatemala perceived itself not only as threatened by Napoleon, but also as engaged in battle against the "greatest of dangers": anarchy. Hence their endorsement of the Captain General's zeal. "Love of order and justice," the Cabildo declared, "is inseparable from vigilance, because the people are an instrument of various voices -- voices which cannot, except in the rarest case, by themselves attain the proper tone. For this, they must be tuned by a wise hand".⁴⁹

Specifically, the Guatemalan cabildo's letter to the other cabildos in the Kingdom was a response to disturbances in the capital of the intendancy of San Salvador, where, in early November of 1811, a rebellion had finally erupted, the culmination of a conspiracy which early on had been brought to the attention of the Captain General by his network of

of local uprisings, and there was always the possibility that they would turn on the authorities and side with the insurgents.⁸²

"I leave much unsaid, as I am confident of the penetrating wisdom of Your Excellency," the Guatemalan Intendant of San Salvador wrote, suggestively. By means of his missive, the Intendant, a member of the faithful cabildo of Guatemala, had proved his loyalty to the crown -- fealty being the defining virtue of Guatemala City. But he had accomplished much more. As an hidalgo, he had defended his "ancestral luster" from the attempts at deceit on the part of San Salvador's rebels. Before that, as a creole, he had been solidary with those same notables by engaging with them in conciliatory negotiations. And through it all, he had looked after the status of Guatemala City, the preeminent city in the Kingdom, trying 'til the end to exercise control over events in San Salvador, the challenger which, in comparison to Guatemala City and its ancient reputation for fealty, appeared as nothing less than impudent.

Upon receipt of the Intendant's report, His Excellency, the Capitan General, prepared his own.⁸³ Addressed to the "Most Serene Senor", the narrative, as always, described a fierce moral struggle set off by a particular event. This time, the event, of course, was the insurrection in San Salvador -- a "scandalous recurrence of wickedness," whose agents the narrator himself was battling in the capital of

Guatemala. That city, which believed itself loyal, was, in fact, according to the Captain General a hotbed of rebelliousness. As he put it, Guatemala City was the point of origin of the "fire" which had spread throughout the provinces. But Guatemala City was also the stage where good had triumphed over evil. It was the centre of the "rare felicity" which had allowed him -- the Captain General -- to prevent the realization of threats against the life and property of men of "true honor".

Indeed, the initial confrontation pitted the benevolence of his authority and the potency of moral eloquence, on one side, against the "willpower of evil," on the other. In that confrontation, the "agents of evil's willpower" rejected the pardon in which he even offered them the "perpetual forgetfulness" of past horrors. This notion of human memory as a potential tabula rasa (to become a recurring theme through the century) was related to the belief in the supremely transformative faculty of discourse, itself seen as an instrument of greater forces. The decision finally to punish the "perverse," for example, was justified by the fact that the sermons of the missionaries who had been dispatched to San Salvador and were renowned for their zeal, had proved ineffectual. To be sure, the "orators" were to continue their instruction of the "naive and the ignorant," but coercion, it was now arguable, could not be avoided. The forces of good were facing "an abrupt and extraordinary transformation," the

Captain General observed. "Towns that had been submerged in the most stupid ignorance only two months back," he explained, "suddenly turned into academies, engaged in political disputes; and men who were good and simple [as recently as April] had become cynics by December; this was a rare phenomenon, both political and moral".⁸⁴

The rapidity of events was frightening, since it constantly threatened to "obscure" the truth. But on his own view, the Captain General was equal to the challenge. In Guatemala, he had already "split the tree of evil" so that its "branches might languish". And he issued a public communique expressing disapproval of the lack of courtesy accorded in San Salvador to the Corps of Volunteers, so clearly deserving of esteem. Simultaneously, he sent a secret message: the Volunteers were to be given weapons, as well as the discretion to use them. After all, judging from the animosity they evoked in their fellow creoles, the Volunteers were indeed estimable, even trustworthy.

Gradually, military force dispersed "the wicked" and "the restless"; and amidst a battle of words, the rabble was intimidated by "demonstrations" of integrity by "honorable men". Relentless insults were levelled at the Intendant of El Salvador and his subordinates, until finally, he was forced to put together a team of notables, including rebel clerics, to convey to the cabildo the message that the insults must stop, under penalty of law. At the time, a battle of sermons was

also raging, pitting the Captain General's missionaries against local clerics, who pronounced "scandalous" sermons, full of "ambiguities" and affronts to the Intendant, judges and troops. And last but not least, there emerged a "familiarity" in the form of address to "authority" which wounded its dignity.

The narrative shows that antagonists and allies alike became ensnared in mutual suspicion. In an effort to highlight his own astuteness and vigilance, for example, the Captain General proudly explained that it was thanks to his private sources (spies and informants) that he was able to keep abreast of matters which might appear "insignificant" to the Intendant of San Salvador. Such sources had brought to his attention the fact that offensive broadsheets had been posted by criminal hands on the homes of the authorities, including that of the Intendant. The intimation of the Intendant's lack of perspicacity was clear. And perhaps even his reliability was questionable, since, according to reports from the Comandant of San Salvador, the Intendant had been warned repeatedly of potential danger.

Lack of confidence in the utterances and gestures of rivals eroded the faith so essential to stable emblematic competition: actors perceived the truth, in all its "simple chastity", as being in constant peril. Donations by creole notables to the embattled Crown, once a gesture of dutiful generosity, were now seen by the Capitan General as merely the

signs of "hypocrisy"; as an integral part of the sinister plan to sever the "inalterable" bond between the peninsula and the provinces. Hypocritical, too, were the provinces that pronounced themselves "fidelisimas" (most loyal). Such pronouncements, he argued vehemently, were meant to "lull" the government; to "conceal" true objectives; to open up career avenues for those whom [the restless and vile] wish to place in positions of authority.

Indeed, the Captain General no longer knew when to believe the ceremonial expressions of the emblematic selves. He reminded his "Most Serene Senor" that as recently as March 20, 1812

the Sovereign Congress [had] extolled the culture and religion of San Salvador, elevating her above the other provinces in this regard: the jubilation of its people, the loyalty of its clerics; and the music, processions and demonstrations through which they paid solemn homage to the publication of the political constitution of the monarchy, and to the union of the two continents -- [the latter] symbolized in two globes made up of fireworks.⁸⁵

Another case in point, said the official, was Chalaltenango, whose "people, after having manifested their devotion in a procession of penitence, left the parish and went off to agitate against authority and Europeans." And then there was Nicaragua, where in 1811, Leon and Granada, immediately after making "the most expressive claim of fealty to the government, engaged in commotions even more horrendous than those of San Salvador." Finally, there was his own capital city: "This

Ayuntamiento [cabildo] of Guatemala, which never ceases to repeat that fidelity is its most glorious emblem, in 1810, at the first news of the resignations of Bayona, sought to have the authorities come before it to take their oaths."

Even the virtue that was emblematic of Christian imperial authority -- benevolence -- the Captain General concluded, had failed to "eradicate the roots of evil." In San Salvador, for example, the Spanish Intendant had been replaced by "a creole son of this capital [Guatemala], and the most liberal constitution possible [had been] given to them," with the disastrous result that entire towns had come to resemble "academies". Worse yet, "they abused the freedom of the press, publishing papers that spread venomous seeds".⁸⁶

For the Captain General it was particularly astonishing that culpability lay with the most visible -- the upper classes: "the lawyers and clerics" and "those who call themselves 'the principals'". These creole notables, the Captain contended, were the first to experience the "baneful effects of abrupt enlightenment," and to communicate to the simple people the "fire" which "devoured" them. But the "clases ínfimas" (the lowest, weakest, least visible classes), "submerged in depth," could not receive information except through the "intermediary channels of the middle classes". If the notables' ideas became "corrupted" as they reached the lowly, the hand of the most zealous chief would be unable to eradicate the "heinous" consequences. Fortunately, these ideas

had not yet penetrated the "clases ínfimas", which had agitated in some provinces, but only as the "unhappy automatons" of the hands that compelled them.

Suspicion was attended by dread: "More frightening and dangerous than sheer force, [was] the malevolent spirit of intrigue, working on behalf of the prisoners." Also terrifying were

the systematic, hidden maneuvers, designed to elect suspects to office while excluding Europeans and creoles whose fidelity is positive; the plan to fill the [cabildos] with 'certain' persons; the heavy traffic of secret correspondence, bearing false news; the relentless effort to discredit those loyal employees who are experts on the trickery of unrest and could thus frustrate the development of evil; and the artful displays of fealty for the benefit of the distant eyes of the supreme government.⁸⁷

Sincerity -- expressed in rituals which were inextricable from the deeds of virtue -- was not to be taken at face-value. The policy recommendations put forth by the Captain General sought to encourage those cities that were "truly" loyal and those notables of authentic integrity. The city of San Vicente, for example, was to be rewarded for its indisputable valor in the "battle against perfidy and evil" with the cherished title of Very Noble and Very Loyal.

Loyalty had been manifested in all sincerity by several localities, including Indian pueblos whose clerics opposed rebellion from the pulpit, and whose parishioners, in turn, typically perceived the agents of evil to be other localities

-- pueblos, Villas and cities. "We shall follow the advice of our priest," declared the Indians of Comalapan,

because we see that his only wish is our welfare. We are prepared to lose our lives in the pacification of the city of San Salvador, and beg our priest to write the Excelentisimo Senor Presidente [the Captain General was also President of the Audiencia], notifying him that he can count on two thousand Indians, for we the sons of this pueblo shall go armed with arrows and machetes, and serve as best we can.⁸⁸

But the turbulence in San Salvador was alarming. Its Intendant, as we have seen, had begun to detach his familial dignity and "amor propio" from his official post once the insurgence was under control. Indeed, he was now able to fulfill his obligation as a Guatemalan notable: as a citizen of the loyal city of Guatemala, he dutifully warned the Captain General of the danger inherent to the city of San Salvador; and simultaneously, as a member of a competitive local elite, he cast aspersions on San Salvador, the traditional rival of his own Guatemala City. In his view, the influence of the capital city of San Salvador throughout that province was remarkable, and threatened to reach the border with the province of Guatemala. "Any detrimental developments in its government," the Guatemalan Intendant of San Salvador asserted, "[will] always be dangerous, as your glorious Pacifier, Don Jose de Aycinena, will duly inform you".⁸⁹

Conclusion

As late as the second decade of the nineteenth century, we have seen, Central American politics remained connected to identity-formation, in turn inextricable from discourse and narrative. Indeed, new variants of dramaturgical obedience were developed in the 1810's. Though expressed in the traditional discourse of good and evil, narratives of the clash between these two forces unravelled new plots which preserved the emblematic virtue of self-seeking actors.

The narratives' collective enactment -- either on ceremonial occasions or in the turbulence of the *cabildo abierto* -- was at once scripted and spontaneous, conventional and innovative. The element of risk, moreover, was always present. Hence the continued structural spontaneity of the colonial system.

In the next chapters, we will see that the emblematic nature of identity and competition, on the one hand, and the discourse of good and evil with its attendant practice of dramaturgical obedience, on the other, combined to make politics inherently violent. Specifically, we will see that by the third decade of the nineteenth century, excoriating suspicion pervaded relations among collective identities. Localities, families, and officials came to perceive one another's narratives -- both ceremonial and textual -- as no more than the stratagems of perfidy. The mutual fear and disdain experienced by antagonists remain almost palpable on

the pages of surviving documents.

1. Mario Rodríguez, The Cádiz Experiment in Central America (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 33-34.
2. This 1808 narrative, composed by the Cabildo of Guatemala City, can be found under the title Guatemala por Fernando Séptimo el día 12 de diciembre de 1808 at Madrid's Biblioteca Nacional. The passage quoted here comes from p.3.
3. Present were the Ministers of the Audiencia; the Archbishop; the ecclesiastical and municipal cabildos; the Dean of the University; the Marquis (Aycinena); provincials of the Dominican convents; the Artillery Commandant; the Colonel of the Militia; the Jefe de Rentas; the consuls of the merchant guild; and the Intendant of Comayagua. For more detail, see Laudelino Moreno, "Guatemala y la invasión napoleónica en España," Anales de la Sociedad de Geografía e Historia de Guatemala, VII, no. 1 (September 1930).
4. Cabildo of Guatemala of City, Guatemala por Fernando Séptimo, 4-5.
5. Ibid., 84.
6. J. J. Pardo, Miscelánea Histórica, Guatemala, siglos 16 a 19, vida, costumbre, sociedad (Guatemala: Editorial Universitaria, Colección Realidad Nuestra, 1978).
7. Moreno, op. cit.
8. Cabildo de Guatemala, Guatemala por Fernando Séptimo, 85-87.
9. Moreno, op. cit., 11.
10. Cabildo of Guatemala City, Guatemala por Fernando Septimo, 87-89.
11. Moreno, op. cit., 11.
12. Rodríguez, op. cit., 39.
13. Pardo, op. cit., 155-58
14. Cabildo of Guatemala City, Guatemala por Fernando Séptimo.
15. Ibid., 9.
16. Enrique Martínez Sobral, "La Jura de Fernando VII," Anales de la Sociedad de Geografía e Historia de Guatemala, Volume I, no.3, (January 1925).
17. Cabildo of Guatemala City, Guatemala por Fernando Septimo.

18. Moreno, op. cit., 13.
19. Cabildo of Guatemala City, Guatemala por Fernando Séptimo.
20. Ibid., 18.
21. Ibid., 21-22.
22. Ibid., 30.
23. The sermon was one of the "documents" annexed to the Cabildo's narrative by way of evidence. See "Oración Eucarística que pronunció el Sr. Dr. D. Isidro Sicilia y Montoya, Arcediano de esta Santa Iglesia Metropolitana el Martes 13 de Diciembre de 1808, en la Solemne Acción de Gracias que celebró la M.N.Y.M.L Ciudad de Guatemala por la Exaltación del Sr. Rey D. Fernando VII al Trono de Españas". See annex, Ibid.
24. Ibid., 63-73.
25. Martínez Sobral, op. cit.
26. Ibid., 4-5.
27. Luis Marina Otero, Las Constituciones de Guatemala (Madrid: Instituto de Estudios Políticos, 1958), 26.
28. See Máximo Soto Hall, "Capítulos de un Libro Inédito," Revista de Costa Rica en el Siglo XIX, Volume I, no. 32 (San José: Letras Patrias).
29. Hubert Howe Bancroft, The Works of Hubert Howe Bancroft, Volume VIII, History of Central America (San Francisco: The History Company, Publishers, 1887), 4.
30. Otero, op. cit., 26-28.
31. Moreno, op. cit., 14-15.
32. Ibid, p.15.
33. At the end of 1809 the French army occupied the greater part of Adalucia, thus splitting Spanish territory in two. The Junta Central fled Sevilla and took refuge in Cádiz, where, hopelessly discredited by the latest in a series of military defeats, it dissolved after transferring governmental authority to the Consejo de Regencia, or Regency Council, which assumed power on January 30, 1810.

34. To the parliament, it should be noted, the former colonies would be allowed to send one deputy per cabeza de partido (a bureaucratic-administrative jurisdiction), which meant that the Kingdom of Guatemala would have six deputies. For more, see Otero, op. cit., 28-29.

35. Rodriguez, op. cit., 49.

36. Ibid., 76.

37. Bancroft, op. cit., 4-5.

38. César Branas, Antonio Larrazabal, Un Guatemalteco en la Historia (Guatemala: Editorial Universitaria, 1969), 42-43.

39. "The general public hastened to the benches on the second and third floors...Public sessions had been the rule at the Spanish Cortes from the beginning. Thus, 'the people' could add their approval or disapproval to the acts of their representatives". See Rodríguez, op. cit.

40. Carlos Melendez-Chaverri, "Los Problemas de la vida cultural en el reino de Guatemala en la época de la ilustración," in Centro América en las vísperas de la independencia (San José: Academia de Geografía e Historia de Costa Rica, 1971), 171-172.

41. Rodriguez, op. cit., 39.

42. Ibid., 56.

43. Rodriguez, p.56.

44. Centro America en las Visperas de la Independencia, 288.

45. Ibid., 289.

46. Bancroft called them "questionable devices". See Bancroft, op. cit., 12.

47. See J. C. Pinto Soria, Centroamérica, de la colonia al Estado Nacional, 1800-1849 (Guatemala: Editorial Universitaria, Colección Textos, 1986), 97; and 147.

48. Ibid., 152.

49. Ibid., 108.

50. In August, 1811 the Captain General put in a safe place 125,000 pesos and 11,000 rifles. See Centro América en las Vísperas de la Independencia, 290.

51. Bancroft, op. cit., 13.
52. Bancroft refers to these as "the usual cheap reward of monarchs". See Bancroft, op. cit., 13.
53. Ibid., 14.
54. Pinto Soria, op. cit., 73.
55. Ibid., 149.
56. See Centro America en las Visperas de la Independencia, 294-95.
57. This was the laudatory term given to Aycinena a few years later by the Intendant of San Salvador in a report to the Captain General. The report had to do with the disturbances of January 14, 1814. See Pinto Soria, op. cit., 130.
58. Pío Bolaño, "La ciudad Trágica, Monografía de Granada," Revista Conservadora, Volume 2, no.13 (October 1961).
59. Ibid.
60. José D. Gámez, Historia de Nicaragua (Managua: Fondo de Promoción Cultural, Banco de América, Papelera Industrial de Nicaragua), 308.
61. Document No. 2389, "Testimonios del acta de la primera sesión de la Junta Provincial Gubernativa que se instaló el 14 de Diciembre de 1811 en León de Nicaragua, a consecuencia de las conmociones populares habidas en esta Ciudad y especialmente la de la noche del 13. Preside la Junta Don Fray Nicolás García Jerez, Obispo de Nicaragua y Costa Rica". See Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volume X, no. 1 (April 1948).
62. "Informe del Capitán General de Guatemala al Secretario de Gracia y Justicia, Reservada, No. 19," Guatemala, January 30, 1812, Revista de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volume X, no.1, (April 1948).
63. "Sr. José de Bustamante -- Iltmo. Sr. Obispo D. Fr. Nicolás García, Gobernador Intendente de Nicaragua," Guatemala, February 3, 1812, Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volume X, no. 1 (April 1948), 15-18.
64. "Exmo. So. B.L.M. de V.E. su mas obligado y reconocido capellán, Fr. Nicolás Obispo de Nicaragua - Exmo. Sr. D. José de Bustamante, Presidente Gobernador y Capitán General del Reyno de Guatemala," León, February 20, 1812, Revista de la

Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volume X, no.1 (April 1948), 18-20.

65. Rodríguez, op. cit., 70.
66. "Exmo. Sr. Fr. Nicolás, Obispo de Nicaragua - Exmo. Sr. Presidente y Capitán General del Reyno D. José de Bustamante," León, February 21, 1812, Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volume X, no.1 (April 1948), 20-22.
67. The year was 1812. See Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volume X, no. 1 (April 1948), 23-25; and 13-15.
68. "José de Bustamante -- Ilmo. Sr. Obispo, Gobernador de Nicaragua," Guatemala, March 3, 1812. See ibid., 25-26.
69. Gámez, op. cit., 308.
70. Rodríguez, op. cit., 72.
71. Bancroft, op. cit., 8.
72. Ibid., 10-11.
73. Pinto Soria, op. cit., 73.
74. Rodríguez, op. cit., 68.
75. Ibid., 70.
76. Mario F. Martínez, "La Ilustración en Honduras," in Centroamérica I, op. cit., 259.
77. Bancroft, op. cit., 20.
78. Rodríguez, op. cit., 113-116.
79. Miles Wortman, Government and Society in Central America, 1680-1840 (New York: Columbia Press, 1982), 201.
80. Rodríguez, op. cit., 107.
81. José María Peinado, "Comunicación dirigida por el Intendente don José María Peinado al Capitán General del Reino, en el que da cuenta de la Insurrección efectuada en la ciudad de San Salvador el 24 de enero de 1814," Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volume III, no. 3 (December 1940), 215-229.
82. Pinto Soria, op. cit., 101.

83. "Informe del Capitán General de Guatemala, Don José de Bustamante sobre la insurrección efectuada en la ciudad de San Salvador el día 24 de enero de 1814," Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volume III, no. 3 (December 1940).

84. Ibid.

85. Ibid.

86. Ibid.

87. Ibid.

88. Pinto Soria, op. cit., 106.

89. Ibid., 130.

CHAPTER 6

The Moral Politics of Appearances on the Eve of Independence

During the Napoleonic invasion of Spain and the exile of the Spanish monarch (1808 to 1814), Central Americans developed new variants of dramaturgical obedience in order to extract advantage from conjunctural events, and simultaneously reaffirm their fidelity to the monarchy. A consequence of this political strategy was the preservation of the discourse of good and evil, and the preclusion of an autonomous ideology.

This blockage of ideological innovation itself had profound repercussions. During the Napoleonic period, there emerged in Spain a nationalist movement which, though monarchical in loyalty, culminated in the constitution of 1812. Liberals revered this constitution, conservative royalists abhorred it. Their debate reached the colonies, which split over the issue. But as this chapter shows, in the Kingdom of Guatemala, constitutionalist arguments were as entwined with the colonial discourse of good and evil as were the contentions of recalcitrant opponents.

Derivative of this crucial commonality between the two camps was the unquestioned legitimacy of the monarchy, which prevailed as late as the eve of independence in 1821. Indeed, this chapter argues that the break with the metropolis entailed not only the loss of the monarch as sovereign arbiter

of competitive struggles, but also the unwitting "dethronement" of the metaphor which for so long had endowed the colonial worldview with coherence. No institution inherited the king's arbitration powers; and no ideological structure comparable to the mystical notion of the Spanish state emerged to hold actors in its grip.

But as this chapter also shows, the metaphor's attendant discourse and narratives remained intact. The constitutive elements of identity, for example, were still the virtues that earlier had joined service to Crown and God: obedience, honesty, charity and valor. Conversely, "no-ones" were still the agents of perfidy and avarice. And even as the figure of the king vanished, Central Americans continued to compete on the field of appearances and to judge outcomes in moral terms. The core argument of this chapter is that the removal of the monarchy from a system of political competition which had become deeply entwined with manichean identity-formation, let loose the suspicions and jealousies which the colonial regime had managed to contain.

Such suspicions, for example, flowed directly from the practice of dramaturgical obedience, which practitioners recognized as spontaneous in their own hands, but deemed a shameless ploy in the hands of others. Jealousies arose when those who "feigned" their virtue went unpunished. Indeed, when looking back at prior struggles, rivals invariably engaged in discriminatory remembrance, accusing one another of deploying

deceitful practices -- practices which in point of fact were shared habits. These retrospective accusations were as frequent as they were predictable. For behind facades and formalities there emerged the paradoxical opportunity for rivals to make common cause, given a coincidence of interests. In short, as we begin to see in this chapter, emblematic competition led to the proliferation of tactical alliances, in turn based on ephemeral commonalities between obdurate identities. In the discourse of good and evil, these transient understandings, ex post, seemed to be mere confirmation of the treachery of others.

Moreover, the discourse of good and evil, the narrative of their clash, and the practice of dramaturgical obedience still combined to affirm a set of expectations about the fair distribution of status and wealth. In short, the struggle for power remained a struggle for justice -- justice at once ancestral and eternal; and the attendant system of rewards and punishment continued to foment the yearning for distinction characteristic of emblematic identities. Hence the ongoing centrality of titles to colonial statecraft as late as 1821.

a. The Emblematic World in its Late Manifestation

Notable families, guilds, brotherhoods, and cabildos -- these were the collective identities that populated localities throughout the colonial period. In the Kingdom of Guatemala, as we saw in Chapter 4, the family Aycinena gained social

preeminence among creoles after a decisive victory in emblematic politics during the move from Antigua to the new Capital.

In the new capital, as Ralph Woodward has noted, the Aycinenas became "the axis of an oligarchy" known as "the family". By the second decade of the nineteenth century, the "family" -- bent both on obtaining a rank equal to that of peninsulars and on furthering its economic interests -- was in conflict with Spanish officials. In their quest for honor and might, the Aycinenas embraced such progressive ideas as constitutional restraint and free trade. The inter-related struggles for socio-political ascent and a liberal regime, however, suffered a reversal on May 13, 1814, when Fernando VII returned to Spain and abrogated the constitution he had sworn to uphold.

Emboldened by the royal abrogation of the Constitution, the Captain General appeared in Guatemala City's municipal government, where he proceeded to insult the cabildo's members. He then demanded that the portraits of three Guatemalan notables (Jose Aycinena included) be removed from their place of honor, since they were sympathetic to the constitution which the king had revoked.¹

There were other repercussions. The government junta of León was abolished. And in Guatemala, the leaders of secret Juntas were brought to trial on charges of conspiracy against the colonial military chiefs. Significantly, the prosecutor

informers and spies.⁵⁰

The avowed objective of the Salvadoran notables leading the rebellion was the dismissal of peninsular officials. In the name of the king, and with the backing of a large group of citizens, the notables (a group which included several clerics) forced the Intendant to ring the bells and convene a cabildo. That morning, the cabildo was scheduled to hold an ordinary session, but due to the popular mobilization induced by rebellious notables, it became, de facto, an open cabildo.

Once under the pressure of "the people," the cabildo designated a Mayor and a Deputy of the Plebs, the latter being the "voice" of popular representation. This creole victory was celebrated with a Te Deum, after which a number of accords were reached in the home of the notable who had been named Deputy of the Plebs. There, for example, the creation of a Provincial Government Junta was planned.

In the intendency of San Salvador, the rebellion of the capital city was supported in Metapan, Zacatecoluca, Usulután, and Chalaltenango. But it was repudiated by Santa Ana, San Vicente, Sonsonate and San Miguel, where the public executioner burned the invitations received from the capital to join in a "sacrilege". These towns "renewed their pledges of fealty to the government".⁵¹ In return, the metropolis finally awarded San Miguel the title of "Very Noble and Very Loyal". San Vicente was made a city, which title was confirmed January 15, 1812. Santa Ana was raised to the rank of Villa.

And the parish priests of these various places were "promoted to the canons of the chapter of Guatemala".⁵² In sum, the interests of collective identities diverged according to their rank in the hierarchy; and their impulse to ascend rendered them susceptible to the imperial system of reward and punishment.

If these cities deserved rewards, others deserved punishment. Thus, the Archbishop of Guatemala dispatched priests to preach against the insurgents of San Salvador, a measure consistent with the belief in the potency of discursive eloquence, as well as with the corollary notion that inexplicable dissent was the work of "agents of Satan".⁵³ In rebellious Mexico, according to the Archbishop of Guatemala, prompt intervention by the King's military force would either paralyze "the perfidious and hypocritical leaders of the conspiracy, or in an instant slay the monstrous heads whose infernal blasts have ignited the torch of discord".⁵⁴

At the same time, however, the Very Noble and Very Loyal cabildo of Guatemala, which had previously condemned disturbances in San Salvador as the work of an agent of evil, now prevailed upon the Captain General to send not troops but a commission of local creole notables to negotiate with the Salvadoran rebels. This agreement between the Captain General and the Guatemalan cabildo, according to the latter, was

widely applauded, not only because of the harmony and fraternity reigning between the two bodies, but

also because of the personal reputation of the regidor comisionado, whose family [was] among the oldest and most distinguished in this city; a descendant of the original pacifiers and settlers.⁵⁵

Indeed, the commissioned regidor was the very same notable who had drafted the constitutionalist instructions for Guatemala's representative to the Cortes at Cadiz. Only now, he was to lead a negotiation that would engage creole notables whose cities were competitors but who shared a common cause in the struggle for equality of privilege with peninsulars. Once inside the territorial turf of the intendacy of San Salvador, the Guatemalan emissaries stopped in several towns on their way to the capital. From Santa Ana -- a faithful city -- they extended a pardon to the insurgents in the capital, who in turn welcomed them upon their arrival in San Salvador. Presently, they struck a bargain: the rebel junta would be dismantled, but the Intendant would be replaced by one of the two Guatemalan emissaries, the Marquis de Aycinena.⁵⁶

Peace reigned once again in San Salvador, an accomplishment which earned the Marquis the sobriquet of the Glorious Pacifier,⁵⁷ in the style of the conquista. The rebellion in San Salvador, however, had already influenced the notables of Leon and Granada in Nicaragua. In Granada, the newly elected mayor -- a member of one of the "principal" creole families -- inaugurated his tenure with an aggressive campaign against the forces of vice, which he deemed rampant among colonial authorities. Pointing to the scandalous private

life of the Colonel of Engineers (a peninsular), the Mayor sought his removal from the post. The Colonel dug in his heels, at which point, the Mayor gathered a mob and, in what ended as a popular mutiny, forced the Colonel to submit to mayoral authority.

The emboldened Mayor next turned his moralist campaign against the Chief of Arms, who, as was generally known, kept a mistress. The Mayor put out an edict forbidding "mujeres alegres" -- women of doubtful reputation -- from attending the solemn procession on the afternoon of Holy Friday. This procession was more than a display of religious fervor; it was an assertion of social belonging, and a fashion contest among the faithful. Not surprisingly, the Chief's mistress, a Sevillian renowned for her sense of style, not only marched in the procession, but did so defiantly: dressed in a regal outfit, and enshrouded in fragrances. Momentarily, she was imprisoned by the Mayor's police, only to be liberated from jail by the Chief of Arms, in open contempt of the law. This transgression, in turn, allowed the creole mayor to "elevate" the case to the Audiencia Real in Guatemala City. Presented with this clear case of moral transgression, the Audiencia condemned the conduct of the Chief.⁵⁸

Creole notables felt vindicated by the ruling. A Guatemalan writer who published under the pseudonym of Doctor French Redish related the incident in an article entitled, "Cedaste, arma togae" -- in reference to "cedant arma togae,"

or let arms yield to the gown, Cicero's affirmation of the primacy of civil authority over military might.⁵⁹ Moreover, the Mayor and other creole notables were emboldened to take more drastic measures: on December 22, 1811, they convened the vecinos to an open cabildo, where they demanded the resignation of all Spanish officials. The latter resigned from their posts and escaped to the neighboring villa of Masaya, from where they sent word of their predicament to the Capitan General in Guatemala City.⁶⁰

Thus a moralist campaign ushered via a holy procession into an open cabildo, where the creole notables of Granada and their allies, having enhanced their own moral stature, defied the authorities. Already in Leon -- the capital of the Nicaraguan Intendancy -- disobedience had led to an even more radical outcome: the formation of a governing junta. In Leon, however, the open cabildo, rather than the culmination of a moralist upsurge, was presented as the defensive response of "vecinos honrados", or honest citizens, to the demands of the "plebe," or plebs.

And yet, the cabildo of Leon did much more than take a defensive stance; it actually managed to install local notables in the governing junta of Leon, and made of the city's Spanish bishop the junta's titular image -- a kind of patron saint whose image represented the "face" of the junta. And it did this even as its deputy at Parliament struggled to obtain two cherished objectives: the elevation of the seminary

to the status of university, and the right of its bishopric to dispose of its tithes without interference from Guatemala City. In short, while the cabildo of Guatemala displayed its loyalty to the crown even as it reached for greater control of the Kingdom, the cabildo of Leon both displayed its loyal obedience to the monarchy and made it bid for local autonomy from Guatemala. In so doing, the latter both affirmed and risked its reputation; and it executed this simultaneity through the theatrical management of contradictions, most particularly by blurring the line between discourse of fidelity and tactical pronouncement.

Thus, in the ex-post narrative of events, Leon's Government Junta -- itself the embodiment of local disobedience -- faced a complex task: 1) to explain its bid for power, 2) vindicate the standing of its prominent members, and 3) justify its own continued existence. Its narrative report to the Captain General shows us how emblematic identity shaped tactics, as well as the important role of tactics in the preservation of identity amidst intense competition for power.

The narrative takes as its point of origin the prevalent view which divided the people of a city between the honest and the dishonest; the notable and the invisible. Thus, it pitted the "plebs," deluded by "false rumors" against the "vecinos honrados", or honest citizens. Indeed, the latter were depicted as half-defeated from the start, able to dissuade the

plebs only temporarily from engaging in violence, and themselves convinced that upheaval was inevitable.⁶¹ Also typical was the reponse of the cabildo, which, as in moments of turmoil, had opened up to include the vecinos honrados, or honest citizens, who in turn agreed on a resolution which was at once conciliatory and defensive: they extended a general pardon to the authors of broadsheets and proponents of rebellious ideas, but also authorized the formation of a patrol of honorable citizens.

Precisely at that moment, the bishop, sitting in cabildo, received word that a "large portion of the people" wanted to speak with him. The theatrical representation of inexorable collective ire had begun. The prelate addressed them with "the most tender and Christian sentiments", speaking to them of peace and tranquility; then asked them about the reason for their agitation. They replied that they wanted no "chapeton" -- a derogatory term for Spaniards -- to govern them, except the bishop himself. The prelate was "speechless", but then imparted his blessing on the "plebs", which disbanded, though only to regroup hours later, when thousands of men, armed with knives and machetes, surrounded the Governor Intendant's house.

The bishop rushed to the scene, where he pleaded in "tears" with the plebs. Then, a friar whom the prelate had brought with him -- "a religious exemplar" -- tried, but failed, to dissuade the mob. In fact, the plebs, even as it

swore devout obedience to the bishop, carried him into the cabildo, then demanded that he come out to the balcony, from where, once again, he asked them what they wanted. They handed him a list of non-negotiable demands, which he read aloud, and to which he acceded. He then presided over a solemn oath of fidelity and obedience to the authorities. Next morning, however, the mob demanded a meeting between cabildo and the bishop. This time, convinced that there was no alternative left, the bishop notified the barrios that they were to name their deputies to the governing junta that would replace the Governor Intendant.

According to the Junta's narrative, the nominations caused "great jubilation", a fact which suggests that creole notables, the "most honest of the honest", had forged a secret alliance with the "plebs" through their clientelistic networks. For as the Junta happily reported, all the new deputies, as if by miracle, were notables, known for their "probity" and for the "character which expresses [such probity]". Once instituted, the governing Junta named the bishop as its president, then swore fidelity and subordination to the authorities in Spain. The "plebs" swore this too, three times; and swore obedience to the governing Junta. The governing Junta and the "people" -- no longer the plebs -- proceeded to the church, where they swore fidelity for the fifth time.

The tears of the bishop, the repeated oaths of the

citizens, and the barrios' nomination of reputable deputies attenuated the official assessment of the events. Though keenly suspicious, the Captain General could only conclude that the "principals" of Leon had been taken by "surprise". But the role of the "honorable citizens" was dubious at best. Upon the deposition of the Intendant and the dismissal of all peninsular officials, for example, it was the local creole notables who proceeded to distribute the vacant offices amongst themselves. The city of Granada and the villa of Rivas emulated Leon: they dismissed peninsulars from their posts, and created their own juntas.⁶²

Nevertheless, the Junta's narrative letter was so deftly crafted that it effectively constrained the tactical response of the Captain General, who sat down to write two separate letters to the bishop. In one, he addressed the bishop as prelate, while in the other he appointed the prelate Governor-Intendant and addressed him as such.⁶³ It is in the letter addressed to the bishop as public servant that the Captain General, in a very oblique manner, at once reasserted and called into question the "fame" of Leon's cabildo. As he put it, the cabildo was known as "religious" and "obedient", so that it was impossible for him to think of its members and of the citizens as rebels. Also obliquely, the Captain General paid homage to the bishop while implicitly calling into question his true role and effectiveness. "It is not credible," the Captain General stated, "that if the people

were allowed to hear freely the voice of its pastor, that they would ignore it".

In this letter, as already mentioned, the Captain General also appointed the bishop Governor Intendant, and instructed him to "separate" himself from the governing Junta. The bishop replied: "I have been recognized as Governor Intendant, but I lack the force to command obedience." He requested military troops and a new governor, emphasizing that the latter should not be European. For the post, he suggested a creole notable from Guatemala City.⁶⁴ The suggestion was telling, since the creole notable in question, given his record of competitiveness with the Captain General, on the one hand, and his conciliatory attitude towards the rebels of San Salvador, on the other, was likely to be partial to the rebels in Leon. However, the suggestion was not implausible, because the incessant oratorical and ceremonial expressions of fidelity by the notables of Guatemala continued effectively to protect their credibility; and to render them viable as the envoys of the colonial authorities whose domination they had so frequently challenged. Indeed, the Spanish parliament rewarded the cooperation of the notables of Guatemala in the pacification of Salvador and Nicaragua by granting the cabildo of Guatemala City the cherished title of Excellency.⁶⁵

At any rate, as early as the following day the bishop was able to report that the villa of Rivas had dissolved its junta, reorganized its cabildo, and recognized his authority

as governor. Granada, on the other hand, preserved its "monstruous" Junta-Cabildo.⁶⁶

In response, the statecraft of the emblematic world, though on the verge of a systemic crisis, retained as its core its classical policy mixture. Colonial authorities sought to preserve both the credibility and the emblematic virtue of authority -- benevolence -- by punishing the recalcitrant and rewarding the virtuous while simultaneously granting clemency to all through an erasure of memory. Accordingly, to deal with the problematic situation in Nicaragua, the Captain General proposed as follows: Granada was to be subjugated by military force; the faithful cabildo of Nueva Segovia was to receive the title of "Very Illustrious";⁶⁷ and, in recognition of the "prompt obedience" which his commands had met in Nicaragua, a state of "general forgetfulness" was decreed.⁶⁸

The rebels of Granada, for their part, eventually recognized the Junta of León. They decided to send two deputies as representatives; and promised to obey the bishop as long as he did not show any partiality in favor of the peninsulars. The bishop, in turn, dispatched a local creole notable to mediate between the Granada rebels and the peninsulars, but the mediator took the side of the former when the latter offended his social honor by mocking his creole origins.

On April 12 of 1812, one thousand peninsulars attacked Granada, but soon peace negotiations resulted in mutual

capitulation; leaders of both camps declared their differences as settled, and swore solemnly to abide by the terms of the agreement. The rebels surrendered their weapons; and a Spanish division occupied the plaza. For his part, the leader of the Spanish troops, in the name of the King and of the Captain General gave his word of honor not to take revenge on Granada. The Captain General, however, disapproved of the agreement, on the grounds that the King could not negotiate with rebels, and ordered the bishop to apprehend the guilty.⁶⁹

The Parliament granted Nueva Segovia the exalted title which the Captain General had proposed. It also rewarded the Bishopric of Leon: now it could dispose of its tithes without supervision from Guatemala City. And the seminary of Leon was finally promoted to the status of university.⁷⁰ By then the Constitution drafted by the Parliament had been adopted (March 18, 1812). The Extraordinary Parliament was dissolved; the ordinary Parliament was inaugurated. It confirmed the principle of equal rights between Spanish Americans and Spaniards; promised them representation on both continents; and decreed a general amnesty for political infractions on the new continent. The Constitution stipulated that cabildo offices, theretofore either bequeathed or sold, were contestable in elections: holders were to be chosen by electors, in turn delegated by popular vote.⁷¹

After the Constitution was proclaimed in Guatemala, the authorities and people took their oath of fidelity (November

3, 1812). Commemorative medals were struck. In Honduras, the city of Comayagua erected a monument. In Quezaltenango, the cabildo promised its loyal obedience.⁷²

The power of emblematic logic still applied. Titles of nobility were of ineffable value, not just for urban communities, but, as we have seen, for family clans. Even the king's authority and dignity was seen as deriving from his many titles; not the other way around. Conversely, name-calling was unforgivable. In 1812, the Vicar-General of Granada wrote,

[Insurgents are traitors] to the King, not only because they have demeaned his laws and have disrobed him of his majesty, which his many titles grant him, but have also vilified him in the most infamous manner: applying the surname of chapeton [derogatory term for Spaniards].⁷³

Moreover, as previously mentioned, creole notables at Cadiz circulated copies of their cabildos' oratorical testimonies of fidelity and their commemorative medals, for in themselves they were both artifacts and incontestable evidence of trustworthiness.⁷⁴ Indeed demonstrable virtuousness was the basis on which deputies argued and bargained for the elevation of their towns and Villas to higher ranks. The lobbying efforts of the representative from Costa Rica obtained for the capital City of Cartago the title of Very Noble and Very Loyal; the cherished title of city for San Jose; and the rank of Villa for Heredia, Alajuela, and Ujarras.⁷⁵ And Honduran

deputies strove to gain the elevation of the Colegio Tridentino de San Agustin to the category of University, a title which had been recently attained by the city of Leon.⁷⁶

Now granted by the Parliament on behalf of the King, titles of distinction became bones of contention between the cabildo of Guatemala City and peninsular officials, whose struggles now centered with greater frequency on matters of protocol. The Captain General refused to honor the installation of the Deputation -- an event he had deliberately delayed -- with a Te Deum and a high mass. And in disregard of the Deputation's rank of "Excelentisima," he "would append only his "media firma", or surname, to its decrees and documents".⁷⁷ As for the cabildo of Guatemala, he refused to recognize its title of Excellency; and according to its members, addressed that institution in a "language which Spaniards should not have to hear from their governing officials." In addition, the Captain General took exclusive control of invitations to ceremonial displays of jubilation, and manipulated seating arrangements to offend attending aldermen.

The Audiencia and religious corporations, too, ignored the privileges attached to the cabildo's rank. The former, for instance, would not correspond with it directly, only through a scrivener; the latter would only send lower-ranked clergy to welcome aldermen at religious functions.

The cabildo retaliated. It accepted no disrespectful

letters, and would not take part in ceremonies in which its members were relegated to an inferior position. In 1813, the cabildo's delegate to the Parliament vowed as he departed for his post in Cadiz to obtain "remedy" for "the evils" they suffered.⁷⁸ According to the cabildo, the captive monarch was benevolent, but his Captain General was "hard, inflexible, suspicious, absolute, vigilant and reserved, his plans of government a perfect reflection of his character".⁷⁹ Worse yet, the Captain General was closely allied to an unknown "provinciano" from Honduras: an intellectual from outside the local "family".⁸⁰

c. A Multiplicity of Stages for Multiple Identities:
Radical Localism

As the parameters of political competition became increasingly fluid, its tempo was punctuated by alternations between volatility and temporary quiescence. If some localities and groups reached for new emblematic prizes through dramaturgical obedience, others exploited the subsequent unrest by assuming positions of absolute loyalty, which brought them the attendant rewards in the form of titles of distinction from the crown. The traditional link between identity-formation and the system of incentives, in other words, remained intact. The tactics of actors, however, varied according to position and rank. This variation, to be sure, opened up opportunities for alliances among different groups.

But these alliances were ephemeral, and deepened mutual suspicion among elites -- both between creoles and Spaniards, and among creoles of different localities.

The volatility of politics and its punctuated tempo can be gleaned from official correspondence -- itself a narrative bent on reporting in intricate detail the events and circumstances of momentous episodes. Take the report sent in 1814 to the Captain General by the Intendant of San Salvador, who was a Guatemalan. Prima facie, the objective of the report was to provide an account of the insurrection of local notables in the cabildo against the military authorities. But in fact, the report rendered visible a universe in which amor propio -- self-esteem as social dignity and honor -- linked the member of an emblematic self to his public role, in turn embedded in the struggle between good and evil. The report's narrator also depicted actors as enveloped in suspicion, and assuming a stance of vigilance. Indeed, the narrator imagined antagonists as masked, and reality as concealed by a veil.⁸¹

The narrator himself had in the last two years played a multiplicity of roles. As creole notable he had led the struggle for the vindication of the "principals" born in America. Then, as a principal of Guatemala City, he had vilified Salvadoran rebels. But later, as a creole notable once more, he had entered into agreement with these rebels and "pacified" Salvador. Now, he was a strange admixture of all these roles -- he was the creole Intendant of a city that was

a rival to his own.

The stage on which protagonists tread was itself fragmented into a multiplicity of localities, all possessed of distinct identities and demarcated by inviolable boundaries. A false step, and those who were allies one moment became foes the next in the rush towards improvisation, which in turn sought to wound dignity in order to justify indignation. Gradually, adversaries and allies became caught up in the momentum of improvisation. But as they made a bid for the upper hand, and the danger of violence increased, they usually called for a formal staging of political theater: they convened an open cabildo.

The Intendant's narrative took as its chronological starting point the days immediately preceding the insurrection; and opened with an appraisal of the election of Alcaldes de Barrios (neighborhood mayors). It was the outcome of such elections, the Intendant remarked, that first awakened his "suspicions," since all the elected, save one, turned out to be of "doubtful" and "corrupt" character. So he called for new elections, which prompted endless debates and numerous resentments, and whose results also did not please him but were less pernicious than the previous ones. It was then that his "amor propio" was assaulted, as local notables labelled his government "harsh."

The notables' deepest motive, the Intendant suspected, was to force an impossible choice upon him: desist in his

opposition to the designs of the "ambitious," or risk personal "discredit." Once again, his suspicions were confirmed, this time by the "rekindled hatred" towards the Corps of Volunteers. More alert than ever, he provided his trustworthy sergeants with ammunition, and secretly instructed them to be especially vigilant. Shortly thereafter, the Cabildo passed an act, dictating that weapons were to be collected and placed in an unguarded room. For the Intendant, this measure "lifted a veil", and he was finally able to see with certitude the impending explosion.

So he redoubled his vigilance while simultaneously feigning "trust" and "negligence" in order to encourage the "brazenness" of the members of the Cabildo, for only through their own unmasking might he get to know and understand them better. "I put on a comedy at home," he wrote, describing the occasion on which he staged a play within a play. He invited the notables of the Cabildo to an evening of entertainment so as to distract their attention during a movement of weapons. At the conclusion of the comedy, he led them into his drawing room, for the unmasking:

I pointed out to them that I was aware of their evil deeds and maneuvers; warned them that they had exhausted me; that I had not come to this land [Salvador] to lose my honor, or to blemish the ancient luster of my family; that my true character was not the one they had experienced in the last two years, but that they should know in advance that if there to be an insurrection they would see that I was terrible, unstoppable in my resolution, and that they would not see me take one step back.

[the two mayors] pretended this was all new to them; assuring me nothing was afoot; guaranteeing the public tranquility; begging me not to allow myself be influenced by gossip and envy. They concluded by heaping insults on the Corps of Volunteers and on some of their best individuals, going so far as to say that if cabo (corporal) Jose Melendez was stripped of his uniform, then all the hatred for the Volunteers would be finished.

This was a Guatemalan notable describing his confrontation with Salvadoran notables -- neither class nor shared membership in the creole ranks ultimately assured solidarity. Localist identities fragmented the administrative unit of the Kingdom of Guatemala. Moreover, familial and neighborhood identities fractured localities internally.

Consider the subsequent events. Amidst exchanges of accusations, mutual spying, and games of intrigue, a creole leader (a commissary) and a group of co-conspirators intruded on the turf of the mayors of one barrio by convening the citizens, on behalf of a mayor from another barrio, to a secret meeting. "The mayor of one barrio cannot, for any reason, convoke the people of another," the possessive mayors contended. Indeed, the fact that anyone would trespass this boundary, the Intendant reasoned in turn, was "proof of the malevolent science and complicity of the Commissary and his associates".

The Intendant sent them all to prison. But "their accomplices" -- the Constitutional Mayors -- retaliated by inciting the barrios. The insurrection had begun. Mayors and followers assumed a belligerent stance. So did the military,

as the Intendant dug in his heels and refused to release the prisoners. However, as had usually been the case elsewhere in the Kingdom under similar circumstances, an open cabildo was soon proposed, with the participation, of course, of both the Intendant and his antagonists. By way of compensation to the Intendant for the affronts he had suffered, the rebellious notables even offered to hold the cabildo in his home.

This conciliatory gesture, however, was "erased" when in the evening the notables made a surprise announcement: they had decided to postpone the cabildo 'til the next day. "This [delay]," the Intendant contended, "revealed the perversity of [the notables'] initial request." For in the face of turmoil, the anguish of the "distinguished citizenry" -- made up of "virtuous people" -- could only increase.

Given the tension in the air, the threat alone of an open cabildo proved sufficient to tilt the scales. And everyone knew when the scales had tilted. A leading notable took the Intendant aside and discreetly reminded him of a clause which the Captain General himself used as guiding principle. "He reminded me, Your Excellency," wrote the Intendant, "of your clause, which says that, if in fear of general commotion, then dissimulate [the deeds] of the particulars [in this case the rebels]".

And there was dissimulation. The Intendant and his military officers agreed on the spot to release the prisoners to the mayor. The Intendant later wrote, "[the mayor] kissed

my hand, and full of joy went to free them, leaving me behind full of a rage I could scarcely conceal." All the Intendant could do to preserve a degree of dignity was to instruct his boy-servants to sing their customary nightly carols, thus signaling, in feigned nonchalance, that nothing out of the ordinary had taken place.

Days of pronounced uncertainty, even violence, followed, as campaigns of rumors, threats, and competing accounts of events spread throughout the territory. Clerical notables on the side of the rebels publicly accused the Intendant of attempts against "the law of God"; the law for which they, in contrast, were willing to "give up their heads." The Intendant, for his part, described the situation in Chalaltenango as one in which

the virtuous were in utmost consternation, the evil ones and the rabble in the greatest commotion. Until favorable news reached them about progress of the just cause, and fortune changed. Then, the pure breathed; the vile were intimidated.

Military ascendancy and propaganda victories eventually combined in favor of the Intendant, who in a display of humility exalted his own performance: only divine intervention, he declared, could possibly account for his ability to frustrate such vast and evil designs on such short notice. He also claimed public honor for his name, though without openly demanding recognition. Specifically, he suggested the celebration of a Te Deum in the Cathedral in

order to elevate thanks to the Highest for His visible protection of a cause that was just; a cause, he contended, for which Heaven had made him an instrument, and thus covered him with glory.

The Intendant also began to distance himself from the Intendancy whose capital city he had previously called "distinguished" and "virtuous." In an about-face, the Intendant was suddenly able to cast an objective eye on San Salvador, as if he were "an inhabitant of Japan." He wrote:

The Province of San Salvador, on account of its people, its location, and the vice that comes from its ideas, will always be the one to set the tone in the Kingdom. It is thus necessary to bring a foreign force to it; a force which can be trusted to prevail over it [the province of El Salvador]. For while it is possible to think of using one brother to punish and contain another brother, or a son-in-law his father-in-law, or the debtor his creditor, or the godfather his god-son, it is not politically-advisable; and it puts the government at odds with nature.

The natural bonds uniting the people of San Salvador, he argued, invariably gave pause to any intendant, and predisposed him to undue tolerance, hesitancy, and dissimulation. "It has been eight days since one of the Volunteers has been crying over his father's imprisonment. What trust can I place in him?" the Intendant asked rhetorically.

Provincial militias, made up mostly of mestizos and creole officers, were not the most reliable in the repression

recommended hanging, banishment, and imprisonment for the conspirators of common birth, and "garrote vil" (clubbing) for hidalgos, be they creole or Indian, as they were the "sons of something or someone".²

The Captain General was able to mount other public refutations of the creoles' avowed loyalty and honor, thus impugning the moral content of their character. There was the spectacle in which the Executioner burned the cabildo's instructions to its delegate at Parliament. And then there was the Captain General's refusal to carry out a royal decree appointing a creole notable as Government Secretary -- a refusal which was followed by a staged trial during which accusations were levelled against the appointee.³

There were also less visible but no less painful forms of retaliation. The Captain General strove successfully to have the rank of the municipal government reduced from "Excellency" to "Señoría"; and he slighted the aldermen in ceremonies.⁴ Finally, the Captain General, suspicious of the "family", discriminated against them in the allocation of government posts.

Many in the family were not allowed to hold government positions because of their support of the Constitution of 1812 ... In Guatemala they found allies only in those who shared a hatred of [the Captain General], mainly those who favored a return to the Constitution of 1812. It proved a strange alliance of the "best families" with social outcasts, mainly professional men by occupation, an inordinate number of whom were of questionable parentage.⁵

In 1817, however, liberals in Spain forced the restoration of the Constitution of 1812. The consequences for Spanish America were momentous.

Restoration of the Constitution of 1812 permitted open political discussion, and for the first time labeled political parties became clearly recognizable in Guatemala. The interests of the old oligarchy were taken up by the liberals, led by Dr. Pedro Molina in his newspaper, El Editor Constitucional, which he began to publish on July 24, 1820. Molina, of illegitimate birth, was most assuredly not a member of the family, nor were most of his close associates.⁶

The Aycinenas, of course, had their rivals, including old aristocratic families in Guatemala and in the other provinces of the Kingdom. Other merchants and cattle-ranchers also opposed them, and created their own newspaper, El Amigo de la Patria, edited by José Cecilio del Valle.

Valle, from a Honduran cattle ranching family, had come to the capital in the 1790's and had subsequently made his mark as a successful attorney and government official. He had never been accepted into the society of the family, and as a leading adviser to [the Captain General] had become closely associated with those who opposed the Aycinenas and their relatives.⁷

The "family" and its opponents turned to the emblematic tradition of socio-political competition in search of ways to express their mutual disdain. In this tradition, rivals engaged in socio-political struggle by denigrating one

another's familial character and dignity. In Guatemala, the "family" called its opponents "Bacos", or inebriates, who in turn called the family "Cacos", or thieves.⁸ In Nicaragua, the most popular form of denigration was scapegoating -- insulting the corporate group by offending one of its members. In this practice, a scapegoat's family name was substituted with a humiliating appellation. The disparaging nomenclature was carefully selected, often from the animal kingdom, so that in a theatrical world populated by keenly competitive emblematic selves, even a notable might be ridiculed until the end of his life as Pedro "Coyote", Juan "Goat", Francisco "Mule" and Diego "Snake".⁹

This practice thoroughly debased familial identity by transforming kin into the worst kind of hybrid -- half human, half animal. The practice, moreover, was debasing because it identified a scapegoat's kin with the vices represented by the animal family to which the scapegoat now belonged. Diego "Snake" obviously became a member of a species that brings to mind images of venomous treachery (just like the coyote connotes a howling thief bent on robbing others of the fruits of their hard and honest labor).

At the turn of the century, the practice of scapegoating had led in Granada to conflict between the Military Commandant and the cabildo -- the former persecuted the practitioners, the latter disputed the officer's jurisdiction and warned him to abstain from future encroachments on the cabildo's turf.

The controversy was finally resolved by the authorities in Guatemala, in favor of the commandant.¹⁰

There were, of course, other means of attacking emblematic identities. Anonymous broadsides were quite common in all the provinces, as was the the masked theater of the night, when notables went out in disguise, stood under the balcony of a rival household, then proceeded to shout offensive labels intended to caricature each sleeping member of the family. Neighbors laughed and applauded as they recognized the parallels being drawn in ridicule. The cruel entertainment went on until finally, "the doors of the balcony would open, and [disgusting] liquids would pour forth [falling on the shouters]".¹¹

In a world in which people dwelt on the surface, always guarding their image from attack, labels and caricatures were calculated to wound deeply. For they not only denied the dignity and honor of the victim, but put in their stead a ludicrous image. Yet injurious as they might be, labels and caricatures could not "unmask" an impostor. And in the informant tradition promoted for centuries by suspicious monarchs, unmasking a rival was as central an objective as exalting one's own identity. Put in the discourse of good and evil, it was the duty of loyal subjects to rectify the false intelligence provided to the sovereign by dishonest self-seekers.

Indeed, "thieves" and "inebriates" alike believed that

once in possession of the "truth", the crown would fulminate against the wicked who tormented and humiliated men of honor and virtue. Gestures of "paternal benevolence" by the king reinforced this shared conviction. In 1817, Fernando, in one such display, extended a general pardon to political prisoners. Consequently, rebel creole elites from Granada were able to return to their city, for which they were grateful to their king. And as late as 1818, in typical fashion, a creole notable from the province of Guatemala exalted the magnanimity shown by Fernando in granting him a pardon. Also typically, the notable complained that the Captain General refused to execute the pardon, and beseeched the sovereign to issue a corrective order.¹² For this supplicant, as for any other, the king always meant well. If His Majesty erred, it was simply because he lacked the facts, which "others" withheld or distorted.

Creoles' persistence in their appeals to the monarch, we have seen, often paid off in the form of legal exemptions and changes in personnel. It was under pressure from Guatemalan creoles, for example, that Fernando finally announced the imminent replacement of the Captain General.¹³ More than defeat, for the loyal official this was humiliation, the culmination of a conspiracy against his "honor, character, and conduct." In fact, the Captain could not bring himself to publicize the royal order, paralyzed as he was by the same sense of pride that once had led him to author self-flattering

articles and to publish them under the names of sycophants.¹⁴

But the inevitable could only be postponed for so long, and in 1818 the hated Captain General was replaced. Under the tenure of the new Captain General, conflict between the highest official and creole elites was ameliorated. Still, the widening gulf of mutual disdain between creoles and other peninsular officials was not closed. During the second constitutional period, political competition, once again, took the form of vehement disputes over matters of protocol and signs of prestige. The Audiencia, for example, found it difficult to share its rank of Excellency with both the cabildo and the Provincial Deputation (created by the Constitution).¹⁵

Keen emblematic competition persisted among creoles, too. For collective identities in particular, emblems of distinction remained a prize until the end of the colonial regime. And until the end, statecraft relied heavily on the yearning for ascent in emblematic collectivities. Hence, the King's bestowal of the title of Villa on the faithful pueblo of Managua in 1819.

Taking into consideration the inalterable fidelity and loyalty which the pueblo of Managua has maintained toward My Royal Person -- in spite of attempts and attacks by factious [elements] and in spite of being surrounded by insurrectionist pueblos -- and taking into consideration its numerous population of over eleven thousand souls, and the advantages it has gained over other centers [in the province of Nicaragua] in industry, commerce, and agriculture ... I have decided to grant [Managua] the title of Loyal Villa ...

The title, then, was the prize of competition, and competition was embedded in the realm where virtue and vice clashed. From the point of view of the pueblo receiving it, the title signified the triumph of its biographical narrative, which asserted the pueblo's moral excellence to the king. From the point of view of the king, who publicized and exalted that biography, the title obligated him and all future sovereigns to protect the recipient's prerogatives.

It is my will that from here on and forever the said Pueblo shall be entitled and called the Loyal Villa of Managua, and that it shall enjoy the attendant, rightful preeminences ... that it be able to call itself by and to bear this title in all written documents, decrees, and public places; and that it so be called by the Señores the Kings who shall succeed me, to whom I commend [the Villa] so that they will protect and favor it and give it all the honors, graces and privileges that belong to it as [Villa].¹⁶

No less keen than the competition between pueblos, Villas and cities, was the competition among families, which wrote the king with advice, ideas and complaints. And as always, one creole's justice was another's inequity. The case of the Aycinenas and the "family" is again illustrative. Long barred from government, the oligarchs gained access to public posts under the administration of the new Captain General. But soon they also became the object of creole jealousy. In a spirit at once self-serving and altruistic, several notables of Guatemala presented in 1820 a formal complaint regarding the

high number of government and ecclesiastical posts held by the Aycinena and Larrazabal clans. They wrote the Secretary of State, contending that there were "worthy subjects in the other families and parties of [the] capital city". The "worthy" Guatemalans hoped that the Secretary would influence the King to distribute positions in the future more evenly among the families of Guatemala and also in the other provinces of the Kingdom, so as to avoid the "resentment caused by the concentration of so many posts in a single family and a single place".¹⁷

Such creole competition grew keener as Spain granted colonials greater autonomy. Ironically, the more liberal the metropolis became, the more the early nineteenth century in Central America resembled the epoch of the conquest. Recall that in the sixteenth century, lieutenants, convinced of their own moral worth (at once earned and displayed in heroic service to the crown and church), rebelled against their captains as they sought to establish their own towns, then vied for preeminence in the emerging colonial hierarchy. In the the nineteenth century, too, contenders, persuaded of their own superiority, strove for a higher rank in the established pecking order.

In Honduras, for example, Comayaguans refused to accept the dictates of their rival city -- the upstart Tegucigalpa, whose leaders had tried throughout the eighteenth century to surpass Comayagua in prestige and were now in a commercial

alliance with the Aycinenas of Guatemala. Thus, in 1820, the competing families of Comayagua united in a common front against the upstart, as well as in their repudiation of the old "oppressor": Guatemala City.

Significantly, the notables of Comayagua justified their bid for autonomy vis a vis Guatemala through a historical narrative that claimed a local tradition of self-abnegating fidelity to the king, a tradition they claimed to have preserved even in the face of their foe's disloyal wickedness.

[Comayagua has been] sacrificing its rights, sitting in silence, suffering a true enslavement in order to conserve its loyalty to the crown. Now it's the time for this [cabildo] to reveal the pitiful picture of miseries to which we have been reduced by the merchants of cattle and silver of Guatemala [emphasis added].¹⁸

The fact that loyalty to the crown remained the central virtue in the discourse of good and evil as late as 1820, and that proving oneself virtuous remained the great feat of narrative, had a profound impact on the way in which, on the eve of independence, all Spanish Americans defined the ideal form of government. As late as the 1810s and early 1820s, the suggestion arose time and again in cities like Buenos Aires, Mexico, and Lima in favor of enthroning a Spanish infante.¹⁹ And in the kingdom of Guatemala, acrimonious disputes did indeed take place over the issue of constitutional government, but between two camps that were self-avowed monarchists,

neither of which advocated separation from Spain.

Accordingly, by 1820, the kingdom of Guatemala was split between "serviles" and liberals. Significantly, the label "servile" was first used by liberals in Spain to denote the crucial difference between obedience to the sovereign and abject submission. The distinction was more than semantic. As in the sixteenth century, debates about terminology were once again central to policy debates in Spain. Harking back to the old controversy over Indian resistance, for example, Spaniards now debated: Should it be said of defeated South American rebels that they had been "reconquered" or "pacified"?²⁰

In the Kingdom of Guatemala, terminology was crucial as well. We have seen repeatedly that throughout the colonial centuries, derogatory labels refuted the claims on virtue implicitly made by emblematic identities. So if liberals now accused conservative royalists of servility, these retaliated by calling liberals "fieèvres", a term whose literal meaning is "enfevered", and which in the context of the debates signified delirious thinking, itself the result of the "heat" produced by unruly passions. The insult was especially wounding as a sarcastic commentary on the falsity of liberals -- men who saw themselves as the paladins of reason in the age of enlightenment, but whom their enemies sought to depict as groping about in the haze that descends upon those who are seized by dark, primitive forces.

Yet even in the ideal society fathomed by "enfevereds",

the king's place was secure. As articulated by the most prominent Central American liberal of the early nineteenth century, Pedro Molina, society was a pact among men who agreed "to serve" and "not to offend" one another. And within this framework, a "moderate monarchy" obtained when the prince was "just" and governed according to the laws of the pact -- the constitution.

In Molina's view, the restoration of the constitution meant that Spanish Americans were now ruled by a moderate monarchy, a fact which put them in the distinguished company of England. Thanks to Spain's liberal constitution, the former colonials were now embarked on the inexorable march toward civilization which the great philosophers of the Enlightenment depicted in their universal tales of political development.²¹

But creoles modified as much as they embraced these universal tales. In the passage below, for example, our liberal presents the constitution as a reward for obedience to the sovereign; exonerates the king of past wrongdoing; and, most importantly, restores to the core of political narrative the clash between the forces of dark and light.

Finally, your prayers have been answered, noble Americans ... Do you doubt it? Look out, look out to the East and you shall see the Monarchy's political Constitution; it comes to you in the hands of obedience, it comes quickly, to your homes, to wipe away your tears and those of your children forever. Yes, compatriots. Fierce servility once spread terror and vengeance everywhere. The inexorable Inquisition kept the virtuous liberal in chains, since it could not burn

his entrails in a horrid pyre. And the motherland sighed inconsolably, looking at her beloved children in the hands of the monsters who were around the innocent monarch. In sum, everything seemed to announce the coming of one of those great revolutions that make empires vanish, until the intrepid Constitution appeared majestic upon the capital of Spain and dissipated with its brilliant presence the shadows around the throne [emphasis added].²²

The distinction drawn between obedience and servility was crucial, as it simultaneously justified creoles' repudiation of any peninsular bureaucrat who might defy constitutional restraint and preserved the identity of creoles as loyal subjects. The distinction, moreover, served the common view of politics as a moral struggle yet to be resolved. After all, if the virtue of a constitutional monarchy was self-evident and natural, what could explain resistance to its reign if not sheer malevolence?

Again, much like their colonial ancestors in their narrative letters to the king, Central Americans now neatly distinguished between the heroes and villains of their manichean vision: "The most oft-heard voices are the Liberal and the Servile; they constitute two classes that are always in contradiction, like light and darkness".²³ They endowed the antagonists of the new creole narrative with the distinctive attributes of archetypical identities.

To which of these two classes belong the Liberals and the Serviles? Let us quickly glance at their different characters. The servile [toad] loves slavery, for it fits his condition, since he was

either born in tyrannical institutions which identified his soul with error, or he enjoys, under the shadow of a despot, the sad advantage of oppressing others. Or dispossessed of all the qualities of man -- lacking valor and talent -- he has no other capacity than to be a slave.²⁴

The Liberal, in contrast, was seen as an evangelizer; a champion of good who operating within the immutable lines of a virtuous life. On this view, the man who is a Liberal at heart speaks sincerely,

and if he ever keeps silent he never adulates. For him slavery is synonymous with death. Many times the glory of raising his voice and showing himself as a man among millions of silent slaves takes him triumphantly to the gallows ... If he craves for power it is only to make men free ... The true liberal, always filled by an unmistakable ardor for the general welfare, wants all men to be free and, by reasons of state, does not divide the interests of the nation; he seeks useful institutions for Spain and the Americas. This is the mark of the liberal.²⁵

This new struggle between good and evil shared with the traditional variant its most unsettling aspect: the centrality of deceit and the prevalence of masks. In the early decades of the nineteenth century, as in the late decades of the fifteenth, battle was not a stand-off in which combatants could readily identify the enemy and anticipate a clear resolution. Rather, it was a process of revelation, at the end of which allies might well emerge as foes.

Any legislator who does not generalize his principles, who applies and enhances them with reference to one country but curtails them for another, who places some men under the wing of liberty while leaving others exposed, is not a liberal; he is a dexterous servile, all the more dangerous because he knows how to comfabulate with egoism and disguise himself.²⁶

The "true" Liberal was on a totalizing mission, but success was far from assured, as his enemies were cunning in the extreme. In the passage below, "wicked" priests are portrayed as wizards of identity who could even transfigure themselves into archetypically frightening characters. A creole notable wrote thus to the Liberals' major newspaper:

Certain dark green goblins, and some green and white and even green and gray ones, have gone around spreading ridiculous sarcasms against the Constitution, altering the conscience of simple people, saying that the religion of Jesus Christ will be taken away from them, inducing in them suspicion of all that teaches them about the wise document that ensures the liberty of all Spaniards.²⁷

The archetypical identities -- the virtuous self and its vile foe

-- now confronted one another in their nineteenth century guises, but the frenzied mistrust that had prevailed in the years of the conquest, subsequently structured and routinized throughout the mature colonial period, seemed to gain a new unruly vitality. This was partly a consequence of the

prevalent belief among royalists -- be they advocates or opponents of the constitution -- that the wicked could find ways to defy royal authority with impunity.

The fanaticism of these ghastly spirits has not been contained by the decrees of our beloved Monarch in which he commands obedience to the Constitution; nor has been contained by the fact that He himself has given us his example ... Nothing has been able to prevent this pestilence of the republic, which insinuates itself surreptitiously into simple souls, and abuses the beautiful character of our people.²⁸

If the king remained the constant embodiment of truth, the wicked bore false emblems, thus forcing the virtuous to live in a state of permanent alert: " Beware Guatemalans. Look and see that astute [servility], having failed to bring down the Constitution, now tries to undermine its majestic edifice, hampering its efficacy by fomenting division".²⁹

Both the discourse of good and evil and their narrated clash seem intense yet strangely impersonal. Seen in historical perspective, this is not surprising. Rivals identified fully with corporate selves -- family and guild, barrio and locality. And these in turn were living emblems of honor and virtue. Individuals were but their points of sensibility. Individuals, moreover, as archetypical identities, were mere "animations" of virtue and vice. Thus, the line between "servility" and the "servile" was at best

thin. Or stated differently, the servile was as much an agent of servility as servility was the defining attribute of the servile. Hence the frequent references to "servility" as a force in its own right, endowed with intentions and capable of machinations.

Thus, in the debate between "enfevereds" and "toads", no names were needed because the labels -- the categories -- were broad enough to encompass large numbers. Yet broad as the categories might be, they were personal too. As in the case of the snakes and the coyotes, and harking back to centuries of identity-formation, the lines between the self-esteem of the collectivity and that of a member was blurred, if not eradicated. "A hidden hand," claimed the indignant targets of a Liberal attack, "spills slander over all kinds of citizens. This is the way in which the public's face is slit; the way an honorable vecindario is wounded". It is the "public" whose image is scarred; it is the "city" that is injured at its most sensitive point.

As attacks led to counter-attacks, antagonists often continued to speak impersonally -- suggesting rather than naming, alluding rather than specifying. Circuitry and vagueness, however, rarely diminished the passions involved.

I have been accused of calumny. Guilty of calumny are those who impute it to me without proof. However, I shall make the public see that I am not [guilty]. In this endeavor, I do not need the prestige of eloquence, only the truth of the facts and events. In order to slander, it is necessary to

impute an offense to someone who has not committed it. But in my writings I did not speak of offenses; I spoke of abuses, which can nevertheless become so deleterious to the interests of the nation that they do turn into offenses. And I spoke of parties, or rather, factions, which are always pernicious in a free state. I did not refer to persons, for I speak in general.³⁰

Right beneath the surface of generality, however, brewed the rancorous memories of previous struggles, such as those waged during the turbulent period of 1808-1818.

Let us give a succinct description of the party which our electors support. It is the party of señor Bustamante, the predecessor of our most humane current [Captain General]. It is the party composed of certain Europeans and creoles who constantly influenced his spirit, filling him with fears and spite against Guatemalans; it is the party that sustained unabated its terroristic opinions. They continuously dispatched reports to Court against all kinds of citizens and were adamant in their effort to control all causes and to judge them militarily. To this party belong the throng of spies and occult denouncers who sowed mistrust among the individuals of the people, inducing them to believe that the one was not safe from the other. They brought to Guatemala the reign of sepulchral silence proper of inquisitorial and despotic government.³¹

Memories not only came selectively, but discerning remembrance was harnessed to imaginative power. The Napoleonic invasion of Spain, we saw in the previous chapter, evoked genuine anxiety and suspicion of foreigners in Spaniards and creoles alike. Yet in this liberal retrospective, the common hysteria that had in fact been caused by rumors of the arrival of French secret agents in America now was treated as a mere ruse, the

artifice of manipulators like the previous Captain General, his creole allies, and most importantly, anyone who now was a "servile".

To this race [of serviles] belong those who first invented French emissaries and later heretics, accosted many peaceful and innocent citizens, seized their papers, and confined them incomunicado to a dungeon [emphasis added].³²

Yet as the previous chapter also showed, the Liberal notables of Guatemala not only displayed constant fidelity to the king during the Napoleonic period, but forged an alliance with the Captain General in an effort to suppress rebellions in other provincial capitals and cities -- rebellions which they saw as the work of Napoleonic "emissaries". But given the need to be loyal to corporate identity, and the prevalence of a manichean political discourse, actors taking on new ideas were unable to justify their digression from their previous positions. So, rewriting the past while in the act of recalling it became essential, at least if life was to continue to make sense.

After all, if the lines of demarcation between "dark" and "light" are immutable, how to explain the fact that former allies were now adversaries? The electors and the editor of the liberal newspaper involved in the dispute cited above, for example, had been allies in the struggles of the 1810's. In the strict sense of the term, they were all liberals. Indeed, before the royal abrogation of the constitution in 1814, the

electors had been elected as representatives on the strength of their ideological credentials, and because of those very same credentials they had been reinstated after the constitution was restored in 1817. However, the Guatemalan electors now advocated the strange notion that, "Should the pueblos [cities and towns] wish to elect citizens who do not recognize the Constitution, the will of the pueblos should be done".

Their stance offended and baffled our Liberal editor, who felt that by adhering to the letter of the constitution, the electors were even willing to risk the pueblos' rejection of it. Thus the editor wrote:

We shall remind [one of the electors] about the past. In the last elections -- held in 1813 -- he was an elector, and he was also elected official receiver by the people. The denunciation of a miserable drunk, however, was sufficient for [the captain general] to bury [the elector] in jail; he even tried to subject him to a military trial, as he did with others involved in the causa de Belen [a failed attempt at creating juntas]. [The elector] suffered a long imprisonment, was released on bail, was for long deprived of his employment, and finally had to seek a pardon in order to free himself from shame and obstacles. And even this last recourse was made difficult to him for a while.³³

Having established the suffering of the individual elector, however, the Liberal editor moved to argue that the injuries the elector received were felt by a larger self, who in turn was now injured by his betrayal.

[The elector's] undeserved imprisonment undermined his honor, and was an insult to the people and to the Most Excellent Cabildo. Consideration of this, and the love of his fellow citizens, have reinstated [the elector] to the representation he held in those days. But which is the party that the senor [elector] now follows? The party of his enemies and persecutors; the party of that handful who would have celebrated his imprisonment. Forgiveness of insults must not be censured when these are personal; in fact, such forgiveness is commendable. But in order to manifest such goodness of heart, is it licit to show deference in the course of duties that have been entrusted to us so that we may ensure the welfare of the motherland? The senor [elector] knows that the serviles have believed to see an insurgent in every Guatemalan liberal and in every insurgent a man so wicked as to deserve the cruelest suffering. [Emphasis added].³⁴

In essence, the editor reminded the electors, personal forgiveness came at the expense of the corporate self -- it usurped that self's right to resent wounds to its honor. The corporate self could forgive only at the expense of its own identity. But such benevolence had been constitutive of only one identity in the previous centuries: the king's. Constitutive of the identities of royal subjects was their role as implacable soldiers in the battle between good and evil.

And if the line between the "individual" and the collective self remained blurred at best, so too did the line between the living generations and those that preceded it. In 1820, even liberals viewed reward and punishment as corresponding respectively to constancy and inconsistency in genealogical virtuousness. The journal opined:

Those [ancestors] who were good became nobles and thus received the reward of goodness. This reward is an option for descendants who inherited the esteem accorded to their parents, if they know how to conserve it. But if they lose it because of their vices and ineptitude, they shall suffer public censure and disdain.³⁵

And the most direct way for one disputant to bring "censure and disdain" upon another, was still to call into question his fidelity to the king. As the journal's editor wrote:

The electors wish to imply, maliciously, and in the most affected of styles, that I speak [critically] of the king. But I am grateful to a monarch who has always protected Guatemala, and has spoiled the plans of the servility from these parts -- the servility against which [the monarch] has fulminated the rays of justice ... Senor Foronda [another of the electors] too suffered arrest, insults, persecution, and espionage in those days (if he is to be believed). He was a subject of suspicion for the serviles. Now, however, he makes offers to them, and tries to make space for them in the constitutional law.³⁶

"Enfevereds" and "serviles" had positioned themselves as combatants in a potential moral war -- a war, by definition, without quarter; and should the figure of the king disappear, a war without arbiter. Again, the voice of the Liberal journal:

To this infernal race [serviles] belong those partisans ... who call constitutionalists and liberals heretics. They do not hesitate to use their lies, their renown, and their concerns -- daughters of gross ignorance -- to deceive the people by means of hallucination. These are the ones who scurry day and night, and travel to the

pueblos to form parties in favor of despots and despotism. Such men you must exclude from elections, as the law indicates and the king recommends.³⁷

To this "infernal race", in fact, belonged men who in the struggle of the 1810's had been comrades of the man who now judged them so harshly. Such reversals, of course, are not remarkable in politics anywhere. What is unusual is for former allies to conclude that deliberate betrayal is invariably at play. This was the case in Central America. Former allies were bewildered and enraged when the one went in a direction different from the other.

And as previously mentioned, to make sense of "betrayal", actors blended present and past to fit the narrative of the clash between good and evil. Thus, for Liberal creoles in 1820, remembrance was bitter because the wicked had refused to comply with the "repeated pardons granted to the so-called insurgents of Guatemala by the benevolence of His Majesty". The wicked, moreover, defied the sovereign precisely because as serviles they were impelled by ignoble motives, impelled not to principled compliance but merely to blind fawning over power-holders.³⁸

But now, at last, there was hope for the future: the king's new Captain General was obedient, and because he was obedient, he was kind. The Liberal journal put it thus:

But where did the spirit of insurrection of this

Kingdom, today nowhere to be found, flee? It fled far from here ever since the happy day we have been ruled by a just, humane and compassionate Chief. Such are the weapons [justice, humanness, and compassion] with which senor Urrutia [the new Captain General] has subjected Guatemala.³⁹

Indeed, creole Liberals struck an alliance with the Captain General in 1820, while serviles attacked him. The Liberal defense of their ally, however, reaffirmed colonial tradition even as it seemed to embrace a novel discourse, as the passage below illustrates.

If the honor of the last citizen is a sacred object in society, then the honor of the chief who is placed at the head of a province to execute the law and to provide the highest example of public virtue, must be the purest. And if unfounded resentment and the restlessness to publish texts filled with affected patriotism dares to denigrate him unjustly, it is the duty of any good citizen to dispel the shadows cast over him, and to oppose lies with truth. Such is the case at this moment with our superior and Chief, the Most Excellent don Carlos de Urrutia, who has been rendered vulnerable in the most delicate point [honor] by an extemporaneous and false protest signed by ---[a servile], printed in Havana and dated in Guatemala.⁴⁰

The "slanderous" attack which "serviles" levelled at the Captain General was also telling. It called into question the official's fidelity to the sovereign by claiming that even though he had been aware that the king had sworn the Constitution in Spain, he had not followed suit in Guatemala. But in fact, the Captain General was so loyal he had been reluctant to pledge obedience to the constitution without an

explicit directive from the metropolis.

Appearances and truth, however, blurred into one another in the emblematic culture. The so-called "servile", though unsympathetic to the constitution, faulted the Captain General for inadequate promptness in observing royal policy. The "enfevereds", for their part, defended the Captain General by claiming that he had been unaware of the royal oath. Indeed, they asserted that

there were ministerial orders that put these great events [the king's oath to the constitution] in doubt. Far from having official news about such a startling and desirable change, no one dared trust in their success; the most ardent patriots kept prudent silence amidst the most exalted wish for a change of system.⁴¹

The alacrity demonstrated in ceremonial expressions of fidelity, then, was still as important as the splendor displayed in their pomp. At previous critical junctures, however, colonial officials were the ones likely to accuse creole notables of lethargy. Now, those creole notables rose to the defense of the highest colonial official, a peninsular, this time under attack by a "servile".

Significantly, creole Liberals defended the Captain General in exactly the same way as the creole elite (before splitting into serviles and enfevereds) had defended themselves during the uncertain Napoleonic period. Succinctly put, Liberals now resorted to the old creole argument that in

the execution of obedience, caution is prescience.

What then should our chief have done? Should he have published the great code without being sure that the king had sworn it, or that the entire nation had reestablished it, and thus ventured the separation of his province from the majority that constitutes the nation? ... The comportment of senor don Carlos Urrutia could not have been more prudent, nor more appropriate to that of the father of a people.⁴²

b. Eloquence and Turmoil:
The Christian Depth of the Emblematic World

The notables returned to the past in another, more direct way. In order to exalt the cabildo's old struggles with and its ultimate victory over the previous Captain General over the constitution of 1812, the paterfamilias of the powerful Aycinenas proposed that the name of Guatemala's representative to the Cortes de Cadiz be immortalized. This was to be done "in letters of gold" on a commemorative plaque that would "forever" pay homage to the representative's "heroic firmness in defending the constitution".

The memorial, however, would exalt much more than a local champion of a liberal code of laws. It would also praise a code of virtues at once "moral and patriotic". As Aycinena put it, it was the representative's "Christian conduct" that had served as a foundation for his "firmness and resolution", which remained unbroken even during the years of persecution

that came after 1814.⁴³

Behind such "Christian conduct" stood "reason". On the liberal view, both sprang from the same divine source.

Virtue is constant fidelity to the duties dictated by reason. But what are these duties? Where do they originate? What law prescribes them? I say that the law that imposes them is the immutable will of God, to which we are inspired to conform by reason, which is upright. This very conformity is virtue. Virtue is not made up of laws which promulgated at one time do not apply in another. Sovereigns may publish and abrogate their laws, but they will not be able either to form or to destroy virtues.⁴⁴

And if reason is "upright" and "inspires" us to "conform" to a divine will, then there can be only one path to truth, and only one truth. Thanks to their knowledge of this truth, journalists and pamphleteers could proceed to do their duty in a spirit of serene fairness. As "sages", they were to be pitted against an awful force: the depostically inclined and those who were

even more despicable, those who in their writings, which are reflections of their atrocious souls, level calumny and satire against the virtuous citizen who does not belong to their party ... [we recommed] for writers, liberty and moderation, and for the nation, mistrust of partisan writers.⁴⁵

It is in the notion of the sage -- shared by enfevereds and serviles alike -- that we begin to see emerging an awareness of the "individual". The sage, who speaks in an "august idiom," is the "individual" of the species, and as such, he is the "badge of honor" of ordinary men: he has the power to give

expression to their rights and dignity; and he can refute the slanders levelled at them. "Men of all classes" are thus exhorted to "listen" to him; and his power is declared to be that of civilization itself.⁴⁶

But it was in the figure of a Mexican creole military officer -- Colonel Agustín de Iturbide -- that Central Americans first faced a Spanish American with pretensions at this sort of "individualism". A masterful practitioner of dramaturgical obedience, Colonel Iturbide, in May of 1821 declared Mexico's independence from Spain in the Plan de Iguala. Seeking to avert a social revolution at home while pressing for equality of status between Mexico and Spain, Iturbide took special care to cast the declaration in a language that reasserted the virtuousness both of the metropolis and its colonies. To this end, Iturbide articulated his vision in a narrative that presented political change as a benign process of natural maturation.

The European [nations] that attained the highest degree of political enlightenment were once slaves of the Romans, until the moment when this Empire became like the paterfamilias who in his old age sees his children and grandchildren leave the home because they are of age to form their own, though they continue to respect, revere and love [their father] ... For three hundred years [Mexico and Central America] have been under the tutelage of the most Catholic, pious, heroic and magnanimous nation ...⁴⁷

The Plan de Iguala went on to guarantee that "no other

religion [would] be tolerated than the Catholic, Apostolic and Roman"; and it promised a "monarchical government, moderated by a constitution appropriate for the country". Finally, the Plan explained that,

since we already have a monarch and in order to prevent the negative effects of ambition, Fernando VII or his dynastic heirs shall be emperors [of Mexico].⁴⁸

In light of these three guarantees, Iturbide saw no reason for disquiet. As he put it,

[The army of this newly created empire] asks of you only that which you yourselves must desire and request: unity, fraternity, order, internal quiet, vigilance and horror of any turbulence.⁴⁹

The Plan de Iguala created an opportunity for Liberals in Guatemala precisely because its wording allowed them to bid for autonomy from imperial control while reasserting their city's irreproachable fidelity to the king. In this, Guatemalans were not alone. Throughout the Kingdom, striking a balance between selfish aspirations and the preservation of appearances remained as much an exigency of identity as an exigency of realism. Given their divergent positions in the colonial hierarchy, collectivities were bound to exploit to advantage one another's vulnerabilities. If a "city", for example, made an open bid for independence, others (likely to be Villas and Pueblos within the same province) were certain

to pursue a contradictory policy of absolute compliance. And if the latter's bet paid off, they would reap the benefits of good conduct, which were highly desirable precisely because they invariably diminished the vertical distance between superiors and inferiors. This fact obtained as late as 1821, when Tegucigalpa, a Villa since 1762, received its title of city, thus threatening the traditional local preeminence of Comayagua, the capital of the province of Honduras. Also that year, the king honored Cartago in Costa Rica, and San Miguel in El Salvador.⁵⁰

Against this background, the Plan de Iguala was ideally suited for emblematic politics and its central practice -- dramaturgical obedience. As was typically the case with the textual, ceremonial, and theatrical expressions of dramaturgical obedience, the Plan de Iguala did not provoke those it threatened to challenge its substantive assertions -- which were always royalist. Rather, opponents called into question the sincerity of the Plan's author. Consider the message of the new Captain General of the Kingdom of Guatemala to the inhabitants of the isthmus.

You have always been loyal to the King, always united to the Monarchy, and always respectful and obedient of the laws and authorities. You have been an exemplar of virtue in America, emulated by other pueblos, and envied by other chiefs whose fate is to rule over less fortunate countries ... Guatemalans, the new revolutionary cry heard on the coasts of Acapulco, the confines of New Spain, does not matter; it is the cry of the disloyal Colonel Iturbide, the ingrate who has rebelled against his

King and his Mother Patria, and whose first act has been the theft of a million pesos from that country's commerce, a fortune that had been entrusted to him ... His rebellion and machinations entail the most atrocious perfidy, for he feigns respect to a religion which he affronts, love to a king whom he strips down, union to a nation he harrasses, and affection to authorities he demeans ...⁵¹

Even the implicit threat made in closing by the Captain General advanced the claim that, in contrast to Iturbide, he was frank and truthful.

I speak to you in the language of honesty and sincerity ... if you continue to practice the maxims that have heretofore guaranteed your welfare and happiness, you shall find in me a peaceful chief, a father, a compatriot who will lead, defend and protect you. If any of you disavows [these maxims], you shall find in me a firm and resolute soldier.⁵²

Central Americans, however, responded to the power of revealed truth not in uniformity, but rather, as in the story of Christianity, by splitting into two discernable camps. Like the Captain General's oration, the thunderous warning issued by the Archbishop also caused such a split. As we are told by a witness,

[The archbishop] delivered a vehement sermon, attacking the injustice of insurrection, and the vileness of Iturbide. The archbishop promised to sacrifice every drop of blood before betraying God, King and Spain by taking the oath of loyalty to independence ...

[But] if the [archbishop's] oration encouraged the virtuous to stand firm, it irritated the wicked, and spurred them to action. They did not even

refrain from criticizing the prelate's conduct in their indecent broadsheets [emphasis added].⁵³

The Archbishop's sermon, says our witness, "spurred" the wicked. But who were the wicked, and what action did they take? The answer could never be a simple one in a system where actors sought to preserve their virtuous, self-abnegating identity while seeking self-serving goals. The Captain General, for example, denounced the "disloyal" while simultaneously holding talks with creole notables who were in favor of pronouncing independence along the lines of the Plan de Iguala. Conversely, the creole elite, upon receiving the news that the province of Chiapas had unilaterally adhered to Mexico, pressured Captain General Gainza into convening a general junta (assembly) which they hoped would declare independence; but this junta, they also hoped, would not usher into revolution.

The dilemma the creoles faced was now critical. On the one hand, Chiapas' unilateral annexation to Mexico reduced the Kingdom of Guatemala in size, and left its northernmost province, Guatemala, wide open to Mexican power just when Spain no longer seemed able to offer loyalists adequate military protection. On the other hand, there was the possibility that Mexican independence would prove unsustainable, and that a resurgent Spain would strike back at rebels. The dilemma was all the more vexing because Central American creoles might appear rebellious when in fact they

were not -- they were merely seeking equality with Spaniards and remained loyal to the monarchy. They hoped to solve their predicament by declaring independence in the spirit of the Plan de Iguala, which is to say independence without revolution. And to do this, they relied once again on a variant of dramaturgical obedience: the theater of inexorable collective ire.

The outcome was not a foregone conclusion. If notables were to have a shot at declaring independence, the junta had to be held in the open, so that they could rally the barrios and bring popular pressure to bear on the junta's members. However, if the past was any guide, once the open meeting began, controlling the "public" might prove a challenge. In the theater of the open cabildo, for example, political contestation turned on rhetorical duels in which debaters each claimed to speak the truth. Their contradictory claims were either confirmed or repudiated by "the people" -- the riotous collective interlocutor sitting in the galleries whose choral replies took the form of emotive aggression and verbal, even physical violence.

Beyond the traditional concern that the "public" might suddenly turn into the dreaded "plebs", there was a more recent development that contributed to the theatrical unpredictability of the open cabildo: the notion of the "individual" as a kind of speaking emblem, empowered by eloquence both to represent and to illuminate the common run

of humanity. As representative of the people, the "individual" was the orator who prevailed over foes through verbal affirmation of the truth; and conversely, through the unmasking of inauthentic emblematic identities.

Finally, the general junta was at once premeditated and spontaneous precisely because the practice of dramaturgical obedience enhanced the degrees of freedom of actors, in part by expanding the range of possible alliances. Liberals, for example, had for weeks been in contact with the new Captain General (Gabino Gainza had replaced the popular but feeble Urrutia in March of 1821), inviting him to attend their "tertulias" (discussion circles), in order to determine his attitude towards independence. All along, the official seemed to take an ambiguous position, as if hedging his bets. On September 14, 1821, in response to the news about Chiapas, Aycinena, a moderate Liberal, assured the Captain General that independence would not result in changes at the leadership level of government. "Under the new plan," Aycinena promised, "the Señor Political Chief [Captain General] will be the director of a free people, as Guatemala shall be, instead of Spain's dependent employee".⁵⁴ Reassured, the Captain General convened a general junta to meet the following day, September 15.⁵⁵ The purpose of the open meeting was the discussion of events in Mexico and Chiapas.

That night, creole Liberals, including Aycinena, sent their agents throughout the barrios, inciting the neighbors to

attend the meeting, where, gathered in the collective self of "the people", they could pose an overwhelming voice. Telling of the importance of popular clamor is the observation found in various contemporary accounts that some of the notables went personally into the barrios, knocking on doors until late hours of the night.⁵⁶

Early the next morning, Pedro Molina, the "enfevered" Liberal editor we encountered above (and the most eloquent ally of the Aycinena "family"), was already at the Palacio with a multitude. Those Molina had not mobilized the night before, his wife had managed to attract the morning after by positioning a musical band in front of the Palacio. The musicians played on, and as she had also arranged it, fireworks exploded.⁵⁷

As the appointed hour approached, a Guatemalan intellectual remembered, the deputies of each corporation

began to arrive: the archbishop, prelates of religious orders, military commanders, the Provincial Deputation, and [the Captain General]. The session began with a reading of the actas [decrees] of Chiapas. Valle [a conservative Honduran notable whom we met above as a rival of the Aycinenas] was the first to speak. He spoke in favor of independence, but concluded that it should not be proclaimed until after the opinion of the provinces had been heard. Those against independence suggested that no steps should be taken until events in Mexico took a definite turn. Others argued that independence should be proclaimed that same day ... Each affirmative vote was celebrated with cheering and acclamations from the multitude; opposing votes met with disapproval.

Recall that only days before, the loyal Captain General had

denounced the Plan de Iguala. Now, after having agreed with creole notables to convene this junta, events were rushing far ahead of any of their expectations; and the Plan de Iguala seemed like a moderate solution. He proposed it. But

the anti-independence camp was intimidated and decided to withdraw. The majority of the Junta was in favor of independence. The multitude demanded it. And the Provincial Deputation and the Cabildo, which remained in the meeting, became the legitimate executors of the popular will. They agreed on the declaration of independence. The multitude made [the Captain General who had proposed allegiance to the Plan de Iguala] take an oath declaring absolute independence from Mexico and from any other nation.⁵⁸

Another intellectual described the "discussion" of independence in similar terms.

Spectators mingled with the members of the junta. Many of those against independence abandoned the premises ... Those who remained began to shout, demanding that [the Captain General] and all the authorities swear in favor of independence ... [the Captain General] proposed the Plan de Iguala ... The multitude shouted no! They wanted absolute independence.⁵⁹

Pro-independence notables, too, were less radical than the clients they had gathered to play the role of the "people". Indeed, they saw to it that the Declaration was drafted not by one of its most vocal champions, but by its most eloquent opponent, José Cecilio del Valle, whom we encountered earlier as an ally of the previous (and stern) Captain General. Considered a master of the Spanish language even by his keenest rivals, Valle was an ideal choice to cast an event

that had evinced the shrewdness and free agency of Central Americans as little more than an elite response to inexorable collective ire. The first article of the declaration made the point that

Independence from the Spanish Government is the will of the Guatemalan people, and the senor [Captain General], without impinging on decisions to be made by the Congress that shall be formed, must publicize this independence in order to prevent the frightful consequences that would follow should the people proclaim it.⁶⁰

As promised, the Captain General -- a peninsular Spaniard -- was named in the declaration of independence to remain as Political Chief, and to consult with a provisional consultative junta. (To grasp the significance of this fact, simply try to image the American revolutionaries not electing George Washington as their first president, but stipulating instead, in the very text that announced to the world the emergence of their new national identity, that their former English governor was to remain as chief of the thirteen colonies).

The Central American declaration of independence also preserved the Catholic religion. Other articles directed the Provisional Junta, the cabildo, tribunals, military and political chiefs, religious communities, corporations and troops to swear independence and fidelity to the new government. Finally, in the tradition of the emblematic culture, the declaration directed the cabildo to strike a

commemorative medal to inscribe in centuries to come the memory of the event; and arranged for a Te Deum.⁶¹

The importance of Te Deum should not be underestimated. For its sermon, harnessing remembrance and imagination, crafted a narrative intended to reconcile the colonial tradition with the novelty of independence, and to serve as a cautionary tale about socio-political change. This tale, like Iturbide's manifesto, presented independence as the outcome of a natural maturation process. There was, however, a crucial difference. In the Central American version, the process had been triggered by the crown's lack of recognition of the Central Americans' "talent, merit, and virtue". Such lack of recognition had led to the awakening of the "sons" of the kingdom of Guatemala, finally culminating in their formation of a new, separate "family".

Having thus made sense of the past, the sacred orator could indicate its future use. He urged this new family, whose emblematic icon and protector was the Virgin of Socorro de Guatemala, to remember the central lesson of the histories of Greece, Rome, and France: if vices such as ambition and jealousy prevailed over virtue's guidance, then, inexorably, mistrust would gain ground -- cities would at once develop factions and engage in wars of conquest; and even the character of irreproachable notables would be called into question.⁶²

Put another way, if emblematic selves could no longer

take one another at face value, internal discord would destroy the coherence of society. Indeed, in reflexive fashion, this political sermon characterized itself as a "revelation" of "sentiments" in which the orator at once "proved" the "justice" of independence and rendered explicit, in all sincerity, his emotions.⁶³

The Captain General (whose title was now that of Political Chief) himself explained the impetus for independence as a revelation brought about by eloquent expression of the truth.

This oration by the sons of Guatemala had the effect of lightning. It ignited hearts, and kindled wishes. The Government, a spectator to this effect, consulted immediately with the Provincial Deputation [on the matter of the Chiapas proclamation of the Plan de Iguala].⁶⁴

In the Captain General's story, then, this "spectator" government merely convened the junta that declared independence. And as in the dispassionate text of the Declaration, in the Captain General's story the "people" were the moving force behind events.

The people were not indifferent to this matter, which pertained to them, and congregated around the Palace, in the streets, in the plaza, in the doorway, in the courtyard, in the hallways, and in the lobby. The people showed its distinct moderation, but also demonstrated that it knows how to love its cause and to guard its interests.⁶⁵

In the face of uncertainty, the Captain General once again

hedged his bets. On the one hand, he did not to make of the people a "mob". On the other, he took care not to offend those who had argued for a slower pace.

When certain functionaries, without resisting independence, merely suggested that we wait for the final outcome of the events in Mexico, a murmur indicated disapproval. When prelates or even other functionaries claimed that the voice of Guatemala is the voice of America and we should hear it, there was general acclamation.⁶⁶

The manifesto, which concluded with an appeal for perfect unity among the provinces of Central America,⁶⁷ was a display of dramaturgical obedience at its most refined. For in effect, the manifesto left the Captain General (the new Political Chief) poised to enter into an alliance with any winner once the outcome was finally "revealed". And at the moment immediately following the declaration, pro-independence notables seemed victorious.

The Captain General, now Political and Military Chief, was in good standing with the winners. The "enfevered" newspaper declared that "the Supreme Provincial Junta, presided over by our Most Illustrious and Humane Chief, has worked incessantly for our liberty". The winners also expected compliance from him in the future, adding that all that was "resolved" in the general popular junta of September 15 had been "recorded on paper" and was to be communicated by express mail to the other provinces.⁶⁸

Soon, however, the practices of dramaturgical obedience

renewed mutual suspicions among creoles, and this mistrust in turn began to erode their alliance. Enfevereds, for example, tried to control the deliberations of the provincial junta, mobilizing vociferous crowds that tried to pressure its members in one direction or another. On one occasion, a multitude filled the meeting room demanding that those who had not sworn allegiance to the declaration of independence be banished from the country. The demand was crucial. Article 2 of the Declaration had purposely left open the possibility for the revocation of independence by the deputies of the provinces that were to meet in a congress.⁶⁹ This dangerous option, however, was foreclosed to anyone who was pledged to obey the Declaration. Hence the insistence on the expulsion of those who had not taken the oath.

Aycinena was one of the few Guatemalan Liberals who had not taken the oath, a fact that cannot have escaped the notice of his enfevered allies. Conversely, the role of the enfevereds behind the outbursts of "inexorable collective ire" directed at the junta was known to the more moderate notables (since they themselves had joined the enfevereds in similar practices). As these outbursts persisted, the junta closed its doors to the public, a decision that was seen by enfevereds as indicative of probable "secret" dealings.

Conclusion

Suspicion of "secret dealings" had been a characteristic

feature of colonial society, but so had been the steadying hand of royal arbitration and, more importantly, the notion that the socio-political hierarchy was blessed from above. Once the King began to vanish during the complex transition to independence, these suspicions, which flowed directly from the practices used to conciliate the exigencies of virtuous identity with the need for autonomy, were let loose throughout the Kingdom of Guatemala. The political consequences of mistrust were particularly explosive because, as we have seen, socio-political identities were emblematic and collective in nature. The honor and credibility of the individual was entwined with the image of his family, locality, and political camp. Thus, as Chapter 7 will show, the question of annexation to Mexico following independence from Spain unleashed hostilities because Central Americans conflated the colonial officials to whom they had been subordinated with the various cities in which those authorities resided. In other words, localist rivalries were deeply rooted not only in the mistrust engendered by the practices of identity-formation, but also in the emblematic and collective nature of that identity itself.

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2. Maximo Soto Hall, "Capitulos de un Libro Inedito," Revista de Costa Rica en el Siglo XIX, I, no. 32, in Letras Patrias.
3. See annex to the liberal daily "El Editor Constitucional", November 27, 1820, in Escritos del Doctor Pedro Molina (Guatemala: Editorial Jose de Pineda Ibarra, 1969), 313.
4. Mario Rodriguez, The Cadiz Experiment in Central America, 1808 to 1826 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 127.
5. Ralph Lee Woodward, "Economic and Social Origins of the Guatemalan Political Parties, 1773-1823," The Hispanic American Historical Review, Volume 45, no. 4 (November 1965), 544-566.
6. Ibid., 544-566.
7. Ibid., 544-566.
8. Ibid., 560-562.
9. The historian Jose Dolores Gamez wrote on the subject in 1899 in "Promesa Cumplida," later reprinted in Revista de la Academia de Geografia e Historia de Nicaragua, Volumes XVI and XVII, nos. 1-4 (January 1957/December 1958), 44.
10. "Historia Compendia de Granada," Revista Conservadora del Pensamiento Centroamericano, Volume XXVIII, no. 138 (March 1972), 25.
11. Gamez, op. cit., 44.
12. "Solicitud de aplicación de indulto," Revista Conservadora, Volume 1, no.2 (September 1960), 20-21.
13. John Lynch, The Spanish American Revolutions, 1808-1826 (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1986), 336.
14. Rodríguez, op. cit., 129.
15. Ibid., 139.
16. See Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volume VII, no. 1 (April 1945), 29-30.

17. "Relación de los Cargos Públicos y Eclesiásticos Desempeñados por la Familia Aycinena y Larrazabal en Guatemala Durante la Colonia, Guatemala, 3 de Octubre de 1820", Anales de la Sociedad de Geografía e Historia de Guatemala, Volume XXVI, nos. 3 and 4, (September/December 1952), 445-451.
18. See Miles L. Wortman, Government and Society in Central America, 1680-1840 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 223-225.
19. See Timothy Anna Spain and the Loss of America (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), 174-75.
20. Ibid., 154-55.
21. See Pedro Molina, "Instrucción Publica", in El Editor Constitucional, July 24, 1820, Escritos del Doctor Molina, Volume I, (Guatemala: Editorial Jose de Pineda Ibarra, 1969), 12-13.
22. "Variedades," in El Editor Constitucional, August 7, 1820, in *ibid.*, 42-43.
23. "Variedades", in El Editor Constitucional, July 24, 1820, in *ibid.*, 13-16.
24. Ibid., 13-16.
25. "Variedades," in El Editor Constitucional, August 2, 1820, in *ibid.*, 31.
26. "Variedades," in El Editor Constitucional, July 24, 1820, in *ibid.*, 13-16.
27. "Variedades," in El Editor Constitucional, August 2, 1820, in *ibid.*, 32-33.
28. Ibid., 33.
29. Ibid., 30-35.
30. Molina, El Editor Constitucional, October 16, 1820, in *ibid.*, 225.
31. Ibid., 228.
32. Ibid., 228-229.
33. Ibid., 232.
34. Ibid., 232.

35. Molina, El Editor Constitucional, October 2, 1820, in ibid., 173.
36. Molina, El Editor Constitucional, October 16, 1820, in ibid., 225.
37. Molina, El Editor Constitucional, October 2, 1820, in ibid., 178-179.
38. See Molina, El Editor Constitucional, October 16, 1820, in ibid., 228-229.
39. Ibid., 228-229.
40. Molina, El Editor Constitucional, November 6, 1820, in ibid., 263-264.
41. Manuel Montúfar, El Editor Constitucional, November 6, 1820, in ibid., 264.
42. Ibid., 265.
43. Valdes Oliva, op. cit., 8.
44. Molina, "Virtud," El Editor Constitucional, November 13, 1820, in Escritos, 276.
45. "Política," El Editor Constitucional, April 30, 1821, in Escritos del Doctor Pedro Molina, Volume II (Guatemala: Editorial José de Pineda Ibarra, 1969), 544.
46. See José Cecilio Del Valle, "El Sabio," in Ensayos y Documentos (San José: Clásicos Centroamericanos, 1988), 75-80.
47. "Plan de Iguala", issued at Iguala, February 24, 1821, in J.D. Gamez, ed., Archivo Histórico de la República de Nicaragua, Volume I, 1821-1826 (Managua: Tipografía Nacional, 1896), 1-5.
48. Ibid., 1-5.
49. Ibid.
50. María Bozzoli de Wille, "La Diferenciación Social de Centroamérica al Final del Siglo XVIII y Durante Las Primeras Décadas del Siglo XIX," in Centro América en las Vísperas de la Independencia, (San José: Academia de Geografía e Historia de Costa Rica, Imprenta Trejos Hnos., 1971), 85.
51. Gabino Gainza, "Manifiesto," April 10, 1821, in José D. Gámez, ed., Archivo Historico, 11-14.

52. Ibid., 11-14.

53. "Informe del Ministro Tesorero de las Reales Cajas de Guatemala, acerca del estado deficiente del Erario antes y despues del 15 de septiembre de 1821," Madrid, March 11, 1824, Anales de las Sociedad de Geografia e Historia de Guatemala, Volume XII, no.1 (September 1935), 3-22.

54. J.C. Pinto Soria, Centroamérica, de la Colonia al Estado Nacional (Guatemala: Editorial Universitaria de Guatemala, 1986), 45.

55. Valdés oliva, op. cit., 9-11.

56. The historian Victor Miguel Díaz writes that: "Barrundia, Molina and Aycinena, also went around personally inciting the barrios -- Molina covered El Calvario, Santa Isabel and Santo Domingo. Barrundia, accompanied by a farmer and an artisan, concentrated on the Parroquia Vieja. Aycinena covered Santa Teresa, San Sebastián and Recolección. They persuaded vecinos to come to the Palacio the next day. The vecinos of the Parroquia Vieja planted themselves in the portal". See Victor Miguel Díaz, "Rectificaciones Históricas," Anales de las Sociedad de Geografía e Historia de Guatemala, Volume IV, no. 4 (1948), 392-399.

57. Antonio Batres Jauregui, La América Central ante la Historia, 1821-1921, Volume III, (Guatemala: 1949).

58. Among those in favor of immediate independence were Larreynaga, O'Haran, Mariano Gálvez, Mariano Beltranena, Lavarre, Santiago Milla, Matías Delgado, M.A. Molina. See Alejandro Marure, "Bosquejo Histórico," Book 1, Chapter I, in Gámez, Archivo Histórico.

59. Manuel Montúfar. Memorias para la Historia de la Revolución, Chapter I.

60. "Acta de Independencia," signed September 15, 1821, in Gámez, Archivo Histórico, 20-23.

61. Signed September 15, 1821, by the Captain General, Gainza, and by the preeminent notables of Guatemala, including Beltranena, Delgado, Manuel Antonio Molina, Mariano de Lavarre, Antonio de Rivera, and Mariano de Aycinena. Ibid., 20-23.

62. "Notable Sermón del Prócer Canónigo don José María Castilla, sobre la libertad de la América Central, en la catedral de Guatemala en 1821," Anales de la Sociedad de Geografía e Historia de Guatemala, Volume XV, no.1 (September

1938).

63. The preacher explained: "I have opened my heart to you. This speech is not the work of meditation, but of my love for you, and gratitude; of enthusiasm for our independence; of the ardent wish not to see our enterprise frustrated". See Ibid.

64. "Manifiesto del Jefe Político a los ciudadanos de Guatemala," in Gámez, Archivo Histórico, 25-28.

65. Ibid., 25-28.

66. Ibid., 25-28.

67. See "Manifiesto del Jefe Político a los ciudadanos de Guatemala," in Gámez, Archivo Histórico, Volume I, 25-28.

68. El Genio de la Libertad, September 17, 1821, in Escritos del doctor Pedro Molina, Volume III, El Editor Constitucional y El Genio de la Libertad (Guatemala: Editorial José Pineda Ibarra, 1969), 766.

69. Valdés Oliva, op. cit., 14.

CHAPTER 7

Postcolonial Conflict and a Nascent Metaphor

Transition from the colonial to the national period -- a complex process everywhere in Latin America -- was further complicated in Central America by Mexico's own separation from Spain. This event, as we saw in the previous chapter, prompted Guatemalans to debate the issue of independence. Now we will see that once Central Americans declared their independence, the question of their future relationship to Mexico triggered a series of violent political struggles throughout the isthmus.

These conflicts persisted even after the Mexican empire dissolved and Central America emerged as sovereign, for as this chapter shows, collective mistrust derived from the colonial process of corporate, manichean identity-formation and its attendant discourse, narratives and practices. Indeed, this chapter argues that these related aspects of politics and culture simultaneously fomented rupture and continuity in Central America. On the one hand, Central Americans held onto their moralistic views of rank. Thus, localities that had served as capital cities under the colonial regime strove to preserve their dominance over lesser cities and towns. The latter, convinced that their subordination had been the unjust outcome of deceitful practices, sought autonomy and even ascendancy in turn. On the other hand, as these competitive

struggles threatened the radical fragmentation of post-colonial Central America, the region's elites, lacking an ideology of autonomy and solidarity, sought both unity and self-interest by manipulating their shared fears of "inexorable collective ire" and appealing to a new metaphor for harmony: the national family.

The success of these attempts at unity hinged on credibility, which once had entailed persuading the king through narrative accounts and now entailed persuading a more numerous and less distant audience: Central Americans themselves. Accordingly, discursive potency was now seen as the decisive factor in the clash between good and evil. For at the mercy of eloquence, Central Americans believed, human memory was a potential tabula rasa; and in a state of perfect forgetfulness, the provinces of the former Kingdom of Guatemala could either find a new beginning as a "family", or descend into perdition. Ultimately, however, Central Americans could neither forget nor forgive; not even as they began to glean from their tribulations a new vision of the ideal world -- a vision which they would try, time and again, to enact.

a. External Independence and Internal Fragmentation

No sooner had the provinces of the Kingdom of Guatemala begun to receive the declaration of independence from Spain issued by Guatemala's cabildo than mistrust among the localities erupted into open conflict. No city wished to obey

its superior any longer, and no local notable could be less than another in a rival city. If Guatemalan notables had managed to come out from under the presumed superiority of the Captain General and other high Spanish officials, now the subordinate colonial officials of the lesser provinces made their bids for autonomy from their superiors in Guatemala.

For example, in León (the provincial capital of Nicaragua), the Intendant, González Saravia, immediately disregarded the authority of his old rival, the Captain General, who resided in Guatemala City.¹ This insurrection, supported by León's cabildo and its popular bishop, was in fact an act of formal obedience to the colonial regime -- at once a localist bid for autonomy from the colonial capital and a repudiation, as they phrased it, of the "agitation and ferment" that "painfully put the authorities [of Guatemala] at odds with the healthy part of the vecindario".

By splitting society into "healthy" and "unhealthy" parts, León and its authorities reaffirmed the colonial categories of "honest" and "dishonest", except that now the government in Guatemala was on the side harmful to "the general welfare".² In this way, León and its leaders, long unhappy with their subordination to the Captain General and the capital, made a case for disobedience. At the same time, however, the authorities of León reaffirmed León's virtuous fidelity to the king as best they could under the circumstances. In the "Acta de los Nublados", or "The Decree

of the Cloudy Days", they addressed the inhabitants of Nicaragua and Costa Rica (which was partially subordinate to León). In this text of studied ambivalence, León severed its ties to "sovereign" Guatemala, and tentatively declared

independence from the Spanish Government, until the clouds of the day are dispelled and this Province can proceed according to its religious ends and true interests.³

Guatemalans, including "enfevereds", retaliated in kind. Deploying the traditional discourse of good and evil, they immediately differentiated between the Intendant, on the one hand, and the city of León and its people, on the other. The Intendant, according to the Guatemalans, was an irredeemable villain who "physically dragged the mail carrier from Guatemala, and intercepted the correspondence". Once in possession of the documents reporting the news of the declaration, the "villanous" Spaniard convened the junta, the provincial deputation and the bishop, who in turn drafted the Decree of the Cloudy Days.

But the problem went beyond Nicaragua's Intendant and his rivalry with the Captain General in Guatemala City. Colonial León, like San Salvador, had developed resentment of Guatemala's supremacy, albeit not to the same degree of intensity. "It is not Guatemala that has oppressed you, beloved Leonese," wrote the Guatemalan liberals, as if speaking directly to the Nicaraguan city,

but ... Spanish arbitrariness. It is not free Guatemala that has done you harm. It was the enslaved Guatemala that hurt you. Free Guatemala invites you to enter into a fraternal pact.⁴

Unmoved, the Leonese responded by "asking" the venerable capital of the former Kingdom of Guatemala to desist in its plan to become independent. Not surprisingly, in their appeal, the Leonese, too, alluded to uncontrollable and frightful consequences. They wrote the Captain General that if Spanish-America split into "small, sovereign governments" they would be exposed to "invasions by foreign powers", might become "the toys of pirates and adventurers", and could succumb to "continuous debates and clashes amongst themselves".⁵

Everywhere actors manipulated fears to persuade others not only to forge bonds of unity but of uniformity as well. The drama of inexorable collective ire, once deployed by creoles to gain autonomy from peninsular officials, was now aimed at other Central Americans. Guatemala's "enfevered" journal, for example, published letters like the one in which the cabildo of San Vicente warned the Captain General of an impending threat from the populace.

We merely wish to manifest to you the critical state of our situation so that measures will be taken to avoid the deleterious consequences of a sudden explosion ... This [cabildo] can only infer that the government, constrained by obligation and impotence, has not taken measures ... This, however, is not the case with the corporations and authorities here, which, aware of the threat to the Kingdom, will save it from turbulence by directing [public] opinion.⁶

Given the multiplicity of rival identities, opportunities abounded for the self-serving manipulation of fears under the banner of self-abnegating concern for others. Even as the colonial hierarchy crumbled, families and localities struggled for a higher rank -- they struggled impelled by their rancorous memories of undeserved subordination and by the expectation that those who had been virtuous in the past would be justly rewarded in the future.

Under the force of this logic, Guatemala tried to preserve its hegemony over the provinces while the various provincial chiefs fought for autonomy. And just like Intendant González Saravia in León was working against the Captain General, soon the city of Granada began to work against rival León. As León severed itself from Guatemala in the Decree of the Cloudy Days, the chief of arms of Granada instructed all troops to swear independence from the Spanish government in accordance with the order issued from Guatemala by the Captain General.⁷

Once Granada took such a clear stance in contradiction to León, the latter, which had theretofore equivocated between renewed allegiance to Spain and adherence to Iturbide's plan, had to make a choice. It chose the most expedient of the two, and pronounced its allegiance to Iturbide (which was to say the "regent" until a Spanish prince came to occupy the Mexican throne).⁸

Increasingly, San Salvador and Guatemala, the two pre-eminent cities in the isthmus, became isolated in their stance for absolute independence. Shared isolation, however, did not translate into solidarity for these two traditional rivals. The Political Chief of San Salvador decided to form an autonomous consultative junta.

The Salvadoran Chief's decision, in turn, set in motion keen competition among the notables of San Salvador. The notables rode through the barrios of the Salvadoran capital distributing propaganda in their favor, or sent agents in their stead. But as it became clear that Salvador's Political Chief and his local allies would lose the election, the Chief revoked the decree that had called for the junta (arguing that he did not have the faculty to issue the decree in the first place). In typical fashion, the Chief's opponents gathered a crowd, which began to shout that they did want a junta. The Chief sent troops to disperse the crowd, and sent to prison its leaders (among them the Salvadoran liberal notable, José Manuel Arce).

Guatemalan proponents of absolute independence, temporarily putting aside localist jealousies, supported the Salvadorans who continued to demand a junta. The Guatemalans pointed to the shouting incident as evidence of the Salvadoran people's repudiation of "oppressors"; and commented that it was a "scandal" to see such distinguished Salvadorans in prison.⁹

In this secenario, which verged on the Hobbesian, actors' fear of internal disintegration and exposure to foreign rapacity argued compellingly in favor of unity among the former provinces of the Kingdom of Guatemala. Iturbide himself resorted to this argument when claiming that Mexico and Central America belonged together. In a letter to Guatemala's (former) Captain General and new Political Chief, Iturbide asserted that

The interests of Mexico and Guatemala are so identical and immutable that they cannot constitute themselves as separate nations without risking their existence and security, exposed as they will be to internal convulsions and to the agression of foreign maritime powers.¹⁰

As if to prove his sincerity, Iturbide reminded Guatemalans that they had been mistrustful of Mexico once before for no good reason. They had proclaimed their independence, Iturbide said, only after "the agents of oppression" had tried and failed through "imposture and calumny" to discredit Mexican efforts. This time, too, Mexico meant well, but this time Mexico would take firm measures to prevent calamity. A Mexican "protector army", Iturbide informed the Central Americans, was on its way.¹¹

Still, the provisional Junta in Guatemala replied that it did not have the faculties to decide on the matter of annexation to Mexico. Iturbide's communiqué, the junta said, would have to be circulated throughout the provinces (an idea suggested by the notable Aycinena); and the issue should be

put to a test in open cabildos. In the meantime, elections of deputies to Congress would proceed.

Like the issue of independence from Spain, the issue of annexation to Mexico evoked double dealings among elites. Aycinena maintained discreet correspondence with Iturbide -- a correspondence he had begun even before independence.¹² Anti-annexationist independists continued to mobilize crowds surreptitiously. "Imperialists" accused them of instigating "disorder" even as they, too, incited the pueblo, and formed "squadrons" that went around insulting opponents. And the Captain General instructed pro-annexation vecinos to inform on independists. Finally, a violent confrontation took place, leaving two independist leaders dead.¹³

Not surprisingly, retrospective partisan accounts interpreted the fight between annexationists and independists as a clash between deceit and honesty. But furtive maneuvers, as we saw, were typical of Central American politics. Most recently, they had been deployed by creoles during the Napoleonic invasion of Spain, and later, after the proclamation of the Plan de Iguala, in their pursuit of independence. Moreover, as in the case of independence, the (former) Captain General was not of a single mind. Even if he was surreptitiously promoting annexation, he was also trying to prevent other cities from proclaiming annexation.

This he had to do if he was to preserve Guatemalan hegemony over other provinces. Turning his attention to León,

he wrote the authorities of that city that the declaration of independence did not give legal or political ground for the adoption of the Plan de Iguala, or for annexation to Mexico. Trying to persuade León to accept Guatemala's authority before annexation took place (which seemed increasingly probable), the Political Chief lamented that León's pro-annexation stance dissolved his "cherished hope to see the people of León and Guatemala united in a single family".

As a solution, the Chief advocated "forgetfulness of ancient rivalries, which were doubtless born of the system that previously governed us, making pueblos slaves of other pueblos". And he invited León to send two representatives to the Provisional Junta in Guatemala.¹⁴

A united family Central America was not. Yet in the face of this stark reality, Central Americans searched for ways to explain their fragmentation as a temporary aberration. In typical fashion, a renowned Guatemalan orator contended that San Salvador had initially set out to form its own junta because it was still under the "filthy remnants of tyranny". The Guatemalan also pointed out that San Salvador had eventually desisted from this misguided project because it had finally been freed of the past. Similarly, the orator reasoned that León and Comayagua and the other pueblos that adhered to the Plan de Iguala were not responsible for the misconduct of their oppressive leaders. Finally, the Guatemalan proposed a federal system as a solution to the problem of mistrust and

jealousies-- a system that would bring about unity by making it clear to the provinces that Guatemala had "fraternal" intentions.¹⁵

But rivals of Guatemala saw its intention as paternal in nature. This suspicion, as we have seen, was not at all unfounded. The authorities in Guatemala, for example, rewarded Granada for its prompt recognition of the provisional government junta in the Guatemalan capital. More specifically, they authorized Granada to form a government junta subordinate only to that in Guatemala; and gave Granada's Military Commander jurisdiction over all Nicaraguan localities that swore the same allegiance.¹⁶

This reward to Granada was an affront to the authorities in León, who rose to the defense of their old jurisdictional supremacy and prohibited Granada's commander from forming the Junta.¹⁷ On this, the defiant León was prepared to wage war.

The possibility of anarchy was of grave concern to San Salvador. But San Salvador, too, was consumed by mistrust of Guatemala. In an effort to deal preemptively with both dangers, San Salvador proposed a union with the cities of Comayagua and León, which now favored adherence to Mexico (in direct contradiction to their respective foes Tegucigalpa and Granada).¹⁸

The stated objective of the union proposed by San Salvador was the avoidance of "civil war and despotism". By "civil war", the notables of San Salvador clearly meant

conflict between such traditional rivals as Comayagua and Tegucigalpa; and León and Granada. But also implied was the danger of a conflagration in which the major combatants would be two blocs of tactical allies: San Salvador, Comayagua, and Leon against Guatemala, Granada, and Tegucigalpa, with other cities attaching themselves to either camp. Inside Guatemala, for example, Quezaltenango, had already annexed itself to Mexico; and inside Salvador itself, Santa Ana and San Miguel (previously in disagreement with San Salvador) proposed to do the same. By "despotism", San Salvador simply meant something quite unacceptable to its self-esteem: continued Guatemalan hegemony.

b. Familial Unity, Eloquence, and Forgetfulness

As the peril of disintegration grew closer, appeals to familial unity became more frequent. According to this imagined ideal of the nation as a "natural" identity, the Central American provinces, though "orphans" of a vanished paternalistic Spanish empire, were still siblings. Consider the passage below, in which the Captain General, who now saw annexation as inevitable, informed his ally, Granada's creole Chief of Arms, that he could no longer count on Guatemala's support against León.

We must not lift our swords, brother against brother. This is dictated by prudence and discretion at a time when things have changed entirely. Guatemala can hardly sustain a government

independent of Mexico, since many of the pueblos it needed for its political viability have chosen to adhere to [the Mexican Empire], and which segregated would make [Guatemala] appear isolated.

Unity was the central exigency of political viability. And unity required forgetting old animosities, such as those that had divided not only Granada and León, but also Guatemala and León.

By necessity, Guatemala must become again a sister to the other provinces, treat them as friends, and throw a veil upon the past.¹⁹

The theme of forgetting and concealing the past was to recur as often as appeals for societal unity on familial grounds. Indeed, as we shall see more fully in Chapter 8, it was through this super-human faculty of erasure, in combination with incantations about the immutable virtue of familial unity, that Central Americans hoped to put an end to their internal fragmentation. Thus, when the junta in Guatemala decided in favor of annexation to Mexico, it justified the decision as an effort to preserve the traditional unity of Central American "brothers" in the face of uncontrollable and potentially dangerous forces.²⁰

Recently opposed to the annexation to Mexico, the notables of Guatemala now openly embraced it; and provincial notables who had opposed immediate independence now resisted annexation, which they saw as brought about by "surreptitious intrigues".²¹

In a society characterized by obdurate collective identities, tactical plasticity was the mark of politics. "Virtuous" actors defended their integrity to the death, but as they deployed narratives in their own defense, they also expanded their degrees of freedom. Consider the imaginative streak in the manifesto addressed by the Political Chief to the provinces of Central America on the very same day that Guatemala adhered to Mexico:

[after the declaration of independence] old rivalries disappeared; opposing parties swore agreement; seemingly irreconcilable enemies embraced; individual interests lost their impetus; and a single family was formed out of the many.²²

If Guatemala's leadership in declaring independence from Spain had redeemed the entire isthmus and restored it to its natural state -- that of a family, how then could one explain the quick internal dissolution of this new-found and perfect happiness? Human "misunderstanding". Or put another way, miscommunication, which in turn led to dissent, which "spread the seed of discord", which grew into a "tangle".²³

As in the Christian story of the human genesis, the manifesto's narrative unfolds in a paradisaical setting, where human error spoils it all -- "misunderstanding" engendered a maze of mistrust. And as in the story of redemption, the maze was cut down by the decision of the cabildos in favor of a union with Mexico. The resolution made by the Junta in Guatemala, the manifesto concluded, merely reflected the

decision of the Central American cabildos.²⁴ "Partial language" [the voice of the minority] "in order to speak at all would have to deny the truth: that the Junta had followed the general will."²⁵

San Salvador, in open cabildo, spoke this "partial language", and finally formed its own Junta. San Salvador justified its new autonomy by pointing to Spanish law (the constitution of 1813), while Guatemala contested it on the basis of its own legal supremacy.²⁶

But just like Guatemala insisted that San Salvador conform to its decision in favor of annexation, San Salvador insisted that in Salvador the towns of Santa Ana and San Miguel, which favored annexation, recognize its leadership above that of Guatemala.

In the face of impending disintegration, political narratives brought back an old incantation -- the erasure of rancorous memories through the potency of eloquence. At the height of its efficacy, eloquence, by subordinating fact and memory to emotion and will, could obliterate the distinction between the actual past and its recollection. In practical terms, if inordinate pain induced forgetfulness, then orators and authors sought to evoke such pain in audiences and readers. Forgetfulness, they believed, was the pre-condition to a new beginning, for the reconstruction of the national "family".²⁷

Eloquence, in fact, was power itself. Prevailing opinion,

for example, held that convincing Spanish Americans of the need for a single government would not be difficult, since "inspired by nature herself, they all [loved] to have at home a protective father." Competing interests and passions, however, posed a vexing problem, and demanded a constitution that would begin to establish general conditions of trust by striking a balance amongst such interests and passions. Such a constitution was already a central goal of the new Mexican government, to whose cortes the Central Americans were expected to send deputies.

The way in which notables proposed to strike this balance tells much about their faith in eloquence. First, a commission of "sages" should prepare a draft, to be printed and circulated among more sages, cabildos and towns, who were then to opine on the draft within a period of six months. Once this period elapsed, the Cortes were to begin discussion on the various articles. And once the discussion had concluded and the document had been ratified,

a beautiful speech [is] to be prepared in the cortes, in the august idiom of sovereignty, and in the divine language of reason, which, seated at the throne, would reveal the constitutional system and make manifest its foundation. Once this speech has been written and printed, the constitution should then be published in a manner appropriate for a fundamental law that decides on the fate of so many generations and peoples.²⁸

Eloquence, the notables imagined, could even draw the borders of the interior world of power, and keep the peace among its

parts. The government mechanism of checks and balances, for instance, was represented as a system of mutual deterrence in which the distinct "idiom" of the executive was pitted against that of the legislature. Each branch was, quite literally, a speaker bent on impressing upon potential rivals the indisputable worthiness of its claim on authority.²⁹

Eloquence was elemental to politics. To be heard and to be believed by others was the first imperative of politics, whose fundamental task was to instill faith. Absent credibility, there could be no faith, and absent faith there could be no allegiance. In the art of faith-building, the more "ignorant" the listener, the more essential eloquence was to the speaker; and the more malicious the listener, the more clear the speaker's words had to be. The higher the position of the speaker vis a vis the listener, the greater the degree of decorum expected from the speaker. Hence the proscription of the first person: in the most clear illustration of self-abnegation, the speaker was to abstain from using the word "I". And the greater the eloquence, the more its possessor should hide it, so that the listener might come to believe that he had understood aided only by his own faculties. The "virtue of eloquence" was in getting the listener to do as he was told, verbally or in a text.

Even peace, as we have seen, depended on eloquence. Notables reminded themselves time and again that general forgetfulness and the word "amnesty" were tied in the history

of rhetoric. Writing on eloquence, a Central American notable observed that a Roman orator used this Greek word -- amnesty -- in an effort to reestablish peace.

Turbulence came of eloquence, too. Our notable asserted that as in antiquity, in Central America it would be the orators and the press who were to persuade, calm, disabuse, and agitate. Eloquence, in short, was the weapon shared by the agents of good and evil. In antiquity, the notable remarked,

a speech could go on for two, three and even eight hours and was called oratio perpetua. And if there were ill-intentioned and well-intentioned orators, in the end, there was equilibrium. Orators had to obtain license from the government.³⁰

Above all, however, eloquence was at the center of politics because politics was entwined with morality. This entwinement was taken as a self-evident fact by notables, regardless of identity or position on the issues. They invariably left unchallenged two related notions. One held that the art of deceit should have as its purpose to sever the natural link between virtuousness and the application of public power; the other asserted that eloquence was essential to that art.³¹ Indeed, learning to "speak" an "idiom" that was "not of its heart," was the sine qua non of a faction's duplicity.³²

The verbal artifice of factions was, of course, immoral. Making opposition to a representative government -- composed of "true" patriots, champions of the law, lovers of glory, liberty and order, as well as industrious men and sages -- was

a "scandal," which revealed the "perversity" of the opposition's intentions. Or at the very least, it revealed "the delirium of their minds".³³

Yet factions and their artifices were seen everywhere. In fact, to be a political man was to live with the perception of being surrounded by evil. In Nicaragua, the Chief believed his opponents to be "depraved souls". In the same vein, an imperial agent wrote Iturbide that the people were divided into two parties -- the majority, who were honest, and those who were not. The agent also asked for military support because the enemies of good were trying to kill him. Naturally, the loyal secret agent related to Iturbide how he had taken up arms, resolved as he was to "go down killing, amidst the tears and supplications of his wife and children".³⁴

Victory over internal foes, meant victory over external predators. "Foreign nations observe us carefully" Iturbide warned, and "will either respect our common sense, or exploit our ineptitude". But, Iturbide hoped, the "majesty" of the people, being "superior to the instigations of the wicked", would "know how to consolidate unity among the inhabitants of this Empire".³⁵

During moments of desperation -- when vendettas, anarchy, and war threatened societal dissolution -- oratorical pleas were issued everywhere for a more benevolent discourse. But these pleas, significantly, were made on behalf of the

national family, and were joined to warnings about the apocalyptic dangers posed by the evil agents of internal discord. Both the volatile nature of narrational politics and its limits were at best only partially understood by protagonists. For at those moments of desperation, even as notables consciously strove to exercise caution in their use of words, they unselfconsciously reaffirmed their belief in the potency of eloquence, going so far as to try to induce general forgetfulness in their audiences. Routinely, governmental decrees, too, ordered the partial eradication of historical memory among the population. And in the end, all appealed for concerted efforts at familial unity.

c. The Rise and Fall of the First Paterfamilias:
Early Orphanhood

Familial unity presupposed general acceptance of a national paterfamilias. In principle, this problem found its solution when Iturbide, theretofore a "regent", declared himself emperor in Mexico. The move was not entirely ludicrous. Months before, the majority of the provincial localities had voluntarily annexed themselves to the Mexican empire. And now, the Archbishop of Guatemala hailed Iturbide's coronation. He wrote the new emperor,

I have given my humble thanks to God our Lord, who has deigned grant us, in the zealousness and religiousness of Your Imperial Majesty, the firm support that in this turbulent times was necessary to repair the fractures that began to show in the

doctrine, habits, and ecclesiastic discipline, all to the grave detriment of Jesus Christ's church.³⁶

Indeed, until the last moments of the colonial regime, if creoles, mestizos and Indians had shared anything in common it was their view of the Spanish monarch as wise and benevolent. And if local elites had struggled incessantly against anything it was not the crown but "interceptions" and "distortions" of their communications with the king by "evil" royal officials. That these were the great anathema in a system of socio-political competition which turned on competitive narratives, is only confirmed by the fact that Iturbide now wooed Central Americans with the promise of easy access to his ear. As Chief Filísola in Guatemala put it,

the sanctuary of the law and the father of the pueblos are no longer two thousand leagues away from you, with a vast ocean in between; recourse to His Imperial Majesty is easy and expeditious, no longer subject to interception by an absolute chief.³⁷

All that remained to be done, Iturbide's man believed, was the removal of Spanish officials such as the Intendant in Nicaragua, and ancient rivalries between collectivities would be eradicated.³⁸ Even as creoles faced intractable localist conflict, they failed to recognize that the long colonial process of identity-formation had produced towns, cities and provinces with as much personality and character as their proudest notables. Succintly put, if removing a chief here and there was mere tinkering, tampering with provincial boundaries

was like smashing the face of a narcissistic beauty. And Iturbide, in an ill-advised attempt to reward and punish the friends and foes of annexation, reorganized Central America,³⁹ with the result that "almost everyone was alienated, even those who had defended union with Mexico".⁴⁰

Localist rivalry, in fact, had led to war between San Salvador and Guatemala (with the Salvadoran localities of Santa Ana and Sonsonate siding with Guatemala) even before the actual annexation to Mexico. The war continued afterwards. The Mexican empire offered the solution of a paterfamilias at the imperial level, but did not solve the problem of keen rivalries at the provincial level. San Salvador, which had been nipping at Guatemala's heels during the late colonial period, had every reason to expect that under the empire, Guatemala City would strengthen its position of superiority.

Conversely, Santa Ana favored annexation in the hopes of gaining its autonomy vis a vis San Salvador. For their part, the old provincial capitals of Comayagua and León favored annexation because they sought to preserve their supremacy over the "lesser" cities and towns that had fallen within their jurisdiction in the colonial system. But those "lesser" cities, too, we saw in chapters 4, 5, and 6 had been ascending in the echelons of the colonial hierarchy until the last moment. Independence abruptly stopped the ascent of Tegucigalpa, for example. Yet it did not eradicate its impelling sense of merit.

Collective identities, it bears repeating, were heirs to a legacy of moral worth and social honor -- a legacy at once embedded and exposed to assault in stories of genealogical and localist virtue. Guatemala's pronouncement in favor of annexation brought conflict among these identities out into the open. Indeed, it revealed the mistrust that prevailed even among allies. Early reversals suffered by Guatemala in its military confrontation with San Salvador, for example, created suspicions in Mexico regarding the loyalty and resoluteness of Guatemala's Political Chief.⁴¹

This was ironic. Hailed by liberals during independence, the Chief was later described by those self-same admirers as a "weather vane" in his studied fickleness. They also criticized his haste in accepting the Plan de Iguala. Finally, this plastic official who had survived against all odds, was replaced by Iturbide's representative, Colonel Filísola, who assumed the post of political and military chief. It was Filísola who ultimately vanquished San Salvador.⁴²

The impulse to come out from under Guatemala was so strong, that before Filisola's final victory, the congress in San Salvador, in a futile attempt to avoid subordination to the old capital of the Kingdom, unilaterally decided to place their country under the protectorate of the United States, and declared it an integral part of the North American union.⁴³

Granada's traditional rivalry was with León. And since Leon was led by imperialists, Granada, too, had every reason

to oppose annexation. But Granada's Chief of Arms -- a local creole notable -- had been made aware only recently that he could not count on Guatemala in a confrontation with Leon. Recall that after Leon made its autonomous decision to adhere to the Plan de Iguala "until the clouds of the day" were removed, Granada took a contrary stance and welcomed Guatemala's declaration of independence. Also recall that on that occasion, Guatemala rewarded Granada by authorizing it to establish a government Junta, but then, as annexation appeared inevitable, Guatemala quickly appealed to Granada to reconcile with León and thus avoid a military conflict between "brothers". Not surprisingly, then, Granada's Chief of Arms now complied with Guatemala's pro-annexation decision, thus falling into line with the position of its own great rival, León.

This compliance, however, opened up an opportunity for the Chief of Arms' rivals, who now moved to challenge his socio-political supremacy. Like cities, families were unwilling to submit to the authority of traditional superiors. Thus, when Colonel Cleto Ordoñez rebelled against the Chief of Arms, who had been his long-time ally and patron, he did so with the support of many local creole notables. Indeed, though Colonel Ordoñez was a popular orator widely believed to have magical powers, he did not attempt to rule alone and soon established a junta of notables, which governed in opposition to the junta in León.

Leon's leaders, particularly the bishop and the Intendant, were unrelenting in their effort to subjugate Granada, which at every turn seemed to contradict León. The implications, however, went beyond Granada and León. Ever since independence, nothing less than the moral future of the Nicaraguan province had been at stake, as can be gleaned from the "intelligence" which the Intendant conveyed to Iturbide's Political Chief. Much like governors had once informed royal investigators, the Intendant narrated for his superior an intricate story depicting a clash between the wicked and the virtuous. Malevolent anarchists, the Intendant related, were waging war on the "lovers of order and the system of independence which makes us part of the Mexican empire".⁴⁴ The Intendant also advised the Chief that "perverse anarchists" had to be repressed by "military bravery".⁴⁵

The Intendant gathered an army of two thousand Nicaraguans, many of whom hailed from minor localities that harbored resentment towards Granada, and marched upon the city. News of this march had important consequences for Costa Rica, where Cartago had sworn allegiance to the empire, thus providing the rival city of San José with a pretext to mount a military attack. Cartago was now caught between two fears. If it stood up to San José, it could not count on assistance from Nicaragua's Intendant, who at the moment was occupied with Granada. And if it succumbed to San José without a fight, it might have to face the wrath of its jurisdictional superior

(Nicaragua's Intendant) once he had finished with Granada.

In the midst of desperation, the notables of Cartago finally believed they had found an escape route. They dispatched a peace envoy to San Jose. The envoy was armed only with a letter "from the Virgin Mary", drafted and signed on her behalf by a local friar. In the letter, Mary implored the citizens of San José to work for peace.

You who have always gloried in recognizing me as your protector; you who as faithful supplicants never hesitate in asking for my help in your moments of need, and who loudly proclaim my graces, miracles and favors; you who are now agitated by the infernal shrewdness of the spirits of novelty, divisiveness and discord ... be aware that I have inspired certain ministers of the Sanctuary to write you in my name, and propose the only way for all [contenders] to have peace: each locality must abandon the system it has adopted.⁴⁶

Employing the same discourse, San Jose's caudillo replied that

the holy religion of Jesus Christ is diametrically opposed to intrigue, calumny and the disturbance of the public order and laws. The Most Holy Mary cannot protect the horrendous crimes that are the cause of her children's desolation ... If Cartago reinstates the broken system, it will save itself from the ills that threaten it on account of the felonies and rebellion of a few perverse people.⁴⁷

From the combats that followed, San Jose ultimately emerged victorious, after its caudillo, feigning disposition to engage in peace talks, launched a surprise attack on its foe. Thus, San José "wrested" the capital away from Cartago -- its colonial superior.

d. Orphans and Foes: No one to Write To

Ironically, even before Cartago's capitulation, Iturbide's hold over Mexico had become increasingly tenuous, his abdication increasingly probable. And liberals in Guatemala had seized the moment and pressured Chief Filísola -- Iturbide's representative -- to convene a Congress, just as they had pressured the king's Captain General to convene the general junta that decreed Central America's independence from Spain.

This was an about-face on the part of Iturbide's representative, who in the recent past had responded to news of the emperor's troubles by trying to keep Central America calm and obedient. Significantly, he had appealed to the traditional sense of identity of the former Kingdom. "I merely demand," Chief Filísola said in his manifesto, "the enlightened prudence and docility that constitute the character of the Provinces of Guatemala".⁴⁸

Now, Filísola acceded to the requests from Guatemalan liberals, because, as he put it, he saw "with great clarity the horrible anarchy in which Mexico [was] plunged", and added that "to save Guatemala, [he had] no choice."⁴⁹

The discourse of the manifesto of convocation tells much about the metaphorical shift underway. The break between the Spanish Empire and its former colonies had effectively destroyed the notion of an expanding Spanish state whose boundaries blurred into the body of Christ. But the loss of

the Spanish King -- the head of that state -- was something that creoles, in various ways, had tried to avoid to the last. The Mexican empire, financially strapped and given to imprudent reorganizations of Central America, proved to be a failed attempt to uphold the metaphor that for centuries had bounded colonial tradition and reigned over the colonial imagination.

Thus, as Iturbide lost his empire, Filisola's manifesto justified convocation of a Central American congress by referring to the nation's state of "orphanage and anarchy". Moreover, the manifesto convened the provinces -- Nicaragua, Honduras, Salvador, Costa Rica, Chiapas and Quezaltenango -- on the basis of their "shared and identical" interests.

In León, however, the authorities took this news as a pretext to create a provisional government (after the banishment of the Intendant). Echoing the manifesto, though for purposes entirely their own, the authorities in León stressed that the provinces were now incomunicado with the emperor, and declared them "orphans" -- members of a family now unable to communicate with its head, the father.⁵⁰

The natural family exemplified the notion that social order was sustained -- and structured -- by inherited, and ultimately unbreakable bonds. But the question remained, who would stand at its head at the provincial and national levels? In Salvador, the Villa of Santa Ana, long resentful of San Salvador's superior rank, was quite clear on this point in its

instructions to its delegates to congress.

The Villa of Santa Ana and the pueblos under its jurisdiction must be excluded from the political and military government of San Salvador, due to the enmity that emerged in the past; the preservation of fraternity does not require that Santa Ana be ruled by the capital [emphasis added].⁵¹

The disappearance of the Mexican paterfamilias left a vacuum which competitors, convinced of their own virtue and moral superiority, sought to fill. Guatemala's claim to preeminence was historical; she was the eldest and the seat of the capital of the former Kingdom. However, San Salvador, though militarily defeated only recently, was suddenly enjoying the prestige of having resisted Iturbide, who was now irrelevant. In this important sense, San Salvador was ascendant over its elder. In Nicaragua, a similar reversal was taking place. The Intendant, who had been closing in on Granada when he received Filisola's decree of convocation, now had to leave Nicaragua. And Granada, which had repudiated Iturbide in contradiction to the provincial capital, León, was now, like San Salvador, tactically victorious. In Costa Rica, San José was doubly triumphant.

e. The First Official Narrative

Creole notables saw the new constitutional assembly both as inevitable progress, concomitant with the enlightened spirit of the nineteenth century; and as a victory of good

over evil, a victory in which God had played a hand.⁵² Admission to this institutional icon of enlightenment was denied to those who had resisted the power of its divine author. Iturbide's Political Chief, for example, argued successfully that Nicaragua's intendant should be denied participation in the assembly because he had "delayed" for two years Central America's "political march".⁵³

But finding anyone who was "pure", posed a challenge. The Political Chief himself had the merit of having convened the assembly. Yet no one could deny that he had also served his Mexican emperor well. And what about the Archbishop of Guatemala, who had "thanked God" on the occasion of Iturbide's coronation and had branded anti-imperialists as "heretics"? He now assumed the pontifical role in the opening ceremonies of the congress. Finally, most of the assembly's members had tainted pasts. Some had been representatives at the Spanish cortes during the constitutionalist period; others later attended the Mexican cortes during Iturbide's reign (including the preeminent Honduran liberal, Dionisio de Herrera).

So how to redeem liberals and thus clear the way for a new beginning? In one of its earliest decisions, the Assembly produced the first national official narrative in Central America. On this account, independence from Spain had been the natural solution to an insoluble communication problem.

Nature itself resists dependence: this part of the globe is separated by an immense ocean from its

former metropolis, an ocean which renders impossible the immediate and frequent communication that is indispensable among pueblos that constitute a single State.⁵⁴

In contrast, discussions of possible annexation to Mexico had been forced on Guatemalans by "the hidden maneuvers of certain provinces, supported by the ambitious and the deceived". But these ploys, the story went on, came to naught when the enemies of independence were "suddenly terrified" during the general junta "by the enthusiasm of the friends of liberty who, emboldened by the progress of Mexican independence and the example set by Chiapas, decided to overthrow the yoke, even if it meant death". In the days that followed,

victorious liberalism was most generous with its enemies ... A provisional [government] junta was established ... this government proceeded majestically, prudently and reasonably in its early days, as it is obvious from its actas, which today would bring eternal honor to the Provisional Junta were it not for the fact that this self-same Junta later became the most powerful statement of its own imbecility and the dementia of its ideas.⁵⁵

The "imbecility" refers, of course, to the fact that the government junta ultimately annexed Guatemala to Mexico. And it was in explaining this "imbecility" that the author of the Assembly's historical account relied on selective remembrance.

The junta, which occasionally held open sessions, suddenly disliked popular participation and petitions, which it generally discarded, calling

them imprudent. The public spirit that began to develop scared many ... patriotic circles of discussion which tried to enlighten the people terrified the serviles, and certain speeches on liberty and the equality of men led some who passed as liberals to drop their masks.⁵⁶

On this account, then, old allies now figured as false liberals being unmasked by uncontrollable events; and in the passage below, they figured as instigators of appalling deeds.

[the Captain General] printed and distributed [Iturbide's documents and communique] ... [in response] there were celebrations ... Eternal shame for Guatemala! Many personages contributed to this: a base populace, led by mayors and escorted by militias, went out on the streets, playing music, insulting liberals, as it was its habit One beautiful night, a group of sixteen unarmed patriots left the patriotic discussion circle and went around cheering for a free Guatemala. The mayor and his troop found them and shot at them, leaving two dead ... The following day a group of serviles appeared at the plaza demanding the expatriation of pro-liberty citizens. That same day, an edict prohibited meetings, juntas, music, fireworks, ringing of bells ... Some even took their devotion to the Virgen de Guadalupe, whom they had theretofore neglected, as a pretext to form a brotherhood and to dazzle the ignorant multitude.⁵⁷

But these "appalling deeds", we have seen, were in fact shared practices -- at once a spontaneous expression of sentiment and a political instrument manipulated by "enfevereds" and "serviles" alike. Indeed, past exercises of dramaturgical obedience -- particularly the drama of inexorable popular ire -- deepened intra-elite and localist suspicion. In Costa Rica, for example, one of most prominent pro-republican orators was

accused of duplicity, presumably for having engaged in suspicious correspondence with Nicaragua's Intendant, simultaneously seeking an understanding with the imperialists to the north and an agreement with Simon Bolivar to the south. The Costa Rican defended himself before the Provincial Assembly, which absolved him and declared him "trustworthy". This exoneration notwithstanding, the municipal government of Cartago, rival of San José, ordered the republican's arrest, accusing him of "imposture", and asked the Government Junta to expel him from the country. The request was denied.⁵⁸

Everywhere, creoles replayed in their dealings and struggles with one another the gestures and habits they developed in their dealings and struggles with peninsular officials. In Guatemala, for example, the Constitutional Assembly met in open session, harking back to the open cabildo. And harking back also to the double role played by notables in that colonial institution, now the Assembly's orators incited spectators to agitate either in favor or in opposition to particular motions. As epithets went back and forth, the Assembly elected a provisional executive -- a triumverate that included the "enfevered" Guatemalan liberal Pedro Molina and his Salvadoran fellow, the military leader José Manuel Arce.

Soon, the triumverate and many in the congress grew uncomfortable with the presence of Filisóla and his men, even though he had installed the congress and his army had joined

local troops in paying homage to the deputies. In fact, the Central American government now faced a grave dilemma. On the one hand, it could not abide operating in the shadow of a foreign force. On the other hand, its members were compelled to show their gratitude to that self-same force. They were compelled by their moral discourse -- their ideological lingua franca, which exalted the virtue of loyalty above all others. And they were compelled by a fundamental political consideration -- loyalty was the constitutive element used in competitive narratives to construct an archetypically virtuous identity.

Not surprisingly, no one dared be the first to violate the dictat of discourse and identity. But traditional practice provided a way out. Rather than directly request the withdrawal of the Mexicans, Central Americans enacted a justificatory theater, in which, disguised as Mexicans, they perpetrated "hostile acts" that discredited Filisola's troops.⁵⁹ And as in the past, a price had to be paid. The accusations and counter-accusations they subsequently levelled at one another reveal the contempt creoles felt for their own political habits when displayed by a foe. Consider a passage from a booklet published by Filisola in refutation of allegations made against him by several Central American liberals who had been his admirers only recently.

The basest ingratitude, the most blind ambition,
and the worst kind of faith has led the [liberal]

citizens Pedro Molina, Francisco Barrundia, Doctor Gálvez and Juan de Dios Mayorga to smear my reputation in their newspaper La Tribuna, treating me as stupid and rapacious; assuming I allowed my division to commit excesses; and criticizing my operations in Chiapas ...

In the remainder of the text, the aggrieved Filísola retaliated against his aggressors one by one. The Salvadoran Liberal (Arce) was a "cowardly liar", while his Guatemalan homologues (Barrundia and Molina) were

mere manipulators who never did any service to their patria other than incite disorder through anonymous texts and seditious papers written in the dark.⁶⁰

The narrative crafted by the Assembly to unite its members in a shared sense of historical and moral superiority proved ineffective in the face of entrenched divisive practices. Soon after the Mexican troops evacuated Guatemala, and in the context of congressional turbulence and polarization, a Captain Ariza seized the moment and convinced the unpaid and unhappy soldiers to revolt. He then sent a message of obedience and loyalty to the assembly, also claiming that the insurrection was not his responsibility but rather his troops' way of "forcing" him to assume the position of commandant.⁶¹

According to a congressional Acta, "Several deputies gave eloquent and honest speeches against the rebellious conduct of Ariza [the leader of the coup], and asked that he be declared traitor ... " And according to the contemporary historian

Marure, "the people, violently agitated by the vehement speeches of the orators, set out to destroy Ariza".

But the assembly, too, split on the question of Ariza, as the orators' agitation culminated in a clash between "rebels" and "patriots".⁶² Finally, the self-proclaimed military commander, who was being called a traitor and a criminal in congress, attacked the premises, forcing deputies and functionaries of the executive to climb the walls and escape. Thus began a long negotiation process between the government and the commander, who was ultimately persuaded to go to Antigua, where his troops dissolved.

Mistrust between Liberals (enfevereds) and self-defined "moderates" (the new Serviles) persisted, however. The "serviles" suspected the "enfevereds" of having sponsored the coup in order to avail themselves of a pretext to call in Salvadoran troops (sympathetic to the enfevered camp). And as the Salvadoran troops continued on their march, fear spread through the congress that the soldiers would take revenge on Guatemala, which only recently had invaded and vanquished San Salvador. This fear, in turn, led many to clamor for a new executive. The triumvirate tendered their resignation.⁶³

The new triumvirate included the most renowned Salvadoran Liberal of the day (he had headed San Salvador's resistance against Guatemala under Iturbide). In the end, however, even the Salvadoran executive was unable to stop his compatriots, whose commander, upon being asked to return to his country,

replied that he was not sure the government was safe, and could accept orders only from San Salvador.

In the final analysis, "enfevereds" and "serviles" confirmed their mutual suspicions. Enfevereds welcomed the Salvadoran troops in congress. Serviles did the same for the troops from Quezaltenango, which the new triumverate had called in.

The tension between the rival troops finally broke out into open an conflict, which came to an end only after they evacuated the city. After the troops' departure, in the hopes that the constitution being framed would settle all disputes, leaders made an effort at dissimulation of rancorous sentiments.⁶⁴

Conclusion

Even after the loss of the metaphor -- the vision -- which for centuries had governed Central Americans' imagination, localist and personalist suspicions and jealousies continued to interact, in ways both familiar and unpredictable, with the discourse and narratives political actors employed to make sense of their past, present and future. As we have seen, the lack of an ideology independent of the monarchy, its attendant worldview, and its system of rewards and punishment, perpetuated the core of colonial practices and, at the same time, alienated practitioners from one another. Against this background of rupture and

continuity, Central Americans were increasingly in the thrall of a replacement-ideal: the familial nation. But as Chapter 8 will show, the interplay between this new vision and older practices had a profoundly destructive effect on the macro-institutional framework of the post-colonial state: the Central American Federation.

1. The Intendant's insurrection was supported by the bishop of Leon, a Spaniard who, as we saw in Chapter 5, was so respected by local notables and so popular in the city that he was made head of the junta of notables that was established as a result of the rebellions of the 1810's. That junta was abolished after the abrogation of the constitution of 1812, but localist sentiments remained, and now came to the surface once more.
2. "La Diputación provincial de Nicaragua y Costa Rica manifiesta su lealtad con motivo del movimiento de independencia de Guatemala, 1821", Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volume IX, no. 1 (April 1947), 31-32.
3. "Acta de los nublados, 28 de setiembre, 1821," Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volume I (1936-1937), 235.
4. El Genio de la Libertad, October 22, 1821, in Escritos del Doctor Pedro Molina, Volume III, El Editor Constitucional y El Genio de la Libertad (Guatemala: Editorial José Pineda Ibarra, 1969), 816-820.
5. Tomás Ayón, "Historia de Nicaragua", Volume 3, Book VIII, Chapter XIII, in J.D. Gámez, ed., Archivo Histórico de la República de Nicaragua (Managua: Tipografía Nacional, 1896).
6. El Genio de la Libertad, October 1, 1821, in Escritos, op. cit., 771-773.
7. "Orden General," Granada, October 3, 1821, in José D. Gámez, ed., Archivo Histórico, 32.
8. See "Acta del 12 de octubre, 1821", Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volume I (1936), 236.
9. El Genio de la Libertad, October 15, 1821, in Escritos del Doctor Pedro Molina, Volume III, 809-810.
10. "Manifiesto by Agustín de Iturbide," issued at the Palacio Imperial de Mexico, on October 19, 1821, in Gámez, ed., Archivo Histórico, Volume I, 38-43.
11. Ibid., 38-43.
12. Valdés Oliva, op. cit., 15.
13. Marure, Bosquejo Histórico, Volume I, Chapter II.

14. "El Capitan General de Guatemala a la Diputación Provincial de Nicaragua y Costa Rica. Explica el verdadero sentido del Acta de 15 de septiembre de 1821, con motivo de aquello de los nublados del día," Anales de la Sociedad de Geografía e Historia de Guatemala, Volume XVIII, no.2. (December 1942).
15. Speech by José Francisco de Córdova, Genio de la Libertad, November 19, 1821, in Escritos del Doctor Pedro Molina. El Editor Constitucional y el Genio de la Libertad. Volume III, 853-859.
16. "Comunicación Oficial del General Gainza del 22 de Noviembre", in Gámez, ed., Archivo Histórico, Volume I, 34-35.
17. See "Comunicación de las autoridades de León prohibiendo la organización de la Junta gubernativa de Granada," in Gámez, ed., Archivo Histórico, Volume I, 37-38.
18. "La Provincia de San Salvador propone la unión a las de Comayagua y León para evitar la guerra civil y el despotismo, 1821," Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volume I (1936), 42-43.
19. "Communique from Gabino Gainza, Palacio Nacional, Guatemala, Diciembre 22 de 1821, to Sr. Comandante don Crisanto Sacasa, Granada," in Gámez, ed., Archivo Histórico, 43-44.
20. Among the signatories were Gabino Gainza, the Marqués de Aycinena, Mariano Gálvez, et al. See "Acta de Anexión a Mexico, Palacio Nacional de Guatemala," January 5, 1822, in Gámez, Archivo Histórico, 48-51.
21. See Ramón Rosa, "Biografía de don José Cecilio del Valle" in Gámez, ed., Archivo Histórico, Volume I, 51-53.
22. "Manifiesto del General Gainza," January 5, 1822, in Gámez, ed., Archivo Histórico, Volume I, 55-59.
23. Ibid.
24. In January of 1822, the cabildos' votes on the matter of annexation finally came in. The ballots fell into four categories. 1) 23 cabildos said that only the Congress (yet to meet) would be able to decide on union to Mexico. 2) 104 simply wanted annexation. 3) 32 either accepted it but with provisos, or 4) would go along with whatever the government in Guatemala decided. Many other cabildos did not have time to issue their decision, or never received the communique inviting them to vote (the cabildos that did not get to vote

were 77).

25. "Manifiesto del General Gainza," January 5, 1822, in Gámez, ed., Archivo Histórico, Volume I, 55-59.

26. Andrés Ezcurra Townsend, Las Provincias Unidas de Centroamérica: Fundación de la República (San José: Editorial Costa Rica, 1973), 44-45.

27. See José Cecilio del Valle, Ensayos y Documentos (San José: Clásicos Centroamericanos, 1988), 169-173.

28. Del Valle, "Constitución", originally published in El Amigo de la Patria, 1822, in *ibid.*

29. Del Valle, "Necesidad de la armonía de los poderes," in *ibid.*, 227-229.

30. Miguel Larreynaga, "De la Elocuencia," Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volume IX, no.1 (April 1947), 14-20.

31. Larreynaga, "Discurso en el Aniversario de la Academia de Ciencias," in Boletín Nicaraguense de Bibliografía y Documentación, no. 55 (November 1987 -- September 1988).

32. Del Valle, Ensayos y Documentos.

33. Del Valle, "De la Oposición a los gobiernos representativos," *Ibid.*

34. "Cartas de González Saravia que dan idea de cómo estaban las cosas en Nicaragua a raíz de la independencia", 1822, Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volume IV, no.2 (August 1942), 6-14. See also Townsend Ezcurra, *op. cit.*, 32-33.

35. Speech by Agustín de Iturbide, dated February 24, 1822. See Anales de la Sociedad de Geografía e Historia de Guatemala, Volume XII, no. 1 (September 1935), 80-81.

36. Pinto Soria, *op. cit.*, 50.

37. "Manifiesto del General don Vicente Filísola", August 10, 1822, in Gámez, ed., Archivo Histórico, Volume I (1936) 73-79.

38. See "El Capitán General de Guatemala, Brigadier don Vicente Filísola, explica al Secretario de Guerra y Marina del Imperio Mejicano por qué debe ser relevado el Gobernador Intendente de la Provincia de León de Nicaragua, Brigadier don Miguel González Saravia," August, 1822, Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volume I, (1936), 249-

251.

39. See Gordon Kenyon, "Mexican Influence in Central America, 1821-1823," The Hispanic American Historical Review, Volume XLI, no.2 (May 1961), 175-205.

40. Miles Wortman, Government and Society in Central America, 1680-1840 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 232.

41. José Dolores Gámez, Historia de Nicaragua (Managua: Fondo de Promoción Cultural Banco de América, 1975), 339.

42. See "Un Guatemalteco", Memorias para la Historia de la Revolución de Centro América (Jalapa: Impresa Aburto y Blanco, en Oficina del Gobierno, 1832); and Antonio Batres Jauregui, La América Central ante la Historia, 1821-1921, Memorias de un Siglo, Volume III (Guatemala: 1949), 85.

43. Hubert Howe Bancroft, The Works of Hubert Howe Bancroft, Volume VIII, History of Central America, Volume III (San Francisco: The History Company, 1887), 64.

44. "El Jefe Interino del Estado Mayor de la Provincia de León de Nicaragua, don Antonio del Villar, da parte al Comandante General de la Provincia sobre la asonada del 4 de junio de 1822 en que fueron derrotados los enemigos de la unión al Imperio Mexicano," Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volume I (1936), 237-241.

45. "El Jefe Político y Militar de la Provincia de León de Nicaragua, Brigadier don Miguel González Saravia, da informes sobre el estado político y militar de aquella Provincia y una breve noticia geográfica al Jefe de la División Auxiliar de Guatemala, Brigadier don Vicente Filísola (9 de julio de 1822)," Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volume I (1936), 243-247.

46. Máximo Soto Hall, "Capítulos de un Libro Inédito," Revista de Costa Rica en el Siglo XIX, no. 32 (Costa Rica: Letras Patrias), 106.

47. Ibid., 106.

48. Valdes Oliva, op. cit., 20.

49. Ibid., 20.

50. "Acta, Se Organiza en León un Gobierno Provisional," 1821, Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volume I (1936).

51. Townsend Ezcurra, op. cit., 262.

52. "I look at our pueblos, and realize that imposture, disdain and violence have been added to their misery and weakness; yet I also find a marvel that makes me dispose of the principles of political science, for this marvel has the seal of God, whose mighty hand moves in our favor. Oh Guatemala, San Salvador, Nicaragua and other provinces of Central America, Admit and publicize to the face of the universe that liberty is the precious gift with which man has been created and endowed". Ibid., 115-116.

53. Ibid., 97.

54. "Acta de Independencia," Guatemala, July 1, 1823, in Gámez, ed., Archivo Histórico, Volume I, 110-113.

55. "Dictámen de la comisión de la Asamblea Nacional Constituyente acerca del punto de independencia general y absoluta", in Ibid., 91-105.

56. Ibid.

57. Ibid., 91-105.

58. Arturo Aguilar, "Don Rafael Francisco Osejo," Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volume I (1936), 197-208.

59. Bancroft, op. cit., 68-70.

60. "Manifiesto del General Filísola sobre su expedición a Guatemala, o refutación de lo dicho por los ciudadanos Molina, Barrundia, Gálvez, Mayorga y Arce," in Gámez, ed., Archivo Histórico, op. cit., 189-224.

61. Bancroft, op. cit., 73-74.

62. Townsend Ezcurra, op. cit.

63. Ibid., 207-217.

64. Ibid., 230-231.

CHAPTER 8

The Federal Republic of Central America: Forming and Contesting the National Family

In the early post-colonial decades, Central America was plunged into anarchy and civil war. The five states of the new federal republic fought amongst themselves; and within each of the states, cities and notables fought against one another, while notable clans were themselves plagued by internal jealousies. This chapter argues that the upheaval was a consequence of attempts by elites and localities simultaneously to unite Central America along the lines of the "national family" model, and within this ideological context, to secure for themselves the institutional supremacy properly belonging to a "virtuous identity". Hence their competitive quest both for a unified nation and for control over its symbolic, administrative and coercive resources (most fully embodied in the colonial tradition in such acmes as the capital city and the political Chief).

That these twin purposes should engender conflict even among allies is not as startling as the demonstrable fact that the conflict proved as pervasive as it was intractable. Succinctly put, neither military victory nor a shared worldview led to sustainable peace. Indeed, even consensus on the rules of the game failed to prevent destructive competition. For example, rivals might accept the primacy of elections, but did not necessarily accept specific electoral outcomes. A

candidate might win through elections that were acknowledged as procedurally correct and fair, but his foes could still claim that he had won the votes because, empowered by his duplicitous immorality, he had "mesmerized" the ignorant. In other words, the opacity of dramaturgical obedience now obscured the outcome of transparent practices.

Moreover, such accusations tended to proliferate as the victorious candidate, in a common pattern of internal bloc-dissolution, became estranged from his allies. This was true at the level of the individual states, and at the level of the Federation. The worldview and practices attending identity-formation fomented dissent among Central Americans even as these set out to realize their unification agenda. Their intent was the construction of harmonious order, but in practice Central Americans incessantly grouped and regrouped into camps that perceived others as "traitors" and "factions" driven by particularist concerns, and themselves as the "majority", solely concerned with the general welfare. In short, the key to the destructive immanence of the political culture of the day can be found in the crucial link that dynamically connects worldview, practice and structure: emblematic identity.

The textual narratives of the day bear out this claim. As Central America severed its ties to monarchical Spain, narrators ceased addressing their competing accounts to the king and turned instead to "el publico", or "the public" --

the republican judge of men's character and deeds. Accordingly, new narratives took the form of manifestos and broadsides in which story-telling was mixed with exhortation. But narrators continued to draw on the discourse of good and evil to construct archetypical personas, of which only one deserved control of the nation's apex.

Recasting archetypical identities and manichean views according to the logic of the familial metaphor, narrators distinguished between the champions of a strong and unified national family and its base assailants, who, motivated by selfish interest, threatened societal cohesion and hampered the family's "marcha politica" -- the nation's journey down the one and only path to civilization.

Convinced of their righteousness in this struggle, caudillos and priests deployed their oratorical skills and "super-human" attributes, thus marshalling resources, mobilizing families and barrios, pueblos and cities, and setting off intra-local conflicts as well as wars between cities.¹

a. Insults and Emblems: Virtuous Identities at War

In 1824 Nicaragua's violent anarchy tested the effectiveness of the new federal framework and its central authority. The test was a stringent one. The atmosphere was laden with echoes of the servile-enfevered debate, which could still be heard in the acrimonious labels Nicaraguan

antagonists gave one another. The acrimony, moreover, was compounded by the bitterness of dissolved alliances. In Granada, as we saw in Chapter 7, the popular caudillo Colonel Ordoñez had broken with his long-time ally and patron, the creole notable and local military chief, Colonel Crisanto Sacasa, when the latter followed Guatemala's lead and declared annexation to Mexico. Sacasa had been among the first to repudiate annexation, but once he accepted it, he was branded a "servile". The label remained with him even after Central America became fully independent. In retaliation, Sacasa and his camp branded their opponents "anarchists".

Beneath the mutual suspicion of open antagonists, a less visible layer of suspicion prevailed among allies, who speculated on the true relationship between Ordoñez and Sacasa. There were some who suspected that the notable and the caudillo, underneath the intensity of their savage confrontations, were in secret understanding. Or at a minimum, others believed, the rebellious caudillo, out of a sense of loyalty to his old ally and benefactor, now found ways to preserve his safety.²

The speculation was not farfetched. Even from an ultra-realist perspective, a secret deal between the notable leader and the popular caudillo seemed just as plausible as the new alliance between the popular caudillo and the other notables who were Sacasa's rivals. Some of Sacasa's notable rivals were tacticians alive to the opportunities inherent in post-

colonial plasticity; others were traditional families that had neglected or refused to diversify from farming into commercial activities. Two of these notables -- Arguello and Cerda -- would play particularly important roles in the immediate future. Both had been in constant rebellion against the peninsulars (but in the name of the king) during the late colonial period. Both had been prominent in the struggles of the 1810's, one of them leading the "moralist" procession we examined in Chapter 5, which culminated in a mutiny against the Spanish military authorities of Granada. Finally, Arguello and Cerda were both members of the same extended clan.

Like all the notables involved in the struggle against Sacasa, and like Sacasa himself, Arguello and Cerda belonged to the circle of families that were keenly aware of their ancestral honor. Indeed, the strategies of forward-looking tacticians and of traditionalists alike were inextricable from their self-perception as members of virtuous genealogical identities. Both groups set out to prevail over their common foe through reassertions of their familial superiority, and both equated final victory with general acknowledgement of that elevated status.

The tacticians were the kind of public men who, as one historian put it, "did not deliberately arrange their memoirs to justify their deeds; rather, they seemed to execute their deeds in order to justify their [future] memoirs".³ The traditionalists were residents of an unchanging neighborhood,

men who were known as "los de arriba", or "the ones from above", in reference to their ancestral residential location in the city's layout.⁴

For tacticians and traditionalists alike, the most tangible sign of honor, we saw in previous chapters, was the family emblem displayed by clans on the facade of their residences -- emblems which in turn synthesized the stories of virtue and service constitutive of familial identity. These emblems became a central bone of contention as Nicaraguans set out to create a unified state within the Central American Republic. Before rivals could stake their competing claims on the future, they had to call into question one another's meritorious past. Thus, in a challenge to Sacasa's preeminence, and invoking the egalitarian majesty of democracy, Ordoñez and his notable allies forcefully erased rival emblems -- chiselling them out if they were carved on the wall, whitewashing them if they were painted -- while preserving their own ensigns intact.

Having lost their eminent positions in Granada, one family clan after another went into internal exile, settling in the Villa of Managua. Soon, several independent juntas of notables were in a keen struggle over national supremacy. In Granada, the victors and their caudillo Ordoñez formed a governing junta, while in León, an existing junta of notables retained all its faculties and autonomy. And in Managua, Granada's notables in exile formed a junta of their own, which

to all appearances was subordinated to that of Leon, but in secret made preparations for its independence. As juntas sprang up, various other towns fell into a constant state of flux, one day adhering to one of the major cities, the next to another.⁵

Finally, civil war exploded, pitting various alliances of notables, priests and popular leaders against one another. But as conflict among "virtuous identities" turned inward, friends turned into foes and foes into friends, rendering all of them free to make common cause,⁶ and to redraw in a moment the map of ancient passions. Accordingly, the theme of betrayal was once again dominant. After the losing faction from Granada established itself in Managua, for example, León began to look upon Managua as an "ingrate" that harbored men of independist designs. And as always, betrayal among friends now paved the way for tactical conciliation among foes. Thus, Granada, taking note of Leon's discontent with Managua, saw fit to support León, their bitter historical rivalry notwithstanding. For its part, León could do no less than reciprocate, deciding in *cabildo abierto* to assist the "heroic city of Granada".⁷

In this new alignment, "enfevereds" controlled León, Granada, Masaya and a number of subordinate pueblos. "Serviles" controlled Managua, San Felipe, Viejo, Rivas and various satellite communities -- each camp headed by one of the two major caudillos (themselves former allies). Each locality, however, retained its own junta. And as it soon

became clear, the object of contention between serviles and enfevereds was the control over the apex of the "national family's" line of authority and prestige.

Indeed, attempts by other Central Americans at mediation stressed the familial context of the war, on the presumption that the matter of internal dominance and preeminence -- location of the capital city and governmental leadership -- would solve itself naturally once the contenders came to their senses and "remembered" their familial ties.⁸

The peace envoy from the federal triumvirate wrote as much to the junta in Managua, which in turn agreed with the envoy's assumption that cultural and political "uniformity" ought to yield peace. But the notion that uniformity went hand in hand with harmony was not at all incongruent with the hyper-vigilant attitude of a manichean worldview, as Managua's junta demonstrated in its response to the envoy.

[A]narchy and its fatal consequences have worked to deprive us of [the consolidation and happiness of this province]. The Government of Granada and its Chief of Arms are the authors of these disasters. This Junta [of Managua] ... has been the sole obstacle on the path of these wicked men and their perverse plans ... This Junta has named a commissioner to meet with you, and is determined to cooperate ... but learned in the school of experience, it intuits that you will fail in your mission if you do not cut the problem by the roots.⁹

To uproot evil -- to eliminate the foe -- was the solution offered by Managua to the envoy of the national executive.

This intransigence startled the envoy, who had been dispatched on his mission of peace by the Honduran member of the federal triumverate with instructions to side with the camp that accepted his lead. The Honduran's expectation had been that Managua -- now controlled by self-proclaimed moderates -- would embrace the envoy; and that Granada and León, in the hands of "anarchists", would rebuff his initiatives. Had this come to pass, the Honduran executive, who was already working for his election to the federal presidency, stood to gain in prestige. But the opposite occurred. Granada and León, in response to the envoy's appeal, dissolved their juntas, while Managua refused.¹⁰

Worse yet, a Colombian officer fighting on the side of Managua's "serviles", launched a surprise attack on Leon while the envoy was still involved in his peace effort. The envoy took this "treachery" as a personal affront, and he soon sided with the "anarchists". Indeed, the envoy now identified himself as a soldier defending not just the besieged city of Leon but all of Central America from inhuman barbarians and their commandant -- a South American fighting on Managua's side whom the envoy called a "foreigner" and a "man-monster".¹¹

Under siege, the federal envoy and the city of León eagerly awaited the arrival of sympathetic Salvadoran troops. This eagerness, too, was ironic, since only a few months back, after thanking Salvadoran troops for "services rendered",

Leon's authorities had requested their withdrawal in view of the "rivalries" and "altercations" between the troops and the "citizenry".¹²

No matter. In the land of self-induced amnesia, Salvadoran troops were on their way again, headed by Arce, Salvador's preeminent liberal and former member of the federal triumverate. This Salvadoran, like his Honduran colleague in the triumverate (who had dispatched the envoy with a hidden agenda), was seeking to gain prestige as a peace-maker in order to win Nicaragua's votes for the federal presidency. Indeed, while still a member of the triumverate, the Salvadoran had tried to put together a military expedition to "pacify" Nicaragua. But his Honduran rival, though a conservative, had colluded with his liberal cousin, the newly-elected Chief of Honduras, to block the pacification project. In retaliation, the Salvadoran liberal left the triumverate, formed an army in his country of origin, then marched on Nicaragua.¹³

The Salvadoran, Arce, through a mixture of diplomatic skill and military prowess, ultimately managed to "pacify" the Nicaraguan combatants, who were in a general state of exhaustion.¹⁴ The Salvadoran returned triumphant to Guatemala, where the Central American Constitutional Assembly had decreed the Constitution of the new Federal Republic of the Center of America late in 1824, and disassembled in January of 1825.

The constitution was federalist in character, due to the

numerical weight of provincial deputies, who were opposed to a centralist framework. Rather than doctrinaire, the centralist and the federalist positions were an expression of the historical identities involved. Guatemalan notables such as the Aycinenas, for example, were preeminent in every way: their status was the highest in their city, and their city was at the pinnacle on the isthmus. Not surprisingly, they were staunch defenders of a centralist government whose power would be concentrated in Guatemala. Lesser Guatemalan notables, in contrast, might be willing to underplay their localist claims to superiority if it meant bringing down the Aycinenas a notch or two.

In contrast to the dominant Guatemalan clans, those of subordinate cities like San Salvador and provinces like Costa Rica (which under the colonial regime had been partially under the administrative jurisdiction of León, Nicaragua) were inclined to federalism. San Salvador's most prominent cleric, for example, long bent on creating an autonomous diocese, was able within a federalist framework to defy Guatemala's archbishop. Similarly, the federalist framework allowed Costa Rica to imitate San Salvador by creating a diocese independent of Leon -- a goal long cherished by Costa Rica.

The issue of the diocese was a crucial matter both for the localities and their notable families: an independent diocese ennobled the identity of a city, and elevation to the bishopric in turn ennobled the prelate's clan. Given these

dual stakes, moral passions were especially keen. There were, for example, excommunications and counter-excommunications of leaders, with the faithful taking sides and refusing to receive the sacraments from priests who opposed their leaders.¹⁵

The federalist framework also called for each of the five member states of the federal republic to draft a constitution for purposes of internal governance. These constitutions were written between 1824 and 1826, with Salvador being the first and Nicaragua and Honduras being the last. Finally, the federal constitution called for the election of a federal government -- executive, legislature, and judiciary; and for the election of five state governments -- Chief of State, legislature and judiciary.

Of these institutional positions, the federal presidency was the preeminent, followed in rank by that of Chief of State (one for each of the five countries). Their ineffable desirability set off a struggle at the first federal congress, which met in Guatemala in February of 1825, and was supposed to elect the president and other federal authorities (no majority had been won by either candidate); and to sanction the constitution.

"Betrayal" was the struggle's most discernable pattern. Former "serviles" (now "centralists" and self-identified "moderates") controlled the congress, yet they abandoned their candidate, the Honduran Valle, and supported Arce, the

Salvadoran liberal who had "pacified" Nicaragua. The driving force behind this about-face were Guatemalan centralists who had never been able to trust their Honduran candidate, and had chosen him simply because they mistrusted the Salvadoran even more. But after Valle's paradoxical intervention in Nicaragua (recall that his envoy ended up fighting on the side of the "anarchists"), the Guatemalans found him even less trustworthy. Arce, on the other hand, had gained enormous prestige in Nicaragua. Moreover, Guatemalans feared that San Salvador might not recognize the federal government if Arce was not elected. So, if Arce was willing to assure the Guatemalan centralists that he would not insist on an autonomous bishopric for San Salvador, then he would be their man.¹⁶ Arce gave them the necessary assurances, and he was declared president.

The pact between Arce and the "centralists" was rooted in the parties' complementary gambles. The Guatemalans, by accepting the "enfevered" Salvadoran as president, sought to neutralize the danger of localist resentment from San Salvador and preclude war. Yet by extracting from him the promise not to support a Salvadoran bishopric, they not only defended their own city's preeminence but also began to drive a wedge between Arce and his fellow Salvadoran Liberals (the majority of whom were federalists). The liberal Arce, for his part, sacrificed the federalist principle of the autonomous bishopric for his native San Salvador and his relative

Delgado, but in exchange got the opportunity to become President of the Federation, a position whose status and resources he immediately deployed in an effort to conciliate former "serviles" and "enfevereds" -- many now identified as centralists and federalists -- whether Salvadoran or Guatemalan.

His conciliatory attempt backfired. Fellow liberals felt betrayed by the President, and ridiculed him in their newspaper. President Arce, for his part, set out to defend his institutional prerogative, and warned Guatemala's liberal officials not to transfer the seat of their government from Antigua to Guatemala City, which was already the site of the Federal Authorities.¹⁷ The liberal government did not pay heed, and settled in Guatemala City, where its leaders soon clashed with the Federal Government. In short, the liberal camp was internally torn as its notables strove for absolute preeminence.

Alienated from other liberals, the President sought refuge in the former "servile" camp, which took him in, but on their terms. Soon the President found himself in league with the very priests who had branded him a "heretic" and the families that had waged military war against him during the Mexican empire.¹⁸ But as we will soon see, this alliance between the liberal Arce and the Guatemalan "serviles" was riddled with suspicion, even as the animosity between Arce and his fellow liberals became increasingly clear to all.

In Nicaragua, too, the search for unity seemed futile. During the temporary peace that followed Nicaragua's "pacification" by the Salvadoran leader, elections were held for deputies to the first constitutional assembly and for the offices of Chief and Vice-Chief. Looking for ways to prevent acrimonious disputes between camps and between the office-holders themselves, Nicaraguans turned to the idea of the family as source of harmony. They chose two relatives -- Cerda and Arguello -- to fill the posts of Chief and Vice-Chief. That both men were descendants of Spaniards and both were liberals, made each of the two trustworthy to the warring camps but only up to a point. That they were members of the same extended clan, seemed in the eyes of all to lessen the chances that the one would betray the other.

Ironically, of the two relatives, it was the more traditional Cerda who won the support of the "enfevered" caudillo, Ordoñez. So it was Cerda who was elected to the position of Chief. Furthermore, to promote stability in Nicaragua, Ordoñez, whose eloquence and charisma earned him the sobriquet of "The Wizard", retreated to Guatemala as part of the peace arrangements established by Arce, now the president of the Central American republic. The agreement also called for the exile of the eloquent Bishop of León, who had become the leader of the Managua camp. In short, institutional unity was arranged on a familial basis, and the leading orators, seen as unsettling forces, were banished.

But no sooner had the executive and the legislators taken possession of their offices than they were in a keen struggle over institutional supremacy. In less than a month, the new Chief, Cerda, felt himself surrounded by "untrustworthy" men, and requested that the Constitutional Assembly call for municipal elections "to elect men who adhere to order and love of patria".¹⁹

The assembly denied the request. The Chief, however, would not desist. He articulated the reasoning behind his request more fully, alleging that

[because] the municipalities were formed in moments of disquiet ... most of the representatives] are ignorant men who have been led by the wicked ... mayors now support disorder in most of the pueblos and give free rein to insults.²⁰ [emphasis added]

In short, it was the belief that evil could daze the ignorant -- a belief as old as the conquest -- that impelled the Chief of State to disregard the outcome of electoral procedure. But such disregard could only heighten the institutional fragility of the new government -- the very fragility that now made "insults" so threatening.

In the emblematic culture, insult campaigns were at once a natural practice and a potential source of disorder. Such campaigns had posed no mortal threat to the colonial regime: its institutions survived even as actors attacked one another's identities. In contrast, in the post-independence period, actors became embroiled in a struggle over identity

which for centuries had required monarchical arbitration for final resolution.

In an attempt to provide such resolution, the new Chief issued the "Decree for Good Government", which prohibited "all personal attacks using insulting expressions."²¹ The Chief also insisted once more on the need of new municipal elections. And again, the assembly chose to "leave the Municipalities as are."²² Stumped, the Chief of State turned to the Federal Congress for assistance. Much like a colonial governor looking to his monarch for intervention, he wrote the Congress and attached copies of the correspondence between him and the Nicaraguan Constitutional Assembly as proof of that body's contribution to disorder in Nicaragua. He then requested that the Federal Congress issue a law preventing intervention by the Nicaraguan assembly in the functions of the Executive, so that the "Government [might] consolidate itself".²³

But as had been the trend for centuries, localist de facto autonomy proved far more effective than central authority. And as had been previously the case, such de facto autonomy was exercised under the moralist veil of a new kind of dramaturgical obedience. Accordingly, the Nicaraguan Assembly paid homage to the institutional sanctity of the Chief of State even as it deposed Chief Cerda. To manage these seemingly contradictory tasks, the Assembly ordered the Chief to resign only after he was accused of "criminality" by his

own relative and Vice-Chief.

This attack on his identity took the Chief by surprise. He stepped aside, and his relative assumed the post of acting Chief. In his new position, Arguello demanded that the remaining Salvadoran troops that had "pacified" Nicaragua leave the territory immediately.²⁴ The demand might seem curious given the frailty of the peace, as well as the "partisan" sympathies between the new acting Chief and the Salvadorans. But the acting Chief was impelled by strong reasons to take charge without interference from any troops other than his own. As can be gleaned from a manifesto he addressed to his fellow Nicaraguans, the acting Chief was now to be the lone champion of the forces of good. As if rising above the war of insults, and without the military support of a foreign contingent, he upheld his virtuous persona and assumed the responsibilities that came with it. The profile was archetypical.

After two years of disturbances, which produced the most disastrous fratricidal war ... the spirit of evil has set the majestic march [of peace and tranquility] on the retreat ... I have been unable to ignore the clamor of an anguished patria which for a second time asks for my sacrifice, and have assumed the high post of Supreme Chief and taken my oath ... you shall find in me a protector whose sole purpose will be the exact compliance with his oath until the State is completely consolidated.²⁵
[emphasis added]

As in Nicaragua, in Guatemala insults between camps both reflected and confirmed underlying animosities and suspicions.

By attacking the image of a foe, insults went to the core of identity, thus creating a profound sense of collective insecurity. "If no punishment is set for those who slander in newspapers," the intellectual and politician Valle ventured, "those who have been slandered retaliate in kind; nations will become uninhabitable. From one libel we would go to another. Vengeance would lead to the spilling of blood; and political societies would succumb to chaos, death and horror".²⁶

The sense of impending and inexorable chaos conveyed by Valle was more than philosophical: just like Arce had become tied to the "serviles" by a tenuous alliance, now Valle himself was allied to the "enfevereds" against his foe, Arce. In short, each camp was internally fragmented, and the fragments were entering into treacherous unions. Within this context of insecurity, actors assessed one another's measures through an increasingly murky veil of suspicions.

For example, when President Arce cited the violence in Nicaragua as the reason for increasing the federal army to 4,000 men, the liberals at the head of the Guatemalan State interpreted his reasoning as a mere pretext. In their view, Arce and his conservative allies were preparing to attack them. Conversely, Guatemala's liberal government cited a possible invasion from Chiapas and began to make military preparations, leading President Arce to suspect that the liberal Chief of State was plotting a coup against the federal government. Finally, the federal president deposed Guatemala's

Chief.²⁷

The remnants of the deposed government, led by the Vice-Chief, moved to Quezaltenango, where they issued a series of anti-clerical laws that provoked a mob attack on the liberal leader. The mob tore the liberal notable "literally limb from limb, and the liberal government collapsed".²⁸ Given the shared theatrical practice of "inexorable collective ire", the liberals suspected the president and his allies of inciting "the mob of fanatical Indians", as one American historian called the offended believers.²⁹

Significantly, the liberal government of El Salvador, "betraying" Guatemalan liberals and aligning itself with Guatemalan "serviles" and "centralists", supported the Federal President. The reasons for this "perfidious" about-face are telling. First, Arce was the nephew of San Salvador's preeminent liberal cleric, who in turn harbored hopes that eventually the President would find a way to recognize Salvador's bishopric. Second, Salvadorans were bent on having the Federal authorities transferred to a location other than Guatemala City, and insisted that the federal authorities establish residence at least 40 leagues from Guatemala (other states made a similar demand).³⁰ And on this last matter if the Salvadoran clans -- be they former enfevereds or serviles -- could hope for understanding from anyone it was their compatriot Arce.

Thus, when Quezaltenango rose up against the President,

San Salvador (along with Costa Rica) assisted him with troops against the forces of the state of Guatemala. The authorities in San Salvador also advised President Arce to call for new elections in the state of Guatemala.³¹

President Arce ordered the new elections, which resulted in the ascent of Aycinena -- whose identity had gone from faithful royal subject to independist to servile and now to self-described moderate. The elections, however, brought about neither stability nor trust-building. In Guatemala, the new Chief, like the Chief who had just resigned in Nicaragua, when faced with insult campaigns, issued a decree restricting freedom of expression.

Nor did the alliance among Arce, Guatemalan centralists and San Salvador's "enfevered" liberals and federalists bring stability to the rest of the isthmus. The liberal Chief of Honduras, Dionisio de Herrera, in a letter to his conservative cousin, Jose del Valle, reported the uncovering of a "bloodthirsty plot" against him; a plan so horrible it made "humanity tremble". Referring to his antagonist, the caudillo Irias, he spoke of an "infamous, indecent, and perverse" foe who operated through "priests" and "emmissaries".³² Acrimony between the rivals reached a point where the bishop excomulgated the Chief, who was consequently declared provisional executive by the assembly. The Chief retaliated by putting the prelate in prison, which in turn led various localities to disavow the Chief.

In his letter, Chief Herrera also anticipated an external attack from the Federal President (Arce), who had given marching orders to San Salvador. And he remarked that he, Herrera, was in "close relations" with the Chiefs of Nicaragua and Costa Rica, who were in turn adamant that Honduras disregard any decrees from the federal authorities until and unless they were transferred from Guatemala to another country.

The Salvadoran troops triumphed in the Honduran city of Comayagua, and Herrera was sent to jail. Troops from Leon also fought in Honduras, until they too were defeated. But as rancor and suspicion continued to play themselves out, the perception of identities changed radically, so that the most prominent Salvadoran foe of annexation to Mexico (Arce) finally came to be known as a servile, while a vocal Guatemalan advocate of annexation came to be regarded as a liberal (Galvez), and a Guatemalan official (Barrundia) in the administration of the stern captain general in the days before independence came to be seen as a liberal. Finally, the crucial alliance between President Arce and his uncle dissolved when the latter began to suspect that the former's sympathies might be with the Guatemalan Archbishop after all. The turning point came when President Arce "betrayed" his uncle by allowing the Guatemalan Archbishop to publish a "jubileo del ano santo" which excluded the "jubileo" of San Salvador, where the metropolitan diocese was not recognized.

Suddenly, President Arce and his uncle, the liberal cleric, were estranged, and the government of El Salvador withdrew its support from the Federal President.³³

The repercussions of this alliance-dissolution were wide-ranging. Guatemalan liberals in exile denied recognition to the new authorities of Guatemala, while in Honduras the Chief of State openly repudiated the Federal President. In Nicaragua, the acting Chief, just as his tenure was coming to an end, repudiated the president, too. This repudiation, in turn, led a group of Nicaraguan deputies to break with the acting Chief and to set up an autonomous government in Granada.

At first glance, the crisis about to erupt in Nicaragua was a simple power struggle. The assembly had had to choose between two candidates for a Chief and a Vice-Chief, neither one of whom had obtained a majority. One of the candidates was the acting Chief, Arguello, who had turned against his relative, the former Chief Cerda. But as a narrative of the events published by the anti-Arguello forces shows, there was a familiar depth to the power struggle at hand. Specifically: the nature of identity, as well as past practices and a shared discourse, once again caused high instability in government.

The drama of inexorable collective ire, for example, was deployed by Arguello, who brought crowds of supporters to the galleries, from where they shouted at the deputies, who in turn insulted one another. Four of the deputies were for the

acting Chief, seven were against. And it was the latter who voted in favor of transferring the assembly to Granada, so as to escape the charged atmosphere of León.

But according to our anonymous pamphleteer, Arguello was driven by "the frenzy of his ambition" and "accelerated his machinations". Specifically, Arguello declared the new assembly "without faculty", and he distributed "alarming papers and lies" filled with "falseties" designed to "hallucinate" the "pueblos" into "disobeying the assembly".

From there on, the narrative continued in the manner typical of its genre, proving in minute detail that this was a battle between "men of good" and a "blood-thirsty monster". The narrative concluded with a rhetorical attempt to free ordinary Nicaraguans and Central Americans from Arguello's hypnotic power by revealing his "true" identity.

Pueblos! Learn from Arguello's conduct, and do not to allow his words to daze you. He proclaims patriotism, love for the system, abhorrence of tyrants. But in his deeds all one can find is ambition, despotism, oppression, cruelty and crime ... Federal States of Central America ... see that [in Nicaragua] justice is persecuted, the law is treaded upon, and anarchy is enthroned because of the intrigues of one ambitious man.³⁴

b. Central American Unity: The Young Family and Its Eternal Foes

Amidst anarchy and conflict, Central Americans continued to write off on their manifestos, letters and decrees with the motto, "Unity, God, and Liberty". And rather than discard the

analogy between familial and national harmony in the face of severe internal fragmentation, Central Americans gave the analogy greater specificity on a host of issues, ranging from restrictions on the freedom of expression to foreign relations.

Nations, the Honduran notable and orator Jose C. del Valle said during an intervention as member of the Federal Congress, ought not interfere in one another's affairs because

a family has no right to foment divisions in another. One people has no right to engender discord in another... Nations are in a state of nature vis a vis one another, and morality is the bond that must unite them.

Indeed, the belief was that the state ought to exercise caution in dealing with foreigners precisely because the national family's security was at stake. Valle, for example, opposed contracting a foreign firm to open up a canal in Nicaragua because, "a prudent paterfamilias does not bring strangers to make improvements on his farm" but "either uses his own capital or borrows".³⁵

And as in the case of family clans, in the national family, tranquility depended in great measure on reciprocal respect by its members for their most dear possession -- a virtuous and honorable identity. Hence Valle's warning to the Congress that "men can do harm with their words", and his

contention that because calumny and offense could be lethal, all the civilized nations -- ancient Rome, Spain, England, France -- constitutionally declared "those who defame and slander" "prisoners" to be "punished".³⁶

But clinging tenaciously to the familial metaphor reaffirmed the suspicion on the part of traditional power-holders that repudiation of their authority was merely part of the divisive agenda of the family's enemies. Once-predominant cities felt besieged by "anarchic" rivals. Leon, for example, saw itself as threatened "by an invasion of factious elements from Granada, Managua and Rivas, who reject the obedience which they owe to the legitimate government".³⁷

Conversely, the provinces, which had been in a subordinate position to Guatemala City, used the familial metaphor to distinguish between authentic and false family members. Accordingly, San Salvador notables accused Guatemala City of being inhospitable to the federal government and to "true" Central Americans (Salvadorans, Hondurans, Nicaraguans and Costa Ricans).³⁸ Rivalling leaders, too, could not find common ground precisely because they shared identical assumptions about national unity and the role that as superior men of virtue they had to play in the vertical organization of authority. From the perspective of power-holders, attempts by others to head the national family were no mere impudence. Such bids unmasked aspirants and revealed them to be no more than leaders of "criminal factions", their pronouncements no

more than "indecent" expressions of their intent.³⁹

In combating such criminality and indecency, only the eloquence of sincerity offered hope in the fight against the "mesmerizing" power of "denaturalized men". This is what the acting Chief of Nicaragua said to its "inhabitants":

I have addressed my unadorned words to you ... to inform you of events. My purpose has been to be understood by all, in the language of truth, with the frankness characteristic of a freely-constituted, legitimate government, which need not resort to imposture or calumny in order to give credence to its public conduct ... Nevertheless, some of you have allowed yourselves to be dazed by the malice of denaturalized men, lending your ear to seduction, deceit, and feigned flattery ...
[emphasis added]

In typical fashion, the Chief's narrative went on to pit the villainous centralists against the noble federalists, the former advocating concentration of power in Guatemala, the latter fighting for decentralization. However, the Chief's narrative also depicted the federalists' virtue as expressed through their government's paternalist benevolence.⁴⁰

In the civil war of 1827, Nicaraguans displayed even greater ferociousness than in the war of 1824. But the justifications of the camps remained virtually unchanged. After the acting Chief succeeded in killing the leader of the dissenting camp in Granada, the Chief's new commandant in that city issued a manifesto to the pueblos of the Department of Granada justifying the execution as fair punishment for "betrayal" of the electoral process by an elected official.

According to the reasoning running through the manifesto, the outcome of a legitimate procedure was invalidated when, ex post, the elected official, through his "diabolical machinations", showed his "depraved spirit", and thus made it legitimate for the "valiant sons" of the patria to rescue her from that official's "evil and perfidy".⁴¹

Though the acting Chief prevailed in Granada, the Villa of Managua, determined to depose him, turned to his predecessor -- his relative, the former Chief. The antagonistic camps -- now led by two caudillos who were kin and former allies -- waged a savage war. On one side, the military commanders were in the habit of presenting their caudillo with the mutilated ears of the vanquished; on the other side, they mutilated the nose of those who were spared from execution.⁴²

At the narrow level of the leadership, the hatred was exacerbated by feelings of familial betrayal. For example, Arguello's wife was a daughter of the Chamorro clan, and she could not forgive her kinsmen and their allies for fighting against her husband. Her kinsmen, in turn, denigrated her with insulting labels that compared her to a loud marketwoman.⁴³ In the emblematic culture, the comparison was profoundly painful, for it accused a notable family of attracting attention to itself in a fashion that transfigured its image into that of a social being without honor or morality -- the woman who deals in the marketplace.

But at the deepest level, the struggle remained a clash between good and evil.⁴⁴ Moreover, in the fashion characteristic of the emblematic culture, the clash was a huge public drama which shamed Nicaraguans before the "theater of the world" -- meaning civilized nations. Consider the motivation that led a Guatemalan notable to found the newspaper "El Guatemalteco" in 1827.

As a Guatemalan, I am ashamed that foreigners should see that in my country no one writes or reads; and I fear that they should take us for barbarians. If they see that there are newspapers they might believe that they are read ... My newspaper shall serve a purpose similar to that of fake cannons in merchant ships, which give respect to the vessel by deceiving with its appearance those who look at it from a distance.⁴⁵

~~Up close, the reality was indeed alarming. The Nicaraguan~~
civil war was rife with atrocities, leading the president of the Central American federal republic to despair.

Nicaragua exists no more, except as a horrifying lesson to be studied by all who wish to govern the Republic [all five states of the isthmus]. Nicaragua's qualities made it the most valuable State of Central America, but now it is destroyed by atrocious butchery; assassinations, banditry and all kind of violence have established their throne [in Nicaragua].⁴⁶

And San Salvador, so recently supportive of President Arce, now marched against its favorite son. Once the preeminent liberal on the isthmus, the Salvadoran President of the Central American federation was now supported by the

conservative Chief of Guatemala. Indeed, the Salvadoran, once the military commander who led San Salvador's defense against invading Guatemalan troops, now took command of a Guatemalan army marching to confront Salvadoran troops, in turn now supported by Guatemalan liberal exiles. In the military confrontation between Guatemalans and Salvadorans, President Arce not only prevailed but chased his own countrymen as they retreated to El Salvador.

Just as in Guatemala and El Salvador allies were turning into foes, so too in Nicaragua. The popular caudillo, Ordoñez, returned from exile to assist his fellow liberal -- the acting Chief -- in the war against the former Chief, but the two liberals were soon embroiled in a contest for dominance and status. Disunity among these two allies, however, did not translate into a gain for their common enemy, the former Chief, who wrote to the Federal President:

Anarchists commit excesses. I lack resources. I have no staff I can trust. The departments of Segovia and Rivas are no longer willing to help. Ordoñez [the popular caudillo] was repelled in Granada, but is already allied to Hernandez [another caudillo], and both are working against Arguello [the Acting Chief].⁴⁷

Indeed, the former Chief felt besieged:

The government is surrounded by anarchists of depraved ideas, the citizens flee into the countryside.

The former Chief's hopes, as he wrote in 1827 in a letter to

the federal authorities, lay with the federal president, who seemed to be winning in his military campaign against Salvador. The former Chief also expressed the conviction that his enemies at home were bent on allying with San Salvador in order to destroy the Central American "motherland". "I continue in power," the former Chief concluded in a self-abnegating note, "simply to save the patria".⁴⁸

The fate of the patria, of course, would be determined by the war between Guatemala and El Salvador. The war dragged on until El Salvador came to believe it might lose, and in a time-buying bid, offered negotiations to the federal president, which he accepted. The president's Guatemalan allies immediately suspected him of harboring affection and a merciful disposition toward his countrymen and former comrades. The war was resumed, only this time, fate turned against the president, who lost hundreds of men. The defeat was especially significant for the President's Guatemalan allies, who saw it as evidence of his perfidy.⁴⁹

Under suspicion, Arce abandoned his post as military leader, then returned to Guatemala to resume his duties as federal President. Early in 1828, however, as mistrust between him and his conservative allies developed into open hostility, the president left the presidency. Now he sought refuge in the great power of the day -- eloquence, and began to publish *El Diario de Guatemala* in an effort to garner popular sympathy and to form his own army.

In Nicaragua, the former Chief, who had placed his hopes in the outgoing President, managed to hold on to his military forces (even though he felt surrounded by traitors, to the point that he executed his highest ranking military officers, two Colombians). Even less fortunate was his foe, Acting Chief Arguello, who had to flee to Salvador after being deposed by his own ally, the caudillo Ordonez.

From exile in El Salvador, the deposed acting Chief issued a manifesto to the "inhabitants" of Nicaragua. The text reveals in synthetic fashion the enduring link between identity and political narrative, as well as the cultural profundity of the discourse of good and evil. Issued from the pinnacle of a "Supreme Vice-Chief", the manifesto opened with the self-assertion of a virtuous identity under siege. Thus, Arguello began,

[I write] to vindicate my honor and reputation which my rivals try to obscure and even attack with invectives and malignant and arbitrary suppositions. ... for over two years I have given up sleep and made sacrifices for the sake of our common cause of liberty and in support of the Federal system adopted in the Republic ... twice I tried, but [my resignations] were not accepted by the Assembly, and was forced to continue in command, sacrificing for the patria ...

In the spirit of self-sacrifice, Arguello, against all odds, valiantly fought criminals and factions as they strove to fragment the country. He opposed the "arbitrary reconstitution" of the Assembly in Granada and was on "the

defensive", with only 100 men.⁵⁰

Being on the defensive, however, was not enough for Arguello's followers in Leon and Granada once it became clear that in Guatemala the federal president (now an ally of Guatemalan centralists) was out to dominate the federalists. Should this come to pass, both Granada and Leon stood to lose their chance at autonomy in Central America and at preeminence within Nicaragua. Managua, in contrast, never having had illusions about its importance on the isthmus, might find a modus vivendi with Guatemala, and with its help perhaps even emerge predominant among Nicaraguan cities. Thus, as Arguello said in his narrative,

The opinion that Managua should be attacked became widespread. Though authorized ... by the Constitution to use force against insurrection, I refused to put it into effect, because I lacked means and troops, and wanted to avoid spilling American blood. Moreover, the capital of Honduras was at the time in danger of being invaded by federal troops. I tried to provide assistance.

At that point in the narrative, however, the inexorable force of the people, and rampant suspicion (now turning against the leader himself) militated in favor of attacking Managua.

But public opinion asserted the contrary, and insisted on an attack on Managua ... and since I continued to refuse, the rumor spread that I did not want to attack Managua for particular reasons. Other specious notions were spread, which were alarming and fomented revolution and disturbance of the public order. To avoid one or another evil, I found myself compelled to order the formation of a force against the insurrection in Managua (half of

which went to Granada).⁵¹

In Arguello's narrative, he obeyed public opinion, but others who should have, did not. Even the caudillo Ordoñez, his ally, repaid him with disobedience and even treachery by "plotting a revolution". The "treacherous" Ordoñez was dangerous because he had eloquence on his side, and could "daze" people into submission. Moreover, Ordoñez proved cunning even in desperation. In a theatrical ploy, the villain appealed for clemency.

He presented himself before me, claiming to be in the most deplorable state of health, and implored me to allow him to retire to his house to convalesce, offering to retreat to a pueblo if his presence even indirectly disturbed the peace. Moved by humanity to compassion, I agreed to his request. He retired to Hernandez' house, where they completed the plan that later exploded.⁵²

The plan that "exploded", as we saw, culminated in the ousting of the acting Chief, who put his case to the people from exile in Salvador. The city of León, however, now perceived him as a source of instability, and formally requested the government of Salvador to "retain" him while general elections were conducted in Nicaragua.⁵³

Arguello was not the only leader perceived as a source of instability by his own followers. His foe and relative, the former Chief, sought to persuade the public to convene the extant assembly, so that in turn this body would either elect

a new Chief or call elections.⁵⁴ The assembly, however, dug in its heels, and resisted the idea time and again.⁵⁵ Simply put, no one wished to obey anyone. In Leon, even the popular caudillo, Ordoñez, was overthrown by the municipal government, whose members and military officers felt that the caudillo looked upon them with "disdain".⁵⁶ Indeed, mutual disdain was the norm. Leon's municipality, for example, took preventive measures against "disorder" by ordering citizens to report on those who attacked others with insults and slanders.⁵⁷

The municipality also created a junta with sovereign pretensions. The liberal troops of León and Granada continued to create and change governments, each invariably retaining their sense of autonomy and even challenging the other's. In March of 1828, for example, Granada's Chief disagreed with the municipality of León for judging

the pueblos free to give a new constitution to the state based on the erroneous principle that they find themselves in a state of orphanage [emphasis added].⁵⁸

Finally, Managua, too, was in rebellious spirit, and turned on its caudillo, Nicaragua's former Chief, Cerda, who fled to the department of Rivas in search of greater security. Soon thereafter, his relative and foe, the Vice-Chief returned incognito from exile. War between the kinsmen raged again, until the (former) Vice-Chief captured the (former) Chief.

By then, Arguello, seething at the betrayal by Ordoñez,

was flirting with his own foes, who were receptive now that they were increasingly dissatisfied with their own caudillo, Cerda. Indeed, Cerda's capture was carried out with the assistance of some of his relatives and local followers. They seized him at a vulnerable moment (he had recently suffered a military defeat), and delivered him to Arguello.⁵⁹

A military court was promptly organized, and a death sentence was handed down. The day of his public execution, the pious Chief Cerda heard three consecutive masses before facing the firing squad. His corpse was left exposed for all to see. But even before the birds of prey could fall upon it, a man with a machete -- shouting expressions of moral outrage -- quartered the first National Chief of Nicaragua.

It was 1828, and Arguello's was a Pyrrhic victory. The municipal government of León, once his bastion, as if expressing the popular contempt felt toward all Nicaraguan leaders, decreed that to cease the war "between pueblos that are brothers", Arguello be recognized as Vice Chief solely for the purpose of convening elections; that once the elections had been conducted, he was to retire to one of the pueblos of the department of Granada, except the Villa of Managua, so as to remove all suspicion of bribery or graft; and that for the sake of tranquility, Arguello could not be reelected.⁶⁰

Barrio after barrio seconded the decision. The barrio San Juan de Dios was more explicit still.

For two miserable years Arguello has kept us involved in a calamitous war... Will anyone wish to succeed this man whose criminality has been proven in the public sessions of this municipal building? It is contended that only he can convene [elections]. We understand he is no more than an instrument to communicate the decree which can only be issued by a legislative body. And if this does not exist and we do not have an executive? What shall we do in orphanage? Seek a more legal means to constitute ourselves ... Let him convene [elections], but no more. Otherwise, we shall resist.⁶¹

Arguello was not without support. As the León authorities put it,

We understand that the satellites of the former Vice-Chief seek to support him against all opposition, even against the indestructable base of public opinion. And given that there is no other authority under such critical circumstance, this Municipality decrees that the Comandante General is to block all communication that the tyrant might establish with the pueblos of Chinandega, Viejo, etc. That these pueblos be informed, so that aware of our justice, they refuse cooperation with the tyrant who seeks to dominate us.⁶²

Once again, Nicaraguans were "orphans" determined to fight against their "brothers" should they try to impose a pater who was revered by some and abhorred by others. However, all Nicaraguans could agree on the notion that obedience was a virtue, that the nation was a family, and that where once the king had stood now ruled the constitution -- a divine document in their eyes (and lettre morte in ours).

As for the localities and cities, unable to establish mutually-agreed stability, they settled for mutually-agreed

paralysis. So-called peace treaties formalized the intricate arrangements.

The treaties between the government of Segovia and the government of Leon are ratified on condition that Segovia cannot under any circumstances attack Granada, and should this happen, either by Segovia alone or in alliance with Managua, then Leon will succor the people of Granada and attack Managua.⁶³

Managua and León, too, entered into a similar "peace treaty". Indeed, when Arguello attacked the Villa of Managua, the Villa, invoking the terms of the treaty, asked for assistance from León.⁶⁴ But León failed to comply. Managua faulted Arguello.

Arguello's occult hand, guided by the ancient maxim of tyrants -- divide and rule -- tries to undermine the social edifice which is grounded in the peaceful union of pueblos, and prevails in its advances because of the pueblos' credulity. Segovia, the Department of Leon and this Villa entered into inviolable treaties of peace and alliance. But now the authorities of this Villa look with pain upon the fact that as this Villa suffers the most unjust attacks from Arguello, allied pueblos, such as those of the department of Leon, look upon her fate with certain indifference, and have even tried to block the assistance that Segovia might provide [Managua].⁶⁵

If Arguello was indeed behind Leon's noncompliance, he was merely undermining an already weak sense of solidarity among the allied localities. Moreover, if Arguello pursued a "divide and rule" strategy, he succeeded only partially. He divided; but he did not rule in Leon, where his intentions were deemed

suspect at best. On February 9, 1829, the municipality of León declared that Arguello had no supporters to help him "enthroned" himself.⁶⁶ Finally, the municipality, in rapid sequence, disavowed Arguello's decree of convocation, elected a new Political Chief, agreed on the "expulsion of the factious", took preventive measures against an attack from Arguello, ordered his trial, and arranged for the creation of a "weekly" newspaper to "publicize the ideas of the true system".

c. Struggle Over the Federation: Good and Evil Revisited

To say that opportunistic alliances were forged according either to localist or familial interests, is to say that they were struck in pursuit of a moral goal: the defense of virtuous identity and attendant worth. By the late 1820's, it was common throughout Central America to see former allies turn into foes, and vice versa. Their sense of moral outrage, however, was a constant. Defeat at the hand of a rival notable, for example, was offensive to another because in their shared theatrical games of deceit, the central objective was the preservation and improvement of rank -- in turn a reflection of one's identity and worth.

Thus, in 1829, Guatemalan liberals, in an effort to prevail over their former ally, Aycinena, suppressed their own localist sentiments and forged an alliance with the man who was preparing to invade their country: the Honduran liberal

caudillo, Francisco Morazán. For his part, Aycinena, now dominant within Guatemala, set out to protect the preeminence both of his clan and his locality. Not surprisingly, he was a "centralist" who advocated concentrating as much authority as possible in Guatemala City, the residence of the Federal executive.

Also not surprisingly, Aycinena evoked suspicion among his rivals in his own province and among those of other provinces, particularly in cities that had long resented Guatemala City's dominance. Thus, San Salvador harbored Aycinena's Guatemalan enemies, who, like Morazán, demanded that Aycinena resign as Guatemala's Chief of State and that his ally, the Salvadoran liberal, Arce, resign as president of the Central American federation.

Their refusal to do so "obligated" Morazán to make ready to invade Guatemala. In the meantime, Aycinena's enemies inside Guatemala argued that their country should break away from the Federal government, a move that would have further isolated Arce. Soon there were two governments in the state of Guatemala, a liberal one in Antigua, which supported Morazán; the other in the capital.

Finally, in April of 1829, Morazán prevailed militarily in the capital of Guatemala. The Federal President (Arce) and Guatemala's Chief of State (Aycinena) went to prison. Now Morazan, like Arce before him, demanded new elections to change the functionaries of the Guatemalan state. In the

interim, he would be the latter's acting head, while the Guatemalan liberal, José Barrundia, became the president of the Federal Republic.

Morazan's victory over Guatemala City represented a victory of the provinces over the collective identity which, in their eyes, for so long had unjustly subordinated them by feigning its superiority of character. As in 1823, in 1829 the winners strove to construct an effective "national" government for the five states while repudiating "unjust" exercises of power by that government.⁶⁷ In Nicaragua, the city of León celebrated each of Morazan's triumphs as if they were the fulfillment of providential design. Upon receiving the news that [Morazan's] army, "the protector of the law", had emerged victorious after an important battle, the municipality decreed that there was to be ringing of church bells. And upon receiving news of Guatemala's capitulation before Morazán, the municipal government called for the celebration of "a solemn mass in the Cathedral to give thanks to the Almighty".⁶⁸ Finally, the municipal government decreed that the "patriotism" of the barrios was to be "incited" so that they would put on festive displays and celebratory "entertainments" as "best they could".⁶⁹

Morazan's victory established the regional dominance of the liberal alliance between Honduras and Salvador. Harmony within the individual states, however, did not flow naturally from the liberals' military triumph, or their alliance. In

Nicaragua, for example, Leon's municipal government had annulled its peace treaty with Managua, and threatened both Managua and Arguello with war. Finally, in July of 1829, Morazán decided to pacify the areas in Nicaragua and Honduras still fighting a civil war. He crushed the rebellion in Honduras, and instructed Nicaraguans to recognize Arguello as Chief of State.

After reiterating its disavowal of Arguello's legitimacy, Leon's municipal government decided to heed the orders of the Federal Government and recognized Arguello as Chief of State. The language of the municipal decree is telling.

By order of the Federal Government, Juan Arguello is recognized as Chief of State.

[this municipality] ratified the separation of the Vice Chief [Arguello] impelled by the torrential of public opinion which decidedly disavowed him.

[But now] taking account of the horrible state of orphanage of our peoples, it finds it recommendable to second the votes of such honorable and meritorious officialdom [members of the Federal Govt.] which has always been distinguished by the noble pride which great deeds inspire, and by love for independence and the federal system.⁷⁰
[Emphasis added]

Obedience to the federal government, however, was not unconditional. León recognized Arguello for a limited period, until there was a "convocatoria", calling for new elections. Nor did the continued aspiration of electoral democracy imply a change in mutual perceptions. Again, León accused the "evil

men who dwell in the city of San Miguel" of intercepting the mail dispatched to the federal Government in an effort to prevent the public announcement of the "convocatoria".⁷¹

Furthermore, the clash between good and evil, as always, became the core of the new narrative -- the core of history as story. Morazan's manifesto to the Central Americans pit "the efforts and sacrifices of the "free" in Salvador and Honduras and their illustrious allies in Nicaragua and Guatemala against their evil foes, who even "robbed humble huts, violated virgins, and took the lives of anyone who lived in them".

But as had been the case at previous turning points, the new official narrative, this time imposed by Morazán, required adaptation if there was to be hope; if there was to be a future for Central America as a viable nation. Once again, denial about the internal divisiveness that plagued Central Americans provided a temporary escape route. "Such ferocity," Morazán declared,

[was] not credible in Central Americans, who have always distinguished themselves by the sweetness of their character and their humane sentiments. Men of a different character must have been amongst them, inciting them, keeping their tenacity, encouraging their fierceness. And indeed, later it came to be known that they had relations with Spaniards of Trujillo and Havana.⁷²

Denial, however, could not explain the villainy of the Central American leaders deserving of punishment. Those, Morazán

treated as innately corrupt. And what about their Central American followers? How did Morazan justify their conduct? They, predictably, had been misled.

Former President Arce seems to have been born to incite civil war and bring woes upon the peoples whose cause he has feigned serving, when in fact he had no other than his own. If he worked for Independence it was to aggrandize himself. He offered the state of Salvador to Iturbide on condition that he would be its ruler. Cowardly, he delivered the plaza of that State to General Filisola. In order to get the votes of Nicaragua, he flattered both parties, thus sowing discord between them. And finally, after the peoples of the Center of America heaped honors upon him, he tried to subjugate them. He undermined their constitutional laws, persecuted their legitimate authorities, attacked his own patria, and was the first author of the civil war and the calamities that Central America has suffered for over two years...⁷³

In short, Arce's liberal deeds, once lauded by other notables like Morazán, had been a sham; the artful career of an impostor. And against this background of stark villainy, Morazán, like so many leaders before him, now offered his own sincerity and self-abnegation as swords against their "internal enemy".

Peoples of Central America: my frank character and your interests compel me to inform you of the storm being gathered against you and the dangers that surround you. It is up to you to discover the internal enemy; it is up to me to offer you once again the sacrifice of my life and my rest. Keep united. Repel discord and partisanship. Beware of the forces of deceit and of the machinations of all those who sow distrust against true patriots. [the

wicked] are well known; the revolution has exposed them, so you cannot make a mistake ... Soon I shall march to confront the enemies of the Republic.⁷⁴

Conciliatory efforts, too, were premised on a sharp distinction between good and evil. The champions of the former were to exorcise the latter from the nation and thus reconstitute the national family. To this end, in April 1830, José Barrundia, as president of the republic of Central America, named Dionisio Herrera, Morazan's uncle, as "Conciliator, Mediator, and Provisional Chief of Nicaragua" -- a country which, as Barrundia put it, found itself "in utter disorganization after a long and calamitous civil war". Herrera was also instructed to "convene elections, clear the path for election through mediation and negotiation, and punish the factious".⁷⁵

Finally, the distinction between evil and good -- again applied within the context of the familial model -- was the basis for the pacification policy to be implemented in Nicaragua. Consider the manifesto Herrera issued to the Nicaraguans.

This horrible monster that has dominated the State of Nicaragua has poisoned the hearts, has banished familial peace and banished the benefits inspired by kinship and friendship, by gratitude and paisanaje [local ties] and all other relationships of love and solace ... has corrupted morality, the most solid foundation of freedom and other rights ... Nicaraguans, do not drive me to resort to force; do not compel the entire Nation [Central America] to march upon you, as will surely happen if you are deaf to her clamors for peace and

harmony ... let us persuade the outside world that if in Nicaragua there are wicked men there are also good citizens, virtuous men who know the value of honor and probity ... [emphasis added]

Herrera handed down his warning as a national paterfamilias whose duty was to rid the corporate body of the "wicked" and restore its unity. And as "head" of that body, he alone was to utter goals and directives and to articulate disciplinary principles.

Military men, listen to the voice of the patria, which speaks to you through me: do not wage war on one another; do not slit your brothers' throats... The sons of Managua and Segovia, Leon and Granada must form a single family ... and defend one another from the external enemies who threaten to rob us of everything we have.⁷⁶

Nicaragua's disunity, of course, was not solely Nicaragua's problem, as it damaged the image that the Central American "family" presented to the world (at least in the minds of the region's notables). Thus, in May of 1830, when the Honduran (Herrera) assumed his position as Provisional Chief of the State of Nicaragua, he stressed the point that: "Nicaraguan society is a member of a greater society [Central America], which gives responsibility and power to each of its members; and which presents them as a single nation before the other nations of the world".⁷⁷ This fact could only add urgency to Herrera's mission. Soon, he purged the municipal government of Managua, getting rid of people suspected of supporting "the faction" and replacing them with "trustworthy" people. He then

proceeded to his residence in Granada. Leon was no longer the capital city. In a final act as Chief of State, Arguello, claiming that León could not afford him the necessary security, took revenge on the city by designating Granada the seat of the capital. The irony merely illustrates the convoluted paths of Central American politics: Arguello, once a popular leader in León and a foe of Granada, felt betrayed by the former, and in order to punish it, was willing to favor the city that had rejected his leadership.⁷⁸

The issue of trust remained crucial in the rest of Central America as well, because rivalry over institutional preeminence continued to provoke struggles and shifting alliances among notables and localities. Prominent liberals, for example, turned on one another precisely because they clashed over matters of prerogative, their struggle pitting, among others, two Guatemalan liberals against one another -- Barrundia, interim President of the Federation, and Molina, Guatemala's Chief of State.⁷⁹

In 1830, the Legislative Assembly ordered the trial of Pedro Molina, the head of the Guatemalan liberal party and Chief of State of Guatemala. The trial was sponsored not by conservatives, but by other liberal notables, among them Barrundia.⁸⁰ Indeed, in May of 1830, Barrundia tendered his resignation in response to counter-accusations levelled against him by pro-Molina congressmen. In a gesture of self-abnegation, Barrundia addressed the Congress.

It is both my duty and my right to separate myself from power. I have the satisfaction that organization and tranquility prevail, and that I have earned the approval of patriots. I therefore vehemently request Congress to put an end, at this agreeable moment, to my modest career, thus rewarding the painful sacrifice I made by obeying the law. If only one particular enemy of myself and federal authority were making accusations, I would not even think about it. But other, respectable, patriotic representatives have suscribed to the accusations, which makes me fear their influence on public opinion, the base of all good government. Therefore, I must not remain [in power] one more day.⁸¹

The majority in Congress, however, rejected the resignation, citing Barrundia's address, which "revealed" his "genuine and liberal principles" and his "patriotic vigilance and good sentiments".⁸²

An internal dissolution of the liberal bloc was thus postponed. By the end of 1830, Morazán had Nicaragua and Honduras under control, was military head of the Federation, and mantained his alliance with Guatemalan liberals.

Still, El Salvador now posed an increasingly serious challenge to Central American unity in general and to liberal dominance in particular. In 1831, Salvadorean conservatives headed by Arce revolted, and though Morazán prevailed once again, he was unable to establish a sufficiently strong national government, in good measure because El Salvador continued to fear and mistrust Guatemala. In February of 1832, the Salvadoran Arce invaded Guatemalan territory, only to be defeated by one of Morazan's lieutenants. And the State of El Salvador disavowed recognition of the authorities of the

Republic.

Guatemalans, too, harbored localist resentments of their own. Under the colonial regime, Guatemalan notables had often fought with the Captain General and other Spanish authorities over prerogatives, and had grown accustomed to exercising influence over the governance of the entire region. Their sense of entitlement did not cease with independence. And it did not cease in 1831, when Morazan became President of the Central American Republic. Indeed, a tug of war between Morazán and his fellow liberal, the new Chief of State of Guatemala, Barrundia, was soon underway,⁸³ adding to Morazan's troubles, which included various rebellions throughout the isthmus, most notably from Salvadorans.

Caught between the hostility of the Guatemalan Chief of State and the defiance of various camps in Honduras and Salvador, Morazán decided to strike out against both by transferring the federal capital from Guatemala City to San Salvador. In January of 1832, Morazán announced that the federal congress had authorized the move.

The residency of the federal authorities in Guatemala has served continuously as a pretext for complaints and disagreements between these authorities and the state of Salvador. The latter has habitually resisted laws issued by the national congress based on the erroneous opinion of the sons of Salvador that in Guatemala everything is done through 'intrigue, as a result of the immediate influence of Guatemalans and their spirit of capitalismo' [allegiance to their capital city and attendant sense of superiority], to quote a distinguished Salvadoran San Salvador maintains that its complaints are not heard in Guatemala, and in order to obey the national authorities 'thinks

it necessary that [these authorities] should be closer, so that [San Salvador's] voice can be heard more clearly and be better understood ...'⁸⁴
[emphasis added]

Morazan's reasoning was quite similar to that of the Mexican emperor, Iturbide, who once had sought to gain the allegiance of Central Americans partly by promising them direct access to his ear, unimpeded by the kind of intermediary power-holders who, under the colonial regime, had blocked or diminished creoles' access to their "benevolent" king. And in this strict sense, Morazan's proposed transfer could only be appealing to Salvadorans. But the latter also knew that Morazán was making the move in part to be better located to deal with insurrection. And so, Salvadoran troops stopped Morazán on his way to San Salvador. He in turn "requested" further instructions from the national senate, which instructed him to wage war on El Salvador.⁸⁵

Morazán issued a decree publicizing his reasons for waging war. There were three: first, the "machinations" of Manuel José Arce, which "threatened the nation" from its borders with Mexico; second, the "machinations" of the "foreigner" Vicente Dominguez (an Arce lieutenant who was not a Central American), which "threatened the nation from Omoa". Finally, the third was that El Salvador not only "[resisted] the authority of the federal government" by "not providing the assistance required, but [had] separated the country from the union".⁸⁶

Soon thereafter, Morazan's uncle, Herrera, as Chief of State of Nicaragua, issued a decree in which he declared that his government no longer recognized El Salvador's government as legitimate or constitutional.⁸⁷ Herrera also imposed contributions on the State of Nicaragua to support Morazán, and placed the Nicaraguan contingent under Morazan's command.⁸⁸ In his reasoning, Herrera revealed a perception of the "nation" as an emblematic identity, with an image and honor to protect, not only from external attack, but also from the internal offenses of sinister leaders capable of duping the "simple" and "gullible" people by force of sheer eloquence.⁸⁹

Ultimately, Morazán entered San Salvador victorious. In March of 1832, he reported his victory in a brief circular to the Ministers of the Federation: "At this moment I have occupied this plaza by sheer force, with divisions from Honduras and Nicaragua ... Long Live the Republic!".⁹⁰

Control over San Salvador by no means guaranteed regional stability. Guatemalans, for example, were more than ever in the grip of localist suspicions. A Guatemalan writing in the early 1830's put it succinctly: "Morazán is not the son of Guatemala. He is the representative of San Salvador and Honduras in the task of destroying Guatemala". Indeed, even key Guatemalan liberals were once again a problem for Morazán, though this time the problem did not begin with Barrundia but with Molina. Accordingly, pro-Morazán Nicaraguans in the

National Congress led a counter-attack on Molina. In typical fashion, they issued a broadsheet addressed to "El Público", or The Public. Their avowed purpose was "to exterminate the wicked", particularly Molina, "whom we are certain is more evil, more prejudicial, and a worse traitor to the patria than the Salvadoran functionaries who are in prison ... for having broken the federal pact and taken up arms against the supreme authorities".⁹¹

Yet how did liberals explain this turnabout in Molina, the preeminent member of their ranks? Perhaps he was in the thrall of a less worthy person.

Molina has been misguided by a drunken, noisy woman [his wife], thus committing political errors that have spread discord, ignited civil war, and covered the nation with blood and mourning ... displaying [his influence] in the papers that he publishes so frequently to affront the most distinguished patriots ... we are his enemies because we profess different principles. Our political faith is liberty, peace and order; Dr. Molina's is employment for himself and his family, as well as commotion and servile submission to his wife's precepts".⁹²

The attack on Molina's wife brought Central Americans full circle since independence. To begin with, the attack impugned her character on the basis of the leading role she had played in gathering the crowds that had pressured the Guatemalan cabildo into drafting the declaration of independence from Spain. Thus, liberals now attacked one another for behavior displayed by all in the pursuit of a common cause. Once more,

common practices were acceptable one moment, objectionable the next. Moreover, their partial and imperfect interpretations of events were again articulated in the shared absolutism of the discourse of good and evil. Accordingly, the pamphleteers concluded with a warning: the patria would take revenge against the "bats" that dwelt "in dark caves"; against the "monster always thirsty for Central American blood" and who had "offended the patria".⁹³

Yet even as Guatemalans turned on one another, mistrust of Guatemala continued unabated among the rest of Central America. The Guatemalan Assembly admitted as much when other Central Americans began to clamor for a fair trial, outside of Guatemala, for the Salvadorans who had rebelled against the Federal authorities: "It is insinuated in connection to the trial of the Salvadoran prisoners, that Guatemala exercises undue influence on the Federation, which goes against the sons of other states".⁹⁴

Conclusion

Between 1821 and 1833, the pressure of intra-state and inter-state mistrust and conflict was unrelenting in Central America, as was the breaking and making of alliances. Throughout, however, Central Americans held on tenaciously to two visions. One upheld the procedural sanctity of elections. The other was ideological, and it idealized the national family. Thus, the organization of institutions and their

guiding worldview were not the central point of contention. Rather, rivals fought for the right to institutional preeminence and for the privilege of "leading" the family to its natural state of perfect harmony. Simply put, Central Americans fought for roles and rank, in turn the visible expressions of moral worth, or more precisely, the tangibles of identity.

Struggles over role and rank, however, were not easily settled. Time and again Central Americans "elected" their leaders, and time and again, feeling they had been "duped" by the elected, deposed them either militarily or through trickery of their own. Also, time and again they exalted familial harmony, which they sought to ensure by "purging" the corporate body of "wicked" elements (who were often one and the same as the elected officials). In short, the suspicion that came with a long tradition of dramaturgical obedience now invaded and sabotaged the workings of novel institutional arrangements.

The result of this internal corrosion, as we have seen, was a gradual chipping away at the federal system, which only became increasingly ineffectual with time. Even the Liberal camp contributed to this debilitation, to the point that on January 27, 1833, the Liberal Chief of the State of Guatemala, Galvez, declared the state of Guatemala as antecedent to the Central American Federation.⁹⁵

In the next chapter we will see how the Federation

finally collapsed under the pressure of intra- and inter-state jealousies and rancor. This led the most violent of all the five states, Nicaragua, to look for the resolution of its own ongoing struggles by refining its view of the "national family".

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CHAPTER 9

From Anarchy to Paternal Governance and the National WarIntroduction

Central America remained a federal republic until the late 1830's, bound both by the ideological force of the "familial" organizational model and a shared fear of foreign aggression. But as we saw in the previous chapter, the Central American "family" was internally fragmented from the start. Indeed, the earliest violent conflicts came about as a result of insoluble conflicts over preeminence within the "natural order": that is, within the familial model of government.

In practical terms this meant that even as Central Americans felt compelled to form a single republic in 1824, rival identities still disputed one another's "true worth" and proper rank. From this perspective, Guatemalan centralists found the federalist constitution too permissive of state autonomy, and Salvadorans in general found it too favorable to Guatemala. As early as 1825, the Salvadoran legislature sought to "correct" Guatemalan de facto dominance with a decree which stated that no federal law could be applied in Salvador without its prior approval.

The localist tensions undermining the federalist framework transcended camps. The Salvadoran decree, for example, was a liberal project, yet it was the liberal

caudillo Morazan, who annuled it after he rose to federal power in 1829. And it was still during Morazan's tenure that, in 1831, Salvador disavowed federal authority. Morazan, at the head of Guatemalan troops, restored federal authority, but at a cost. In Salvador, the impression that Guatemala was the "despot" of the federal republic deepened; and resentment grew over this "monstruous" situation.'

Moreover, localist and clannish drives for dominance within each of the Central American states led to violent inter-regional entanglements. By 1833, the states of the Republic, particularly Nicaragua, were internally divided between those clamoring for reform of the federal constitution and the liberal defenders of the status quo. The former sought a reduction of federal prerogatives; the latter sought their preservation. Their divergent stances reflected their conditions as "winners" and "losers" in the extant distribution of status and power.

Conflict over status and power, we have seen, was at base conceived as a moral and existential struggle between true and false identities. Hence the entrenchment of suspicion and the intractability of conflicts. This chapter demonstrates that, by mid-century, rivals came to share the view of paternal government as the solution to "anarchy". Underlying both the fear of anarchy and the paternal solution was a conflation of "difference" and "disorder". For example, in the early 1830's, the liberal incumbent in Nicaragua believed that opinions on

the constitutional issue ought to be rendered "uniform". For uniformity, in turn, would deny "harbor" to the "wicked", taking away from them "the opportunity to express their passions and satisfy their vengeance".²

This was also the discourse at the core of official exhortations to peace. In this discourse, civil war came of the opportunity that differences of opinion afforded "evil". And war in turn threatened the core of morality: that is, "sacred religion" and its commandments, institutions and rites.³

Finally, this was the discourse of the pro-reform movement, which in Nicaragua defied local governmental authority, and forced the liberal Chief of State to rely on the military strongmen of the country for his very survival in office.⁴ The rebels spoke of their "loss of trust" in the incumbent.⁵ And they presented this loss as the culmination of an unfolding narrative plot -- a familiar story depicting a manichean universe in which "evil" incited violence while "virtue" tried not to "scandalize the world".⁶

Thus embedded in the discourse of good and evil, loss of trust not only gave Nicaraguans license to disobey their Chief, it also forced them to choose between loyalty to him and loyalty to their society.

You [the Chief] are considered the root-cause of social dissolution ... Pay heed: Public opinion conspires not against the government but against your person and your administration.⁷

But in fact, the next elected Chief of State faced the same type of repudiation, with the additional complication that in his case the two military strongmen who had jointly supported his predecessor were now at war.⁸ In typical fashion, the fighting between the military caudillos was triggered by the election itself, as the two commandants and their rival cities, Granada and León, competed for control of the government. Agreed on the rules of the game -- elections -- neither could trust the other to play fairly; rumors of deception, even when quickly proven false, were enough to sabotage electoral procedures.⁹ And once war exploded, the antagonists could not trust one another to engage sincerely in peace negotiations.¹⁰

a. Justification and the Future

At the conclusion of the war, the discourse of good and evil, so central to political struggle, was marshalled to explain its outcome; to justify both victory and defeat. In politics, the victorious commandant of León told the legislative assembly in 1834, the forces of light and dark do battle. The latter foment "remembrance of old rivalries", the former promote their "perpetual forgetfulness"; and where the former offer their "frankness", the latter meet them with "impostures". Faced with this fact, the victor could do no less than order the execution en masse of the military

officers under the command of Granada's vanquished caudillo.

Moreover, this harsh measure would serve as the foundation of future governance. The military victor, now as Chief of State, became the "father" who reluctantly punished the "infidelity" of those "wicked" pueblos which, "mistaking the executive's frank and humane language for weakness", engaged in "scandalous" disobedience."

If the government's paternal response to infidelity and disobedience was legitimate within the context of the nation as family, the national family was the "ideal" because it linked the "natural" and the "moral". This maxim applied both within the individual states and at the level of the federation. Indeed, the federal system, for liberals as much as for conservatives, was "not a creation of men". Rather, it was a reflection of the "natural" universal order, which was in turn the "stupendous work of the Creator". If there was a problem, it was with the constitution, which "denaturalized" the federation.¹²

"Denaturalization" legitimated disavowals of federal authority. Conversely, the preservation of authority required the identification of rebels with "factions" that threatened the "integrity" of the natural order. In 1834, the bloody military confrontation between El Salvador and President Morazán turned on these two complementary oppositions, both of which derived from a shared worldview. For as long as this vision remained intact, military victory, like elections,

could not guarantee stability, as rivals, in a strategic effort to advance both the cause of the "natural order" and their own standing within that order, forged tactical alliances.

But if tactical alliances enabled the parties to carry out practical tasks, these accomplishments were invariably temporary. The alliance between President Morazán and Chief Gálvez, for example, enabled them to organize a federal government and to convene a federal congress that was overwhelmingly Guatemalan. In addition, Morazán, backed by Guatemalan troops, finally managed to transfer the Federal District to San Salvador. In short, Morazan and Gálvez both seemed to be on the verge of a historic resolution that would benefit Guatemala and Salvador, as well as promote the cause of Central American unity. The day Morazán transferred the Federal District to San Salvador,

Guatemalan functionaries accompanied their federal counterparts for about a league, stating their wishes along the way that the transfer would have the desired consequences ... the Chief of Guatemala vowed to the Federation's President and Senators that Guatemala would be as obedient from a distance as it had always been.¹³ [emphasis added]

Morazán was leaving behind a self-declared "dutiful" Guatemalan Chief of State, but he was also "imposing" the federal capital on the Salvadorans. This was ironic. As we saw in the previous chapter, Morazán had initially been driven to

seek the transfer by the hostility of the Guatemalan Chief of State toward the President and by Salvadoran complaints that their "voice" could not be "heard" in Guatemala City.

Such ironies only added to the misreadings of Central American politics by outsiders and insiders alike. Because Central Americans lacked the discourse that would have enabled them both to articulate to themselves the moral depth of their strategic objectives and to justify their tactical measures, their struggles over rank appeared to outsiders either as naked contests for power or as selfless attempts to save the nation. In other words, outsiders took the discourse of archetypal identities at face value. Thus, the observer John L. Stephens saw a stark contrast between the unionists in San Salvador and other Central Americans:

[San Salvadorans] are the only men who speak of sustaining the integrity of the Republic as a point of honour ... They [are] resolved to sustain the Federation, or die under the ruins of San Salvador. [Listening to them] was the first time my feelings had been at all aroused. In all the convulsions of the time I had seen no flash of heroism, no high love of country. Self-preservation and self-aggrandizement were the ruling passions. It was a bloody scramble for power and place.¹⁴

Just as the clarity of the outsider's judgement depended on a superficial reading of the motives involved, the veil of suspicion that alienated insiders depended on an equally erroneous interpretation of "the other".

[Salvadorans] did not speak in the ferocious and sanguinary spirit I afterward heard imputed to them in Guatemala, but they spoke with great bitterness of gentlemen ... who, they said, had been before spared by their lenity; and they added, in tones that could not be misunderstood, that they would not make such a mistake again.¹⁵

Misreadings in politics obviously matter because they influence our actions in the short term. The ferocity and mutual disdain of the camps could not be explained otherwise, particularly if we take into account the rapidity with which foes became friends (and vice versa). Guatemalan "serviles", for example, now allied themselves with the Indian Caudillo, Carrera (whom they had dreaded). And Morazán, who had had to fight Salvador, now marched at the head of Salvadoran and Honduran troops against Guatemala and Carrera. Yet, Morazan and his troops came into Guatemala shouting "Slit throats! Slit throats!" and "Long Live the Federation"¹⁶ not because they were naturally inclined to do so, but because they felt compelled by others to do so. The same applies to the Carrera forces, which by next morning were claiming the "extermination" of the "aggressors".¹⁷

Misreadings, in brief, also shape our long-term views -- our vision of the world we inhabit; and thus they tell us not only what reality is, but also what we must do if we are to survive in it. Unable to break the vicious cycle of "deceit and revelation" that eroded intra-camp solidarity and entrenched inter-camp suspicion, Central Americans found themselves fighting former allies to the death while former

foes fought on the same side of these wars. Baffled, our observer Stephens noted that only a

[a] year before, the people of Guatemala, of both parties, had implored [Morazán] to come to their relief, as the only man who could save them from Carrera and destruction. At that moment he added another to the countless instances of the fickleness of popular favour ... [Now] denounced personally, and the Federation under which he served disavowed, he had marched against Guatemala.¹⁸

As Central Americans forged and broke alliances, mutual anticipation of betrayal rendered unstable institutional arrangements designed to manage localistic pulls and clannish drives within the individual states. In Costa Rica, for example, the "ambulatory" presidency was instituted so as to distribute fairly the prestige and power of the executive among rival localities and their notables. Thus, the executive resided in various cities, spending a fixed amount of time in each. In 1835, however, the city of Cartago, once preeminent under the colonial regime, remained the object of suspicion among rival cities. The notables of Cartago, for their part, could tolerate neither the loss of their city's preeminence nor the distrust of its rivals.

The municipal government of Cartago argued that it very much aspired "to a sincere peace and a permanent union, when as a single family and our wishes in unison, we shall affirm our glorious Independence." Cartago, however, went on to

qualify the statement:

If ... on some pretext, that which can be restituted is not, ills shall grow, and the most eloquent proposals for union shall be taken as puerile, because it is innate in man to miss that which he has always possessed and distrust he who unjustly took it away. This idea grows with remembrance, and causes agitation and turbulence which invariably lead to harmful and painful consequences.¹⁹ [emphasis added]

b. Discursive Potency and Anarchy

Ironically, if Central Americans lacked a transformative discourse that could have been employed to reformulate their vision of societal harmony and political competition, they also clung tenaciously to their faith in the transformative power of discursive eloquence. Impelled by this faith, governments and opponents alike founded their own "newspapers", all of which seemed to depart from the premise that an impassioned writer could explain the inexplicable.²⁰ Thus, the first Nicaraguan official paper announced in 1835 that:

The voices of the servile and the liberal are today received in their proper meaning. They have been substituted by the voices of the enlightened, the virtuous, the meritorious, the men of probity and good sense.²¹

On the official view, the virtuous had come to power in Nicaragua, and for this reason, the expectation that socio-

political life would naturally reach a point of perfect harmony seemed at last confirmed. So why the need for the "special tribunal" which the government had set up to deal with dissenters? The official publication replied as follows:

Observing this brilliant scenario of tranquility, peace and constant order, all of which are the result of the veneration and respect given to equal guarantees and public liberty, enthusiasts of these same liberty may find it curious that, amidst all this peace, a special tribunal has been formed to judge the raucous. But this must not induce horror.²²

Repression of the "raucous" ought not cause alarm because, as the newspaper's motto said, "Liberty is more frequently destroyed by excess than by its enemies". In other words, now that power was in the proper hands, and fundamental harmony had been attained, the crucial task of governance was the protection of limits -- limits which those who succumbed to excess transgressed.

Inciting turmoil was the most deplorable of transgressions for Central Americans, who, perceiving themselves as bearers of an "image", had always despised "scandal". But we have also seen that even Central America's proudest notables had a tradition of secret political agitation and "mob" violence. Indeed, "collective ire" remained essential to the political theatre that preceded the imposition of official policies. The Nicaraguan Congress of 1836, for example, approved the reforms of the Federal

Constitution in order to avoid an "explosion" among the "pueblos".²³

But if inexorable collective ire served governments, it also served revolution. In 1837, for example, a mob executed the same Chief of State who only recently had declared Nicaragua to be in a state of enlightenment, the protection of which required the "special tribunal". Predictably, a group of Leon's notables and military officers operated behind the facade of the "mob" in a successful bid to eliminate the Chief (who was an ally of Morazán and was himself working to maintain the federation).

And as always, political camps abhorred the deployment of theater by others, yet privileged it among their own array of practices. Thus, the new government ignored the behind-the-scenes planners of the assassination, and concentrated its punitive force on those who had actually seized the victim. The government then singled out the leader of the mob for execution.²⁴ But identifying the embodiment of "evil" in a particular individual was not enough. The problem remained that the "evil" had been committed by one of Leon's own "sons". Hence the need to specify the "kind" of evil that had impelled the mob leader: a "cannibalistic" impulse explained the disruption of order from within.²⁵

Finally, isolating the "human beast" who had turned against his own kind and devoured them was not enough to maintain the order that had been restored. That difficult task

called for a constant attempt at the "moral" education of the public. Hence the creation of the official paper, Aurora de Nicaragua, or Nicaragua's Dawn, which departed from the explicit premise that: "A people without morality cannot endure; a people with morality not only preserves itself but progresses".²⁶

The publication of such newspapers was quickly becoming common among governments and opponents alike. The year of Nicaragua's Dawn also saw the emergence of the anti-government Nicaragua's Sentry. Put out by exiles living in Salvador, the paper's objective was "vigilance" and criticism of the government, as its name implied. Moreover, as newspapers engaged in verbal warfare, readers and actors alike fed into their ongoing disputes by issuing "hojas sueltas", or broadsides, which either supported or refuted the allegations made by rivals.

As in the case of colonial narratives and post-independence journals, the twin object of these broadsides was to "reveal" the merits of the "truly virtuous" and to "unmask" vile impostors. Reacting to an issue of the anti-government Sentry, a broadside printed in León charged that an "impudent hand" was trying to foment the kind of "disturbances" that had culminated in the killing of the Chief of State. The broadside concluded with a threat. "The Sentry has done nothing but slander grossly the current administration and utter falseties which it will see painfully refuted".²⁷

Mixed with the notables' acrimonious disputes were their discursive efforts both to make sense of a crumbling federation and to articulate the ideological foundations of unity for the future. The task was not a simple one. By 1838, leaders faced a bleak scenario, as one state after another proclaimed its independence from the Republic which, by 1840, no longer existed. Compounding the inter-state jealousies and rancors that tore apart the federation were the mistrusts internal to each of the states and their camps. In Guatemala, for example, the liberals combined with Morazan to bring down the state government led by fellow liberal Galvez, going so far as to propose that the legislature confer the title of "Benemerita" -- Notable and Worthy-- on the city of Antigua for sheltering the armed opposition.²⁸

The speech given by the deposed Chief during his trial by the Legislative Assembly suggests that intra-camp political struggle remained a zero-sum game between emblematic identities.²⁹ Indeed, when the deposed functionary named the representatives in the Assembly whom he felt ought to recuse themselves from the proceedings, they turned out to be the preeminent members of his own camp.³⁰ They were the ones, said the former Chief, who could not participate in the proceedings in which his "good name", "more dear than life," was at stake.³¹

Finally, intra-camp conflicts were inextricable from inter-camp and inter-state hostilities. Between 1838 and 1840,

for example, Morazán fought Rafael Carrera in Guatemala, as well as state leaders in Honduras, Nicaragua and Salvador, who openly rejected the President's authority. And in Costa Rica, an anti-Morazán caudillo deposed the Chief of State and assumed power.

Caught in this web of animosities and violent conflict, "liberals" and "serviles" alike came to share a profound fear of "chaos". Throughout the states, the dissolution of society itself no longer seemed unfathomable. But what was the solution? A liberal notable who had been a major participant in the independence movement and was now an ally of Morazán condemned "excess" as the culprit.

All passions share the same property: total abandon. It is in this property that pleasure lies. To enjoy a passion, it is necessary to deliver oneself entirely into its arms, without thought or care for the consequences. This is what happened to us with Independence.

And excess was usually the result of the "divergence" inherent in a plurality of opinions. Central Americans, our liberal argued, had lived under "the illusion" that they knew liberty, when they only knew "half". So they paid dearly, falling into "chaos". Indeed, "disunity and imprudence" had led them to "the brink of an abyss", at which point, the "barbarian" -- Carrera -- seized the opportunity.

Thus, the Central American liberal warned,

If we disunite again and surrender to disputes, if we deliver ourselves to liberal plans and notions of inalienable rights, this barbarian shall rise again, or perhaps another one who does not know how to read or write [Carrera was illiterate].

If unity would come of the awareness that the foe could rise again at any moment; success would come from "outsmarting" the enemy.

The ancients waged their wars more through stratagems than brute force, and the most memorable victories were won through guile. In war, Saint Augustin said, artfulness and valor have the same rank ...

And in the land of masks and impostors, outsmarting the enemy depended not only on the astuteness of the virtuous but also on seeing the true nature of the enemy.

Barbarians, even though they frequently utter the word "Religion", in truth have no virtue or morality or any humane propensity. They understand "Religion" to mean apparitions and superstitious practices. True religion is a code of virtues and morality, of gentleness and union among men, of practicality and civility ...

But once victory was attained, then the ideal world -- free of deceit and suspicion -- could be constructed.

Because of our good comportment and rectitude of intentions we shall reestablish trust ... We shall enter a new order, a new life, a new path; we shall navigate under the two stars of our purpose: forgetfulness of the past, brotherhood for the

future.³² [emphasis added]

Until then, however, disorder remained a threat for liberals and opponents alike. "Anarchy" was as dreaded by pro-federation camps as it was by the anti-federation forces; and "anarchist" was their shared insult.³³ More importantly, "revolution" became for incumbents a "reactionary" force, propelled by "ignorance" to destroy "civilization".³⁴ Hence the dilemma of governments which came to power by force: their mission was to establish unity and structure, but without the open deployment of violence.

Once again, they solved the dilemma by resorting to theater; that is, by creating yet another variant of dramaturgical obedience. Thus, when in 1839 the caudillo Carrera became the de facto ruler of Guatemala, he proceeded to establish a "civilian" government. But when the civilian Chief of State defied the caudillo's supremacy, he was quickly persuaded into renewed submission by an armed group of men who fired shots at his door. As if he had nothing to do with the attack, Carrera came to the rescue of the Chief, thus asserting the importance of his military power to the survival of the civilian incumbent.³⁵

And as in the past, such theater entrenched suspicion and rancor. The "farces" put on by Carrera offended liberals, one of whom wrote a poem connecting the caudillo's misdeeds to his humble origins. Carrera, said the indignant liberal, was a

"Son of misery and of nothingness". Or borrowing the colonial terminology, Carrera was "immoral" because he was a "no-one". Soon, however, Carrera's liberal critic was to be "converted" to "servilismo" ("servility"), and once a convert, he was commissioned to deliver a speech laudatory of the "serviles".³⁶

In Nicaragua, a similar dynamic had led to behind-the-scenes military dominance. In 1838, Nicaraguans drafted a new constitution, which reduced the faculties given to the Executive by the constitution of 1826, changed his title of "Chief of State" to "Director of State", and stipulated that administrative periods were to last two years. At the same time, the new constitution created a Supreme Military Power -- Comandante General de Armas -- which was nominally subordinate to the executive. Significantly, the first man to occupy the military post was the leader who had instigated the mob assassination of the Chief of State in 1837. In other words, the manipulator of inexorable collective ire now rose to power. And for the next decade, it was military men who, after vanquishing their foes, would reach for the highest office in the land, from where they would fight off the incessant attempts of contenders to wrest away the most cherished symbol of social and moral worth.

But as coups debunked governments in various states and war raged among them, foreign observers reached a familiar conclusion. The British consul, for example, opined that

the war which is carrying on between several of the States of this Republic involves no public principle whatever, and is a mere struggle between the members of two or three families for acquiring direction of public office.³⁷

The Consul failed to see that foes felt compelled to fight because they believed they saw the "truth" about one another. In their struggles, they sought self-vindication -- in the form of emblems, status, power, and pecuniary compensation.³⁸ And once vindicated, they entertained the dream of peace based on "forgetfulness" of past horrors.³⁹

On this tabula rasa, they might begin the labor of moral edification that would in turn preclude future institutional disarray. Hence the creation of yet more newspapers, one of which, under the heading "Morality", argued that the problems of society came from disobedience to the Christian injunction: Love Thy Lord God Above All Else, and Thy Neighbor as Thyself. Solution would come from adherence to this commandment.⁴⁰ The ultimate hope was that Central Americans might put in place a new federal pact that guaranteed their union and therefore their safety from the rapacity of foreign powers.⁴¹

However, this was the time when Morazán, the great champion of the federation, saw his camp as "submerged in calamity". Addressing his foes, he complained: "You have never dared face us, and instead insult us ferociously through your printing press". Indeed, he claimed that "serviles" had been the enemy of the patria through its national history. At every turning point -- 1821, 1823, 1826, 1827, 1828, 1831, 1835 --

they had committed "atrocious crimes" and "perfidy" and "vengeance", while Morazán and his allies worked for "liberty".⁴²

And yet, when Morazán returned from exile in 1842, he incited the mistrust that disunited Central Americans in the first place.⁴³ The government of Salvador, for example, protested when it "heard" that Morazán had "introduced" himself and his officers into San Miguel, where they recruited soldiers without previously consulting with the authorities in the capital. The government saw this as "hostile conduct toward the State of El Salvador and all the others in the Republic" and as negating Morazan's "avowed intentions" which "now are clearly seen as nothing but a ruse." Finally, the government concluded, "if your intention is not to promote a fratricidal war in the State that has conferred upon you so many distinctions, you must retreat to the Port of La Unión".⁴⁴

Morazan's reply gives us an indication of the intractability of collective suspicion.

If I left the Port of La Unión to go to San Miguel it was precisely to calm down the agitation of many people upon hearing the news of my arrival ... [because of specious stories about my designs on the capital of the State, my presence] would have provoked similar disturbances in other places, disturbances for which I would be blamed by those who always seek a pretext to wage war on me, even though the facts attest that my intent is to promote the fraternity and reconciliation of all Central Americans.⁴⁵

His explanation fell on deaf ears. The government of Nicaragua, in its official newspaper, urged the people to assist the government of Salvador in its fight against Morazán, whose characteristic "subterfuge" had blocked Central America's reorganization.⁴⁶

Morazan's "subterfuge" would not have been effective and Central America's "reorganization" would not have been necessary if the societies of the region had not been so deeply divided. Indeed, Morazán now found support in Cartago (Costa Rica) because the former capital city set out to "recover" what it deemed its rightful distinction from San José, the new capital.⁴⁷ Ultimately, Morazán and Cartago prosecuted a successful war against San José.

Upon victory, the notables of Cartago vindicated themselves in a manifesto to other Central Americans. The manifesto touched on a classic theme: trust, truth and family doing battle against the trickery of evil, which had operated through the "guile" of San Jose's deposed leader.⁴⁸

The official newspaper in Nicaragua saw it differently, and had already warned of the catastrophe about to befall Costa Rica.

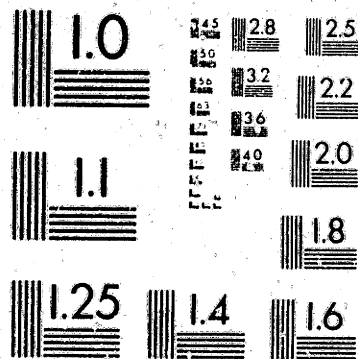
The children of Costa Rica will be torn from the bosom of their families and their honest occupations to be carried off to the field of death, only to serve the goals of this old monster of perfidy and destruction.⁴⁹

By then, Morazán had appealed to the two great hopes that all

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over evil, a victory in which God had played a hand.⁵² Admission to this institutional icon of enlightenment was denied to those who had resisted the power of its divine author. Iturbide's Political Chief, for example, argued successfully that Nicaragua's intendant should be denied participation in the assembly because he had "delayed" for two years Central America's "political march".⁵³

But finding anyone who was "pure", posed a challenge. The Political Chief himself had the merit of having convened the assembly. Yet no one could deny that he had also served his Mexican emperor well. And what about the Archbishop of Guatemala, who had "thanked God" on the occasion of Iturbide's coronation and had branded anti-imperialists as "heretics"? He now assumed the pontifical role in the opening ceremonies of the congress. Finally, most of the assembly's members had tainted pasts. Some had been representatives at the Spanish cortes during the constitutionalist period; others later attended the Mexican cortes during Iturbide's reign (including the preeminent Honduran liberal, Dionisio de Herrera).

So how to redeem liberals and thus clear the way for a new beginning? In one of its earliest decisions, the Assembly produced the first national official narrative in Central America. On this account, independence from Spain had been the natural solution to an insoluble communication problem.

Nature itself resists dependence: this part of the globe is separated by an immense ocean from its

former metropolis, an ocean which renders impossible the immediate and frequent communication that is indispensable among pueblos that constitute a single State.⁵⁴

In contrast, discussions of possible annexation to Mexico had been forced on Guatemalans by "the hidden maneuvers of certain provinces, supported by the ambitious and the deceived". But these ploys, the story went on, came to naught when the enemies of independence were "suddenly terrified" during the general junta "by the enthusiasm of the friends of liberty who, emboldened by the progress of Mexican independence and the example set by Chiapas, decided to overthrow the yoke, even if it meant death". In the days that followed,

victorious liberalism was most generous with its enemies ... A provisional [government] junta was established ... this government proceeded majestically, prudently and reasonably in its early days, as it is obvious from its actas, which today would bring eternal honor to the Provisional Junta were it not for the fact that this self-same Junta later became the most powerful statement of its own imbecility and the dementia of its ideas.⁵⁵

The "imbecility" refers, of course, to the fact that the government junta ultimately annexed Guatemala to Mexico. And it was in explaining this "imbecility" that the author of the Assembly's historical account relied on selective remembrance.

The junta, which occasionally held open sessions, suddenly disliked popular participation and petitions, which it generally discarded, calling

them imprudent. The public spirit that began to develop scared many ... patriotic circles of discussion which tried to enlighten the people terrified the serviles, and certain speeches on liberty and the equality of men led some who passed as liberals to drop their masks.⁵⁶

On this account, then, old allies now figured as false liberals being unmasked by uncontrollable events; and in the passage below, they figured as instigators of appalling deeds.

[the Captain General] printed and distributed [Iturbide's documents and communique] ... [in response] there were celebrations ... Eternal shame for Guatemala! Many personages contributed to this: a base populace, led by mayors and escorted by militias, went out on the streets, playing music, insulting liberals, as it was its habit One beautiful night, a group of sixteen unarmed patriots left the patriotic discussion circle and went around cheering for a free Guatemala. The mayor and his troop found them and shot at them, leaving two dead ... The following day a group of serviles appeared at the plaza demanding the expatriation of pro-liberty citizens. That same day, an edict prohibited meetings, juntas, music, fireworks, ringing of bells ... Some even took their devotion to the Virgen de Guadalupe, whom they had theretofore neglected, as a pretext to form a brotherhood and to dazzle the ignorant multitude.⁵⁷

But these "appalling deeds", we have seen, were in fact shared practices -- at once a spontaneous expression of sentiment and a political instrument manipulated by "enfevereds" and "serviles" alike. Indeed, past exercises of dramaturgical obedience -- particularly the drama of inexorable popular ire -- deepened intra-elite and localist suspicion. In Costa Rica, for example, one of most prominent pro-republican orators was

accused of duplicity, presumably for having engaged in suspicious correspondence with Nicaragua's Intendant, simultaneously seeking an understanding with the imperialists to the north and an agreement with Simon Bolivar to the south. The Costa Rican defended himself before the Provincial Assembly, which absolved him and declared him "trustworthy". This exoneration notwithstanding, the municipal government of Cartago, rival of San José, ordered the republican's arrest, accusing him of "imposture", and asked the Government Junta to expel him from the country. The request was denied.⁵⁸

Everywhere, creoles replayed in their dealings and struggles with one another the gestures and habits they developed in their dealings and struggles with peninsular officials. In Guatemala, for example, the Constitutional Assembly met in open session, harking back to the open cabildo. And harking back also to the double role played by notables in that colonial institution, now the Assembly's orators incited spectators to agitate either in favor or in opposition to particular motions. As epithets went back and forth, the Assembly elected a provisional executive -- a triumverate that included the "enfevered" Guatemalan liberal Pedro Molina and his Salvadoran fellow, the military leader José Manuel Arce.

Soon, the triumverate and many in the congress grew uncomfortable with the presence of Filisóla and his men, even though he had installed the congress and his army had joined

local troops in paying homage to the deputies. In fact, the Central American government now faced a grave dilemma. On the one hand, it could not abide operating in the shadow of a foreign force. On the other hand, its members were compelled to show their gratitude to that self-same force. They were compelled by their moral discourse -- their ideological lingua franca, which exalted the virtue of loyalty above all others. And they were compelled by a fundamental political consideration -- loyalty was the constitutive element used in competitive narratives to construct an archetypically virtuous identity.

Not surprisingly, no one dared be the first to violate the dictat of discourse and identity. But traditional practice provided a way out. Rather than directly request the withdrawal of the Mexicans, Central Americans enacted a justificatory theater, in which, disguised as Mexicans, they perpetrated "hostile acts" that discredited Filisola's troops.⁵⁹ And as in the past, a price had to be paid. The accusations and counter-accusations they subsequently levelled at one another reveal the contempt creoles felt for their own political habits when displayed by a foe. Consider a passage from a booklet published by Filisola in refutation of allegations made against him by several Central American liberals who had been his admirers only recently.

The basest ingratitude, the most blind ambition,
and the worst kind of faith has led the [liberal]

citizens Pedro Molina, Francisco Barrundia, Doctor Gálvez and Juan de Dios Mayorga to smear my reputation in their newspaper La Tribuna, treating me as stupid and rapacious; assuming I allowed my division to commit excesses; and criticizing my operations in Chiapas ...

In the remainder of the text, the aggrieved Filísola retaliated against his aggressors one by one. The Salvadoran Liberal (Arce) was a "cowardly liar", while his Guatemalan homologues (Barrundia and Molina) were

mere manipulators who never did any service to their patria other than incite disorder through anonymous texts and seditious papers written in the dark.⁶⁰

The narrative crafted by the Assembly to unite its members in a shared sense of historical and moral superiority proved ineffective in the face of entrenched divisive practices. Soon after the Mexican troops evacuated Guatemala, and in the context of congressional turbulence and polarization, a Captain Ariza seized the moment and convinced the unpaid and unhappy soldiers to revolt. He then sent a message of obedience and loyalty to the assembly, also claiming that the insurrection was not his responsibility but rather his troops' way of "forcing" him to assume the position of commandant.⁶¹

According to a congressional Acta, "Several deputies gave eloquent and honest speeches against the rebellious conduct of Ariza [the leader of the coup], and asked that he be declared traitor ... " And according to the contemporary historian

Marure, "the people, violently agitated by the vehement speeches of the orators, set out to destroy Ariza".

But the assembly, too, split on the question of Ariza, as the orators' agitation culminated in a clash between "rebels" and "patriots".⁶² Finally, the self-proclaimed military commander, who was being called a traitor and a criminal in congress, attacked the premises, forcing deputies and functionaries of the executive to climb the walls and escape. Thus began a long negotiation process between the government and the commander, who was ultimately persuaded to go to Antigua, where his troops dissolved.

Mistrust between Liberals (enfevereds) and self-defined "moderates" (the new Serviles) persisted, however. The "serviles" suspected the "enfevereds" of having sponsored the coup in order to avail themselves of a pretext to call in Salvadoran troops (sympathetic to the enfevered camp). And as the Salvadoran troops continued on their march, fear spread through the congress that the soldiers would take revenge on Guatemala, which only recently had invaded and vanquished San Salvador. This fear, in turn, led many to clamor for a new executive. The triumvirate tendered their resignation.⁶³

The new triumvirate included the most renowned Salvadoran Liberal of the day (he had headed San Salvador's resistance against Guatemala under Iturbide). In the end, however, even the Salvadoran executive was unable to stop his compatriots, whose commander, upon being asked to return to his country,

replied that he was not sure the government was safe, and could accept orders only from San Salvador.

In the final analysis, "enfevereds" and "serviles" confirmed their mutual suspicions. Enfevereds welcomed the Salvadoran troops in congress. Serviles did the same for the troops from Quezaltenango, which the new triumverate had called in.

The tension between the rival troops finally broke out into open an conflict, which came to an end only after they evacuated the city. After the troops' departure, in the hopes that the constitution being framed would settle all disputes, leaders made an effort at dissimulation of rancorous sentiments.⁶⁴

Conclusion

Even after the loss of the metaphor -- the vision -- which for centuries had governed Central Americans' imagination, localist and personalist suspicions and jealousies continued to interact, in ways both familiar and unpredictable, with the discourse and narratives political actors employed to make sense of their past, present and future. As we have seen, the lack of an ideology independent of the monarchy, its attendant worldview, and its system of rewards and punishment, perpetuated the core of colonial practices and, at the same time, alienated practitioners from one another. Against this background of rupture and

continuity, Central Americans were increasingly in the thrall of a replacement-ideal: the familial nation. But as Chapter 8 will show, the interplay between this new vision and older practices had a profoundly destructive effect on the macro-institutional framework of the post-colonial state: the Central American Federation.

1. The Intendant's insurrection was supported by the bishop of Leon, a Spaniard who, as we saw in Chapter 5, was so respected by local notables and so popular in the city that he was made head of the junta of notables that was established as a result of the rebellions of the 1810's. That junta was abolished after the abrogation of the constitution of 1812, but localist sentiments remained, and now came to the surface once more.
2. "La Diputación provincial de Nicaragua y Costa Rica manifiesta su lealtad con motivo del movimiento de independencia de Guatemala, 1821", Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volume IX, no. 1 (April 1947), 31-32.
3. "Acta de los nublados, 28 de setiembre, 1821," Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volume I (1936-1937), 235.
4. El Genio de la Libertad, October 22, 1821, in Escritos del Doctor Pedro Molina, Volume III, El Editor Constitucional y El Genio de la Libertad (Guatemala: Editorial José Pineda Ibarra, 1969), 816-820.
5. Tomás Ayón, "Historia de Nicaragua", Volume 3, Book VIII, Chapter XIII, in J.D. Gámez, ed., Archivo Histórico de la República de Nicaragua (Managua: Tipografía Nacional, 1896).
6. El Genio de la Libertad, October 1, 1821, in Escritos, op. cit., 771-773.
7. "Orden General," Granada, October 3, 1821, in José D. Gámez, ed., Archivo Histórico, 32.
8. See "Acta del 12 de octubre, 1821", Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volume I (1936), 236.
9. El Genio de la Libertad, October 15, 1821, in Escritos del Doctor Pedro Molina, Volume III, 809-810.
10. "Manifiesto by Agustín de Iturbide," issued at the Palacio Imperial de Mexico, on October 19, 1821, in Gámez, ed., Archivo Histórico, Volume I, 38-43.
11. Ibid., 38-43.
12. Valdés Oliva, op. cit., 15.
13. Marure, Bosquejo Histórico, Volume I, Chapter II.

14. "El Capitan General de Guatemala a la Diputación Provincial de Nicaragua y Costa Rica. Explica el verdadero sentido del Acta de 15 de septiembre de 1821, con motivo de aquello de los nublados del día," Anales de la Sociedad de Geografía e Historia de Guatemala, Volume XVIII, no.2. (December 1942).
15. Speech by José Francisco de Córdova, Genio de la Libertad, November 19, 1821, in Escritos del Doctor Pedro Molina. El Editor Constitucional y el Genio de la Libertad. Volume III, 853-859.
16. "Comunicación Oficial del General Gainza del 22 de Noviembre", in Gámez, ed., Archivo Histórico, Volume I, 34-35.
17. See "Comunicación de las autoridades de León prohibiendo la organización de la Junta gubernativa de Granada," in Gámez, ed., Archivo Histórico, Volume I, 37-38.
18. "La Provincia de San Salvador propone la unión a las de Comayagua y León para evitar la guerra civil y el despotismo, 1821," Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volume I (1936), 42-43.
19. "Communiqué from Gabino Gainza, Palacio Nacional, Guatemala, Diciembre 22 de 1821, to Sr. Comandante don Crisanto Sacasa, Granada," in Gámez, ed., Archivo Histórico, 43-44.
20. Among the signatories were Gabino Gainza, the Marqués de Aycinena, Mariano Gálvez, et al. See "Acta de Anexión a Mexico, Palacio Nacional de Guatemala," January 5, 1822, in Gámez, Archivo Histórico, 48-51.
21. See Ramón Rosa, "Biografía de don José Cecilio del Valle" in Gámez, ed., Archivo Histórico, Volume I, 51-53.
22. "Manifiesto del General Gainza," January 5, 1822, in Gámez, ed., Archivo Histórico, Volume I, 55-59.
23. Ibid.
24. In January of 1822, the cabildos' votes on the matter of annexation finally came in. The ballots fell into four categories. 1) 23 cabildos said that only the Congress (yet to meet) would be able to decide on union to Mexico. 2) 104 simply wanted annexation. 3) 32 either accepted it but with provisos, or 4) would go along with whatever the government in Guatemala decided. Many other cabildos did not have time to issue their decision, or never received the communique inviting them to vote (the cabildos that did not get to vote

were 77).

25. "Manifiesto del General Gainza," January 5, 1822, in Gámez, ed., Archivo Histórico, Volume I, 55-59.

26. Andrés Ezcurra Townsend, Las Provincias Unidas de Centroamérica: Fundación de la República (San José: Editorial Costa Rica, 1973), 44-45.

27. See José Cecilio del Valle, Ensayos y Documentos (San José: Clásicos Centroamericanos, 1988), 169-173.

28. Del Valle, "Constitución", originally published in El Amigo de la Patria, 1822, in *ibid.*

29. Del Valle, "Necesidad de la armonía de los poderes," in *ibid.*, 227-229.

30. Miguel Larreynaga, "De la Elocuencia," Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volume IX, no.1 (April 1947), 14-20.

31. Larreynaga, "Discurso en el Aniversario de la Academia de Ciencias," in Boletín Nicaraguense de Bibliografía y Documentación, no. 55 (November 1987 -- September 1988).

32. Del Valle, Ensayos y Documentos.

33. Del Valle, "De la Oposición a los gobiernos representativos," *Ibid.*

34. "Cartas de González Saravia que dan idea de cómo estaban las cosas en Nicaragua a raíz de la independencia", 1822, Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volume IV, no.2 (August 1942), 6-14. See also Townsend Ezcurra, *op. cit.*, 32-33.

35. Speech by Agustín de Iturbide, dated February 24, 1822. See Anales de la Sociedad de Geografía e Historia de Guatemala, Volume XII, no. 1 (September 1935), 80-81.

36. Pinto Soria, *op. cit.*, 50.

37. "Manifiesto del General don Vicente Filísola", August 10, 1822, in Gámez, ed., Archivo Histórico, Volume I (1936) 73-79.

38. See "El Capitán General de Guatemala, Brigadier don Vicente Filísola, explica al Secretario de Guerra y Marina del Imperio Mejicano por qué debe ser relevado el Gobernador Intendente de la Provincia de León de Nicaragua, Brigadier don Miguel González Saravia," August, 1822, Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volume I, (1936), 249-

251.

39. See Gordon Kenyon, "Mexican Influence in Central America, 1821-1823," The Hispanic American Historical Review, Volume XLI, no.2 (May 1961), 175-205.

40. Miles Wortman, Government and Society in Central America, 1680-1840 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 232.

41. José Dolores Gámez, Historia de Nicaragua (Managua: Fondo de Promoción Cultural Banco de América, 1975), 339.

42. See "Un Guatemalteco", Memorias para la Historia de la Revolución de Centro América (Jalapa: Impresa Aburto y Blanco, en Oficina del Gobierno, 1832); and Antonio Batres Jauregui, La América Central ante la Historia, 1821-1921, Memorias de un Siglo, Volume III (Guatemala: 1949), 85.

43. Hubert Howe Bancroft, The Works of Hubert Howe Bancroft, Volume VIII, History of Central America, Volume III (San Francisco: The History Company, 1887), 64.

44. "El Jefe Interino del Estado Mayor de la Provincia de León de Nicaragua, don Antonio del Villar, da parte al Comandante General de la Provincia sobre la asonada del 4 de junio de 1822 en que fueron derrotados los enemigos de la unión al Imperio Mexicano," Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volume I (1936), 237-241.

45. "El Jefe Político y Militar de la Provincia de León de Nicaragua, Brigadier don Miguel González Saravia, da informes sobre el estado político y militar de aquella Provincia y una breve noticia geográfica al Jefe de la División Auxiliar de Guatemala, Brigadier don Vicente Filísola (9 de julio de 1822)," Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volume I (1936), 243-247.

46. Máximo Soto Hall, "Capítulos de un Libro Inédito," Revista de Costa Rica en el Siglo XIX, no. 32 (Costa Rica: Letras Patrias), 106.

47. Ibid., 106.

48. Valdes Oliva, op. cit., 20.

49. Ibid., 20.

50. "Acta, Se Organiza en León un Gobierno Provisional," 1821, Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volume I (1936).

51. Townsend Ezcurra, op. cit., 262.

52. "I look at our pueblos, and realize that imposture, disdain and violence have been added to their misery and weakness; yet I also find a marvel that makes me dispose of the principles of political science, for this marvel has the seal of God, whose mighty hand moves in our favor. Oh Guatemala, San Salvador, Nicaragua and other provinces of Central America, Admit and publicize to the face of the universe that liberty is the precious gift with which man has been created and endowed". Ibid., 115-116.

53. Ibid., 97.

54. "Acta de Independencia," Guatemala, July 1, 1823, in Gámez, ed., Archivo Histórico, Volume I, 110-113.

55. "Dictámen de la comisión de la Asamblea Nacional Constituyente acerca del punto de independencia general y absoluta", in Ibid., 91-105.

56. Ibid.

57. Ibid., 91-105.

58. Arturo Aguilar, "Don Rafael Francisco Osejo," Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volume I (1936), 197-208.

59. Bancroft, op. cit., 68-70.

60. "Manifiesto del General Filísola sobre su expedición a Guatemala, o refutación de lo dicho por los ciudadanos Molina, Barrundia, Gálvez, Mayorga y Arce," in Gámez, ed., Archivo Histórico, op. cit., 189-224.

61. Bancroft, op. cit., 73-74.

62. Townsend Ezcurra, op. cit.

63. Ibid., 207-217.

64. Ibid., 230-231.

CHAPTER 8

The Federal Republic of Central America: Forming and Contesting the National Family

In the early post-colonial decades, Central America was plunged into anarchy and civil war. The five states of the new federal republic fought amongst themselves; and within each of the states, cities and notables fought against one another, while notable clans were themselves plagued by internal jealousies. This chapter argues that the upheaval was a consequence of attempts by elites and localities simultaneously to unite Central America along the lines of the "national family" model, and within this ideological context, to secure for themselves the institutional supremacy properly belonging to a "virtuous identity". Hence their competitive quest both for a unified nation and for control over its symbolic, administrative and coercive resources (most fully embodied in the colonial tradition in such acmes as the capital city and the political Chief).

That these twin purposes should engender conflict even among allies is not as startling as the demonstrable fact that the conflict proved as pervasive as it was intractable. Succintly put, neither military victory nor a shared worldview led to sustainable peace. Indeed, even consensus on the rules of the game failed to prevent destructive competition. For example, rivals might accept the primacy of elections, but did not necessarily accept specific electoral outcomes. A

candidate might win through elections that were acknowledged as procedurally correct and fair, but his foes could still claim that he had won the votes because, empowered by his duplicitous immorality, he had "mesmerized" the ignorant. In other words, the opacity of dramaturgical obedience now obscured the outcome of transparent practices.

Moreover, such accusations tended to proliferate as the victorious candidate, in a common pattern of internal bloc-dissolution, became estranged from his allies. This was true at the level of the individual states, and at the level of the Federation. The worldview and practices attending identity-formation fomented dissent among Central Americans even as these set out to realize their unification agenda. Their intent was the construction of harmonious order, but in practice Central Americans incessantly grouped and regrouped into camps that perceived others as "traitors" and "factions" driven by particularist concerns, and themselves as the "majority", solely concerned with the general welfare. In short, the key to the destructive immanence of the political culture of the day can be found in the crucial link that dynamically connects worldview, practice and structure: emblematic identity.

The textual narratives of the day bear out this claim. As Central America severed its ties to monarchical Spain, narrators ceased addressing their competing accounts to the king and turned instead to "el publico", or "the public" --

the republican judge of men's character and deeds. Accordingly, new narratives took the form of manifestos and broadsides in which story-telling was mixed with exhortation. But narrators continued to draw on the discourse of good and evil to construct archetypical personas, of which only one deserved control of the nation's apex.

Recasting archetypical identities and manichean views according to the logic of the familial metaphor, narrators distinguished between the champions of a strong and unified national family and its base assailants, who, motivated by selfish interest, threatened societal cohesion and hampered the family's "marcha politica" -- the nation's journey down the one and only path to civilization.

Convinced of their righteousness in this struggle, caudillos and priests deployed their oratorical skills and "super-human" attributes, thus marshalling resources, mobilizing families and barrios, pueblos and cities, and setting off intra-local conflicts as well as wars between cities.¹

a. Insults and Emblems: Virtuous Identities at War

In 1824 Nicaragua's violent anarchy tested the effectiveness of the new federal framework and its central authority. The test was a stringent one. The atmosphere was laden with echoes of the servile-enfevered debate, which could still be heard in the acrimonious labels Nicaraguan

antagonists gave one another. The acrimony, moreover, was compounded by the bitterness of dissolved alliances. In Granada, as we saw in Chapter 7, the popular caudillo Colonel Ordoñez had broken with his long-time ally and patron, the creole notable and local military chief, Colonel Crisanto Sacasa, when the latter followed Guatemala's lead and declared annexation to Mexico. Sacasa had been among the first to repudiate annexation, but once he accepted it, he was branded a "servile". The label remained with him even after Central America became fully independent. In retaliation, Sacasa and his camp branded their opponents "anarchists".

Beneath the mutual suspicion of open antagonists, a less visible layer of suspicion prevailed among allies, who speculated on the true relationship between Ordoñez and Sacasa. There were some who suspected that the notable and the caudillo, underneath the intensity of their savage confrontations, were in secret understanding. Or at a minimum, others believed, the rebellious caudillo, out of a sense of loyalty to his old ally and benefactor, now found ways to preserve his safety.²

The speculation was not farfetched. Even from an ultra-realist perspective, a secret deal between the notable leader and the popular caudillo seemed just as plausible as the new alliance between the popular caudillo and the other notables who were Sacasa's rivals. Some of Sacasa's notable rivals were tacticians alive to the opportunities inherent in post-

colonial plasticity; others were traditional families that had neglected or refused to diversify from farming into commercial activities. Two of these notables -- Arguello and Cerda -- would play particularly important roles in the immediate future. Both had been in constant rebellion against the peninsulars (but in the name of the king) during the late colonial period. Both had been prominent in the struggles of the 1810's, one of them leading the "moralist" procession we examined in Chapter 5, which culminated in a mutiny against the Spanish military authorities of Granada. Finally, Arguello and Cerda were both members of the same extended clan.

Like all the notables involved in the struggle against Sacasa, and like Sacasa himself, Arguello and Cerda belonged to the circle of families that were keenly aware of their ancestral honor. Indeed, the strategies of forward-looking tacticians and of traditionalists alike were inextricable from their self-perception as members of virtuous genealogical identities. Both groups set out to prevail over their common foe through reassertions of their familial superiority, and both equated final victory with general acknowledgement of that elevated status.

The tacticians were the kind of public men who, as one historian put it, "did not deliberately arrange their memoirs to justify their deeds; rather, they seemed to execute their deeds in order to justify their [future] memoirs".³ The traditionalists were residents of an unchanging neighborhood,

men who were known as "los de arriba", or "the ones from above", in reference to their ancestral residential location in the city's layout.⁴

For tacticians and traditionalists alike, the most tangible sign of honor, we saw in previous chapters, was the family emblem displayed by clans on the facade of their residences -- emblems which in turn synthesized the stories of virtue and service constitutive of familial identity. These emblems became a central bone of contention as Nicaraguans set out to create a unified state within the Central American Republic. Before rivals could stake their competing claims on the future, they had to call into question one another's meritorious past. Thus, in a challenge to Sacasa's preeminence, and invoking the egalitarian majesty of democracy, Ordoñez and his notable allies forcefully erased rival emblems -- chiselling them out if they were carved on the wall, whitewashing them if they were painted -- while preserving their own ensigns intact.

Having lost their eminent positions in Granada, one family clan after another went into internal exile, settling in the Villa of Managua. Soon, several independent juntas of notables were in a keen struggle over national supremacy. In Granada, the victors and their caudillo Ordoñez formed a governing junta, while in León, an existing junta of notables retained all its faculties and autonomy. And in Managua, Granada's notables in exile formed a junta of their own, which

to all appearances was subordinated to that of Leon, but in secret made preparations for its independence. As juntas sprang up, various other towns fell into a constant state of flux, one day adhering to one of the major cities, the next to another.⁵

Finally, civil war exploded, pitting various alliances of notables, priests and popular leaders against one another. But as conflict among "virtuous identities" turned inward, friends turned into foes and foes into friends, rendering all of them free to make common cause,⁶ and to redraw in a moment the map of ancient passions. Accordingly, the theme of betrayal was once again dominant. After the losing faction from Granada established itself in Managua, for example, León began to look upon Managua as an "ingrate" that harbored men of independist designs. And as always, betrayal among friends now paved the way for tactical conciliation among foes. Thus, Granada, taking note of Leon's discontent with Managua, saw fit to support León, their bitter historical rivalry notwithstanding. For its part, León could do no less than reciprocate, deciding in *cabildo abierto* to assist the "heroic city of Granada".⁷

In this new alignment, "enfevereds" controlled León, Granada, Masaya and a number of subordinate pueblos. "Serviles" controlled Managua, San Felipe, Viejo, Rivas and various satellite communities -- each camp headed by one of the two major caudillos (themselves former allies). Each locality, however, retained its own junta. And as it soon

became clear, the object of contention between serviles and enfevereds was the control over the apex of the "national family's" line of authority and prestige.

Indeed, attempts by other Central Americans at mediation stressed the familial context of the war, on the presumption that the matter of internal dominance and preeminence -- location of the capital city and governmental leadership -- would solve itself naturally once the contenders came to their senses and "remembered" their familial ties.⁸

The peace envoy from the federal triumvirate wrote as much to the junta in Managua, which in turn agreed with the envoy's assumption that cultural and political "uniformity" ought to yield peace. But the notion that uniformity went hand in hand with harmony was not at all incongruent with the hyper-vigilant attitude of a manichean worldview, as Managua's junta demonstrated in its response to the envoy.

[A]narchy and its fatal consequences have worked to deprive us of [the consolidation and happiness of this province]. The Government of Granada and its Chief of Arms are the authors of these disasters. This Junta [of Managua] ... has been the sole obstacle on the path of these wicked men and their perverse plans ... This Junta has named a commissioner to meet with you, and is determined to cooperate ... but learned in the school of experience, it intuits that you will fail in your mission if you do not cut the problem by the roots.⁹

To uproot evil -- to eliminate the foe -- was the solution offered by Managua to the envoy of the national executive.

This intransigence startled the envoy, who had been dispatched on his mission of peace by the Honduran member of the federal triumverate with instructions to side with the camp that accepted his lead. The Honduran's expectation had been that Managua -- now controlled by self-proclaimed moderates -- would embrace the envoy; and that Granada and León, in the hands of "anarchists", would rebuff his initiatives. Had this come to pass, the Honduran executive, who was already working for his election to the federal presidency, stood to gain in prestige. But the opposite occurred. Granada and León, in response to the envoy's appeal, dissolved their juntas, while Managua refused.¹⁰

Worse yet, a Colombian officer fighting on the side of Managua's "serviles", launched a surprise attack on Leon while the envoy was still involved in his peace effort. The envoy took this "treachery" as a personal affront, and he soon sided with the "anarchists". Indeed, the envoy now identified himself as a soldier defending not just the besieged city of Leon but all of Central America from inhuman barbarians and their commandant -- a South American fighting on Managua's side whom the envoy called a "foreigner" and a "man-monster".¹¹

Under siege, the federal envoy and the city of León eagerly awaited the arrival of sympathetic Salvadoran troops. This eagerness, too, was ironic, since only a few months back, after thanking Salvadoran troops for "services rendered",

Leon's authorities had requested their withdrawal in view of the "rivalries" and "altercations" between the troops and the "citizenry".¹²

No matter. In the land of self-induced amnesia, Salvadoran troops were on their way again, headed by Arce, Salvador's preeminent liberal and former member of the federal triumverate. This Salvadoran, like his Honduran colleague in the triumverate (who had dispatched the envoy with a hidden agenda), was seeking to gain prestige as a peace-maker in order to win Nicaragua's votes for the federal presidency. Indeed, while still a member of the triumverate, the Salvadoran had tried to put together a military expedition to "pacify" Nicaragua. But his Honduran rival, though a conservative, had colluded with his liberal cousin, the newly-elected Chief of Honduras, to block the pacification project. In retaliation, the Salvadoran liberal left the triumverate, formed an army in his country of origin, then marched on Nicaragua.¹³

The Salvadoran, Arce, through a mixture of diplomatic skill and military prowess, ultimately managed to "pacify" the Nicaraguan combatants, who were in a general state of exhaustion.¹⁴ The Salvadoran returned triumphant to Guatemala, where the Central American Constitutional Assembly had decreed the Constitution of the new Federal Republic of the Center of America late in 1824, and disassembled in January of 1825.

The constitution was federalist in character, due to the

numerical weight of provincial deputies, who were opposed to a centralist framework. Rather than doctrinaire, the centralist and the federalist positions were an expression of the historical identities involved. Guatemalan notables such as the Aycinenas, for example, were preeminent in every way: their status was the highest in their city, and their city was at the pinnacle on the isthmus. Not surprisingly, they were staunch defenders of a centralist government whose power would be concentrated in Guatemala. Lesser Guatemalan notables, in contrast, might be willing to underplay their localist claims to superiority if it meant bringing down the Aycinenas a notch or two.

In contrast to the dominant Guatemalan clans, those of subordinate cities like San Salvador and provinces like Costa Rica (which under the colonial regime had been partially under the administrative jurisdiction of León, Nicaragua) were inclined to federalism. San Salvador's most prominent cleric, for example, long bent on creating an autonomous diocese, was able within a federalist framework to defy Guatemala's archbishop. Similarly, the federalist framework allowed Costa Rica to imitate San Salvador by creating a diocese independent of León -- a goal long cherished by Costa Rica.

The issue of the diocese was a crucial matter both for the localities and their notable families: an independent diocese ennobled the identity of a city, and elevation to the bishopric in turn ennobled the prelate's clan. Given these

dual stakes, moral passions were especially keen. There were, for example, excommunications and counter-excommunications of leaders, with the faithful taking sides and refusing to receive the sacraments from priests who opposed their leaders.¹⁵

The federalist framework also called for each of the five member states of the federal republic to draft a constitution for purposes of internal governance. These constitutions were written between 1824 and 1826, with Salvador being the first and Nicaragua and Honduras being the last. Finally, the federal constitution called for the election of a federal government -- executive, legislature, and judiciary; and for the election of five state governments -- Chief of State, legislature and judiciary.

Of these institutional positions, the federal presidency was the preeminent, followed in rank by that of Chief of State (one for each of the five countries). Their ineffable desirability set off a struggle at the first federal congress, which met in Guatemala in February of 1825, and was supposed to elect the president and other federal authorities (no majority had been won by either candidate); and to sanction the constitution.

"Betrayal" was the struggle's most discernable pattern. Former "serviles" (now "centralists" and self-identified "moderates") controlled the congress, yet they abandoned their candidate, the Honduran Valle, and supported Arce, the

Salvadoran liberal who had "pacified" Nicaragua. The driving force behind this about-face were Guatemalan centralists who had never been able to trust their Honduran candidate, and had chosen him simply because they mistrusted the Salvadoran even more. But after Valle's paradoxical intervention in Nicaragua (recall that his envoy ended up fighting on the side of the "anarchists"), the Guatemalans found him even less trustworthy. Arce, on the other hand, had gained enormous prestige in Nicaragua. Moreover, Guatemalans feared that San Salvador might not recognize the federal government if Arce was not elected. So, if Arce was willing to assure the Guatemalan centralists that he would not insist on an autonomous bishopric for San Salvador, then he would be their man.¹⁶ Arce gave them the necessary assurances, and he was declared president.

The pact between Arce and the "centralists" was rooted in the parties' complementary gambles. The Guatemalans, by accepting the "enfevered" Salvadoran as president, sought to neutralize the danger of localist resentment from San Salvador and preclude war. Yet by extracting from him the promise not to support a Salvadoran bishopric, they not only defended their own city's preeminence but also began to drive a wedge between Arce and his fellow Salvadoran Liberals (the majority of whom were federalists). The liberal Arce, for his part, sacrificed the federalist principle of the autonomous bishopric for his native San Salvador and his relative

Delgado, but in exchange got the opportunity to become President of the Federation, a position whose status and resources he immediately deployed in an effort to conciliate former "serviles" and "enfevereds" -- many now identified as centralists and federalists -- whether Salvadoran or Guatemalan.

His conciliatory attempt backfired. Fellow liberals felt betrayed by the President, and ridiculed him in their newspaper. President Arce, for his part, set out to defend his institutional prerogative, and warned Guatemala's liberal officials not to transfer the seat of their government from Antigua to Guatemala City, which was already the site of the Federal Authorities.¹⁷ The liberal government did not pay heed, and settled in Guatemala City, where its leaders soon clashed with the Federal Government. In short, the liberal camp was internally torn as its notables strove for absolute preeminence.

Alienated from other liberals, the President sought refuge in the former "servile" camp, which took him in, but on their terms. Soon the President found himself in league with the very priests who had branded him a "heretic" and the families that had waged military war against him during the Mexican empire.¹⁸ But as we will soon see, this alliance between the liberal Arce and the Guatemalan "serviles" was riddled with suspicion, even as the animosity between Arce and his fellow liberals became increasingly clear to all.

In Nicaragua, too, the search for unity seemed futile. During the temporary peace that followed Nicaragua's "pacification" by the Salvadoran leader, elections were held for deputies to the first constitutional assembly and for the offices of Chief and Vice-Chief. Looking for ways to prevent acrimonious disputes between camps and between the office-holders themselves, Nicaraguans turned to the idea of the family as source of harmony. They chose two relatives -- Cerda and Arguello -- to fill the posts of Chief and Vice-Chief. That both men were descendants of Spaniards and both were liberals, made each of the two trustworthy to the warring camps but only up to a point. That they were members of the same extended clan, seemed in the eyes of all to lessen the chances that the one would betray the other.

Ironically, of the two relatives, it was the more traditional Cerda who won the support of the "enfevered" caudillo, Ordoñez. So it was Cerda who was elected to the position of Chief. Furthermore, to promote stability in Nicaragua, Ordoñez, whose eloquence and charisma earned him the sobriquet of "The Wizard", retreated to Guatemala as part of the peace arrangements established by Arce, now the president of the Central American republic. The agreement also called for the exile of the eloquent Bishop of León, who had become the leader of the Managua camp. In short, institutional unity was arranged on a familial basis, and the leading orators, seen as unsettling forces, were banished.

But no sooner had the executive and the legislators taken possession of their offices than they were in a keen struggle over institutional supremacy. In less than a month, the new Chief, Cerda, felt himself surrounded by "untrustworthy" men, and requested that the Constitutional Assembly call for municipal elections "to elect men who adhere to order and love of patria".¹⁹

The assembly denied the request. The Chief, however, would not desist. He articulated the reasoning behind his request more fully, alleging that

[because] the municipalities were formed in moments of disquiet ... most of the representatives] are ignorant men who have been led by the wicked ... mayors now support disorder in most of the pueblos and give free rein to insults.²⁰ [emphasis added]

In short, it was the belief that evil could daze the ignorant -- a belief as old as the conquest -- that impelled the Chief of State to disregard the outcome of electoral procedure. But such disregard could only heighten the institutional fragility of the new government -- the very fragility that now made "insults" so threatening.

In the emblematic culture, insult campaigns were at once a natural practice and a potential source of disorder. Such campaigns had posed no mortal threat to the colonial regime: its institutions survived even as actors attacked one another's identities. In contrast, in the post-independence period, actors became embroiled in a struggle over identity

which for centuries had required monarchical arbitration for final resolution.

In an attempt to provide such resolution, the new Chief issued the "Decree for Good Government", which prohibited "all personal attacks using insulting expressions."²¹ The Chief also insisted once more on the need of new municipal elections. And again, the assembly chose to "leave the Municipalities as are."²² Stumped, the Chief of State turned to the Federal Congress for assistance. Much like a colonial governor looking to his monarch for intervention, he wrote the Congress and attached copies of the correspondence between him and the Nicaraguan Constitutional Assembly as proof of that body's contribution to disorder in Nicaragua. He then requested that the Federal Congress issue a law preventing intervention by the Nicaraguan assembly in the functions of the Executive, so that the "Government [might] consolidate itself".²³

But as had been the trend for centuries, localist de facto autonomy proved far more effective than central authority. And as had been previously the case, such de facto autonomy was exercised under the moralist veil of a new kind of dramaturgical obedience. Accordingly, the Nicaraguan Assembly paid homage to the institutional sanctity of the Chief of State even as it deposed Chief Cerda. To manage these seemingly contradictory tasks, the Assembly ordered the Chief to resign only after he was accused of "criminality" by his

own relative and Vice-Chief.

This attack on his identity took the Chief by surprise. He stepped aside, and his relative assumed the post of acting Chief. In his new position, Arguello demanded that the remaining Salvadoran troops that had "pacified" Nicaragua leave the territory immediately.²⁴ The demand might seem curious given the frailty of the peace, as well as the "partisan" sympathies between the new acting Chief and the Salvadorans. But the acting Chief was impelled by strong reasons to take charge without interference from any troops other than his own. As can be gleaned from a manifesto he addressed to his fellow Nicaraguans, the acting Chief was now to be the lone champion of the forces of good. As if rising above the war of insults, and without the military support of a foreign contingent, he upheld his virtuous persona and assumed the responsibilities that came with it. The profile was archetypical.

After two years of disturbances, which produced the most disastrous fratricidal war ... the spirit of evil has set the majestic march [of peace and tranquility] on the retreat ... I have been unable to ignore the clamor of an anguished patria which for a second time asks for my sacrifice, and have assumed the high post of Supreme Chief and taken my oath ... you shall find in me a protector whose sole purpose will be the exact compliance with his oath until the State is completely consolidated.²⁵
[emphasis added]

As in Nicaragua, in Guatemala insults between camps both reflected and confirmed underlying animosities and suspicions.

By attacking the image of a foe, insults went to the core of identity, thus creating a profound sense of collective insecurity. "If no punishment is set for those who slander in newspapers," the intellectual and politician Valle ventured, "those who have been slandered retaliate in kind; nations will become uninhabitable. From one libel we would go to another. Vengeance would lead to the spilling of blood; and political societies would succumb to chaos, death and horror".²⁶

The sense of impending and inexorable chaos conveyed by Valle was more than philosophical: just like Arce had become tied to the "serviles" by a tenuous alliance, now Valle himself was allied to the "enfevereds" against his foe, Arce. In short, each camp was internally fragmented, and the fragments were entering into treacherous unions. Within this context of insecurity, actors assessed one another's measures through an increasingly murky veil of suspicions.

For example, when President Arce cited the violence in Nicaragua as the reason for increasing the federal army to 4,000 men, the liberals at the head of the Guatemalan State interpreted his reasoning as a mere pretext. In their view, Arce and his conservative allies were preparing to attack them. Conversely, Guatemala's liberal government cited a possible invasion from Chiapas and began to make military preparations, leading President Arce to suspect that the liberal Chief of State was plotting a coup against the federal government. Finally, the federal president deposed Guatemala's

Chief.²⁷

The remnants of the deposed government, led by the Vice-Chief, moved to Quezaltenango, where they issued a series of anti-clerical laws that provoked a mob attack on the liberal leader. The mob tore the liberal notable "literally limb from limb, and the liberal government collapsed".²⁸ Given the shared theatrical practice of "inexorable collective ire", the liberals suspected the president and his allies of inciting "the mob of fanatical Indians", as one American historian called the offended believers.²⁹

Significantly, the liberal government of El Salvador, "betraying" Guatemalan liberals and aligning itself with Guatemalan "serviles" and "centralists", supported the Federal President. The reasons for this "perfidious" about-face are telling. First, Arce was the nephew of San Salvador's preeminent liberal cleric, who in turn harbored hopes that eventually the President would find a way to recognize Salvador's bishopric. Second, Salvadorans were bent on having the Federal authorities transferred to a location other than Guatemala City, and insisted that the federal authorities establish residence at least 40 leagues from Guatemala (other states made a similar demand).³⁰ And on this last matter if the Salvadoran clans -- be they former enfevereds or serviles -- could hope for understanding from anyone it was their compatriot Arce.

Thus, when Quezaltenango rose up against the President,

San Salvador (along with Costa Rica) assisted him with troops against the forces of the state of Guatemala. The authorities in San Salvador also advised President Arce to call for new elections in the state of Guatemala.³¹

President Arce ordered the new elections, which resulted in the ascent of Aycinena -- whose identity had gone from faithful royal subject to independist to servile and now to self-described moderate. The elections, however, brought about neither stability nor trust-building. In Guatemala, the new Chief, like the Chief who had just resigned in Nicaragua, when faced with insult campaigns, issued a decree restricting freedom of expression.

Nor did the alliance among Arce, Guatemalan centralists and San Salvador's "enfevered" liberals and federalists bring stability to the rest of the isthmus. The liberal Chief of Honduras, Dionisio de Herrera, in a letter to his conservative cousin, Jose del Valle, reported the uncovering of a "bloodthirsty plot" against him; a plan so horrible it made "humanity tremble". Referring to his antagonist, the caudillo Irias, he spoke of an "infamous, indecent, and perverse" foe who operated through "priests" and "emmissaries".³² Acrimony between the rivals reached a point where the bishop excommunicated the Chief, who was consequently declared provisional executive by the assembly. The Chief retaliated by putting the prelate in prison, which in turn led various localities to disavow the Chief.

In his letter, Chief Herrera also anticipated an external attack from the Federal President (Arce), who had given marching orders to San Salvador. And he remarked that he, Herrera, was in "close relations" with the Chiefs of Nicaragua and Costa Rica, who were in turn adamant that Honduras disregard any decrees from the federal authorities until and unless they were transferred from Guatemala to another country.

The Salvadoran troops triumphed in the Honduran city of Comayagua, and Herrera was sent to jail. Troops from Leon also fought in Honduras, until they too were defeated. But as rancor and suspicion continued to play themselves out, the perception of identities changed radically, so that the most prominent Salvadoran foe of annexation to Mexico (Arce) finally came to be known as a servile, while a vocal Guatemalan advocate of annexation came to be regarded as a liberal (Galvez), and a Guatemalan official (Barrundia) in the administration of the stern captain general in the days before independence came to be seen as a liberal. Finally, the crucial alliance between President Arce and his uncle dissolved when the latter began to suspect that the former's sympathies might be with the Guatemalan Archbishop after all. The turning point came when President Arce "betrayed" his uncle by allowing the Guatemalan Archbishop to publish a "jubileo del ano santo" which excluded the "jubileo" of San Salvador, where the metropolitan diocese was not recognized.

Suddenly, President Arce and his uncle, the liberal cleric, were estranged, and the government of El Salvador withdrew its support from the Federal President.³³

The repercussions of this alliance-dissolution were wide-ranging. Guatemalan liberals in exile denied recognition to the new authorities of Guatemala, while in Honduras the Chief of State openly repudiated the Federal President. In Nicaragua, the acting Chief, just as his tenure was coming to an end, repudiated the president, too. This repudiation, in turn, led a group of Nicaraguan deputies to break with the acting Chief and to set up an autonomous government in Granada.

At first glance, the crisis about to erupt in Nicaragua was a simple power struggle. The assembly had had to choose between two candidates for a Chief and a Vice-Chief, neither one of whom had obtained a majority. One of the candidates was the acting Chief, Arguello, who had turned against his relative, the former Chief Cerda. But as a narrative of the events published by the anti-Arguello forces shows, there was a familiar depth to the power struggle at hand. Specifically: the nature of identity, as well as past practices and a shared discourse, once again caused high instability in government.

The drama of inexorable collective ire, for example, was deployed by Arguello, who brought crowds of supporters to the galleries, from where they shouted at the deputies, who in turn insulted one another. Four of the deputies were for the

acting Chief, seven were against. And it was the latter who voted in favor of transferring the assembly to Granada, so as to escape the charged atmosphere of León.

But according to our anonymous pamphleteer, Arguello was driven by "the frenzy of his ambition" and "accelerated his machinations". Specifically, Arguello declared the new assembly "without faculty", and he distributed "alarming papers and lies" filled with "falseties" designed to "hallucinate" the "pueblos" into "disobeying the assembly".

From there on, the narrative continued in the manner typical of its genre, proving in minute detail that this was a battle between "men of good" and a "blood-thirsty monster". The narrative concluded with a rhetorical attempt to free ordinary Nicaraguans and Central Americans from Arguello's hypnotic power by revealing his "true" identity.

Pueblos! Learn from Arguello's conduct, and do not to allow his words to daze you. He proclaims patriotism, love for the system, abhorrence of tyrants. But in his deeds all one can find is ambition, despotism, oppression, cruelty and crime ... Federal States of Central America ... see that [in Nicaragua] justice is persecuted, the law is treaded upon, and anarchy is enthroned because of the intrigues of one ambitious man.³⁴

b. Central American Unity: The Young Family and Its Eternal Foes

Amidst anarchy and conflict, Central Americans continued to write off on their manifestos, letters and decrees with the motto, "Unity, God, and Liberty". And rather than discard the

analogy between familial and national harmony in the face of severe internal fragmentation, Central Americans gave the analogy greater specificity on a host of issues, ranging from restrictions on the freedom of expression to foreign relations.

Nations, the Honduran notable and orator Jose C. del Valle said during an intervention as member of the Federal Congress, ought not interfere in one another's affairs because

a family has no right to foment divisions in another. One people has no right to engender discord in another... Nations are in a state of nature vis a vis one another, and morality is the bond that must unite them.

Indeed, the belief was that the state ought to exercise caution in dealing with foreigners precisely because the national family's security was at stake. Valle, for example, opposed contracting a foreign firm to open up a canal in Nicaragua because, "a prudent paterfamilias does not bring strangers to make improvements on his farm" but "either uses his own capital or borrows".³⁵

And as in the case of family clans, in the national family, tranquility depended in great measure on reciprocal respect by its members for their most dear possession -- a virtuous and honorable identity. Hence Valle's warning to the Congress that "men can do harm with their words", and his

contention that because calumny and offense could be lethal, all the civilized nations -- ancient Rome, Spain, England, France -- constitutionally declared "those who defame and slander" "prisoners" to be "punished".³⁶

But clinging tenaciously to the familial metaphor reaffirmed the suspicion on the part of traditional power-holders that repudiation of their authority was merely part of the divisive agenda of the family's enemies. Once-predominant cities felt besieged by "anarchic" rivals. Leon, for example, saw itself as threatened "by an invasion of factious elements from Granada, Managua and Rivas, who reject the obedience which they owe to the legitimate government".³⁷

Conversely, the provinces, which had been in a subordinate position to Guatemala City, used the familial metaphor to distinguish between authentic and false family members. Accordingly, San Salvador notables accused Guatemala City of being inhospitable to the federal government and to "true" Central Americans (Salvadorans, Hondurans, Nicaraguans and Costa Ricans).³⁸ Rivalling leaders, too, could not find common ground precisely because they shared identical assumptions about national unity and the role that as superior men of virtue they had to play in the vertical organization of authority. From the perspective of power-holders, attempts by others to head the national family were no mere impudence. Such bids unmasked aspirants and revealed them to be no more than leaders of "criminal factions", their pronouncements no

more than "indecent" expressions of their intent.³⁹

In combating such criminality and indecency, only the eloquence of sincerity offered hope in the fight against the "mesmerizing" power of "denaturalized men". This is what the acting Chief of Nicaragua said to its "inhabitants":

I have addressed my unadorned words to you ... to inform you of events. My purpose has been to be understood by all, in the language of truth, with the frankness characteristic of a freely-constituted, legitimate government, which need not resort to imposture or calumny in order to give credence to its public conduct ... Nevertheless, some of you have allowed yourselves to be dazed by the malice of denaturalized men, lending your ear to seduction, deceit, and feigned flattery ... [emphasis added]

In typical fashion, the Chief's narrative went on to pit the villanous centralists against the noble federalists, the former advocating concentration of power in Guatemala, the latter fighting for decentralization. However, the Chief's narrative also depicted the federalists' virtue as expressed through their government's paternalist benevolence.⁴⁰

In the civil war of 1827, Nicaraguans displayed even greater ferociousness than in the war of 1824. But the justifications of the camps remained virtually unchanged. After the acting Chief succeeded in killing the leader of the dissenting camp in Granada, the Chief's new commandant in that city issued a manifesto to the pueblos of the Department of Granada justifying the execution as fair punishment for "betrayal" of the electoral process by an elected official.

According to the reasoning running through the manifesto, the outcome of a legitimate procedure was invalidated when, ex post, the elected official, through his "diabolical machinations", showed his "depraved spirit", and thus made it legitimate for the "valiant sons" of the patria to rescue her from that official's "evil and perfidy".⁴¹

Though the acting Chief prevailed in Granada, the Villa of Managua, determined to depose him, turned to his predecessor -- his relative, the former Chief. The antagonistic camps -- now led by two caudillos who were kin and former allies -- waged a savage war. On one side, the military commanders were in the habit of presenting their caudillo with the mutilated ears of the vanquished; on the other side, they mutilated the nose of those who were spared from execution.⁴²

At the narrow level of the leadership, the hatred was exacerbated by feelings of familial betrayal. For example, Arguello's wife was a daughter of the Chamorro clan, and she could not forgive her kinsmen and their allies for fighting against her husband. Her kinsmen, in turn, denigrated her with insulting labels that compared her to a loud marketwoman.⁴³ In the emblematic culture, the comparison was profoundly painful, for it accused a notable family of attracting attention to itself in a fashion that transfigured its image into that of a social being without honor or morality -- the woman who deals in the marketplace.

But at the deepest level, the struggle remained a clash between good and evil.⁴⁴ Moreover, in the fashion characteristic of the emblematic culture, the clash was a huge public drama which shamed Nicaraguans before the "theater of the world" -- meaning civilized nations. Consider the motivation that led a Guatemalan notable to found the newspaper "El Guatemalteco" in 1827.

As a Guatemalan, I am ashamed that foreigners should see that in my country no one writes or reads; and I fear that they should take us for barbarians. If they see that there are newspapers they might believe that they are read ... My newspaper shall serve a purpose similar to that of fake cannons in merchant ships, which give respect to the vessel by deceiving with its appearance those who look at it from a distance.⁴⁵

Up close, the reality was indeed alarming. The Nicaraguan civil war was rife with atrocities, leading the president of the Central American federal republic to despair.

Nicaragua exists no more, except as a horrifying lesson to be studied by all who wish to govern the Republic [all five states of the isthmus]. Nicaragua's qualities made it the most valuable State of Central America, but now it is destroyed by atrocious butchery; assassinations, banditry and all kind of violence have established their throne [in Nicaragua].⁴⁶

And San Salvador, so recently supportive of President Arce, now marched against its favorite son. Once the preeminent liberal on the isthmus, the Salvadoran President of the Central American federation was now supported by the

conservative Chief of Guatemala. Indeed, the Salvadoran, once the military commander who led San Salvador's defense against invading Guatemalan troops, now took command of a Guatemalan army marching to confront Salvadoran troops, in turn now supported by Guatemalan liberal exiles. In the military confrontation between Guatemalans and Salvadorans, President Arce not only prevailed but chased his own countrymen as they retreated to El Salvador.

Just as in Guatemala and El Salvador allies were turning into foes, so too in Nicaragua. The popular caudillo, Ordoñez, returned from exile to assist his fellow liberal -- the acting Chief -- in the war against the former Chief, but the two liberals were soon embroiled in a contest for dominance and status. Disunity among these two allies, however, did not translate into a gain for their common enemy, the former Chief, who wrote to the Federal President:

Anarchists commit excesses. I lack resources. I have no staff I can trust. The departments of Segovia and Rivas are no longer willing to help. Ordoñez [the popular caudillo] was repelled in Granada, but is already allied to Hernandez [another caudillo], and both are working against Arguello [the Acting Chief].⁴⁷

Indeed, the former Chief felt besieged:

The government is surrounded by anarchists of depraved ideas, the citizens flee into the countryside.

The former Chief's hopes, as he wrote in 1827 in a letter to

the federal authorities, lay with the federal president, who seemed to be winning in his military campaign against Salvador. The former Chief also expressed the conviction that his enemies at home were bent on allying with San Salvador in order to destroy the Central American "motherland". "I continue in power," the former Chief concluded in a self-abnegating note, "simply to save the patria".⁴⁸

The fate of the patria, of course, would be determined by the war between Guatemala and El Salvador. The war dragged on until El Salvador came to believe it might lose, and in a time-buying bid, offered negotiations to the federal president, which he accepted. The president's Guatemalan allies immediately suspected him of harboring affection and a merciful disposition toward his countrymen and former comrades. The war was resumed, only this time, fate turned against the president, who lost hundreds of men. The defeat was especially significant for the President's Guatemalan allies, who saw it as evidence of his perfidy.⁴⁹

Under suspicion, Arce abandoned his post as military leader, then returned to Guatemala to resume his duties as federal President. Early in 1828, however, as mistrust between him and his conservative allies developed into open hostility, the president left the presidency. Now he sought refuge in the great power of the day -- eloquence, and began to publish *El Diario de Guatemala* in an effort to garner popular sympathy and to form his own army.

In Nicaragua, the former Chief, who had placed his hopes in the outgoing President, managed to hold on to his military forces (even though he felt surrounded by traitors, to the point that he executed his highest ranking military officers, two Colombians). Even less fortunate was his foe, Acting Chief Arguello, who had to flee to Salvador after being deposed by his own ally, the caudillo Ordonez.

From exile in El Salvador, the deposed acting Chief issued a manifesto to the "inhabitants" of Nicaragua. The text reveals in synthetic fashion the enduring link between identity and political narrative, as well as the cultural profundity of the discourse of good and evil. Issued from the pinnacle of a "Supreme Vice-Chief", the manifesto opened with the self-assertion of a virtuous identity under siege. Thus, Arguello began,

[I write] to vindicate my honor and reputation which my rivals try to obscure and even attack with invectives and malignant and arbitrary suppositions. ... for over two years I have given up sleep and made sacrifices for the sake of our common cause of liberty and in support of the Federal system adopted in the Republic ... twice I tried, but [my resignations] were not accepted by the Assembly, and was forced to continue in command, sacrificing for the patria ...

In the spirit of self-sacrifice, Arguello, against all odds, valiantly fought criminals and factions as they strove to fragment the country. He opposed the "arbitrary reconstitution" of the Assembly in Granada and was on "the

defensive", with only 100 men.⁵⁰

Being on the defensive, however, was not enough for Arguello's followers in Leon and Granada once it became clear that in Guatemala the federal president (now an ally of Guatemalan centralists) was out to dominate the federalists. Should this come to pass, both Granada and Leon stood to lose their chance at autonomy in Central America and at preeminence within Nicaragua. Managua, in contrast, never having had illusions about its importance on the isthmus, might find a modus vivendi with Guatemala, and with its help perhaps even emerge predominant among Nicaraguan cities. Thus, as Arguello said in his narrative,

The opinion that Managua should be attacked became widespread. Though authorized ... by the Constitution to use force against insurrection, I refused to put it into effect, because I lacked means and troops, and wanted to avoid spilling American blood. Moreover, the capital of Honduras was at the time in danger of being invaded by federal troops. I tried to provide assistance.

At that point in the narrative, however, the inexorable force of the people, and rampant suspicion (now turning against the leader himself) militated in favor of attacking Managua.

But public opinion asserted the contrary, and insisted on an attack on Managua ... and since I continued to refuse, the rumor spread that I did not want to attack Managua for particular reasons. Other specious notions were spread, which were alarming and fomented revolution and disturbance of the public order. To avoid one or another evil, I found myself compelled to order the formation of a force against the insurrection in Managua (half of

which went to Granada).⁵¹

In Arguello's narrative, he obeyed public opinion, but others who should have, did not. Even the caudillo Ordoñez, his ally, repaid him with disobedience and even treachery by "plotting a revolution". The "treacherous" Ordoñez was dangerous because he had eloquence on his side, and could "daze" people into submission. Moreover, Ordoñez proved cunning even in desperation. In a theatrical ploy, the villain appealed for clemency.

He presented himself before me, claiming to be in the most deplorable state of health, and implored me to allow him to retire to his house to convalesce, offering to retreat to a pueblo if his presence even indirectly disturbed the peace. Moved by humanity to compassion, I agreed to his request. He retired to Hernandez' house, where they completed the plan that later exploded.⁵²

The plan that "exploded", as we saw, culminated in the ousting of the acting Chief, who put his case to the people from exile in Salvador. The city of León, however, now perceived him as a source of instability, and formally requested the government of Salvador to "retain" him while general elections were conducted in Nicaragua.⁵³

Arguello was not the only leader perceived as a source of instability by his own followers. His foe and relative, the former Chief, sought to persuade the public to convene the extant assembly, so that in turn this body would either elect

a new Chief or call elections.⁵⁴ The assembly, however, dug in its heels, and resisted the idea time and again.⁵⁵ Simply put, no one wished to obey anyone. In Leon, even the popular caudillo, Ordoñez, was overthrown by the municipal government, whose members and military officers felt that the caudillo looked upon them with "disdain".⁵⁶ Indeed, mutual disdain was the norm. Leon's municipality, for example, took preventive measures against "disorder" by ordering citizens to report on those who attacked others with insults and slanders.⁵⁷

The municipality also created a junta with sovereign pretensions. The liberal troops of León and Granada continued to create and change governments, each invariably retaining their sense of autonomy and even challenging the other's. In March of 1828, for example, Granada's Chief disagreed with the municipality of León for judging

the pueblos free to give a new constitution to the state based on the erroneous principle that they find themselves in a state of orphanage [emphasis added].⁵⁸

Finally, Managua, too, was in rebellious spirit, and turned on its caudillo, Nicaragua's former Chief, Cerda, who fled to the department of Rivas in search of greater security. Soon thereafter, his relative and foe, the Vice-Chief returned incognito from exile. War between the kinsmen raged again, until the (former) Vice-Chief captured the (former) Chief.

By then, Arguello, seething at the betrayal by Ordoñez,

was flirting with his own foes, who were receptive now that they were increasingly dissatisfied with their own caudillo, Cerda. Indeed, Cerda's capture was carried out with the assistance of some of his relatives and local followers. They seized him at a vulnerable moment (he had recently suffered a military defeat), and delivered him to Arguello.⁵⁹

A military court was promptly organized, and a death sentence was handed down. The day of his public execution, the pious Chief Cerda heard three consecutive masses before facing the firing squad. His corpse was left exposed for all to see. But even before the birds of prey could fall upon it, a man with a machete -- shouting expressions of moral outrage -- quartered the first National Chief of Nicaragua.

It was 1828, and Arguello's was a Pyrrhic victory. The municipal government of León, once his bastion, as if expressing the popular contempt felt toward all Nicaraguan leaders, decreed that to cease the war "between pueblos that are brothers", Arguello be recognized as Vice Chief solely for the purpose of convening elections; that once the elections had been conducted, he was to retire to one of the pueblos of the department of Granada, except the Villa of Managua, so as to remove all suspicion of bribery or graft; and that for the sake of tranquility, Arguello could not be reelected.⁶⁰

Barrio after barrio seconded the decision. The barrio San Juan de Dios was more explicit still.

For two miserable years Arguello has kept us involved in a calamitous war... Will anyone wish to succeed this man whose criminality has been proven in the public sessions of this municipal building? It is contended that only he can convene [elections]. We understand he is no more than an instrument to communicate the decree which can only be issued by a legislative body. And if this does not exist and we do not have an executive? What shall we do in orphanage? Seek a more legal means to constitute ourselves ... Let him convene [elections], but no more. Otherwise, we shall resist.⁶¹

Arguello was not without support. As the León authorities put it,

We understand that the satellites of the former Vice-Chief seek to support him against all opposition, even against the indestructable base of public opinion. And given that there is no other authority under such critical circumstance, this Municipality decrees that the Comandante General is to block all communication that the tyrant might establish with the pueblos of Chinandega, Viejo, etc. That these pueblos be informed, so that aware of our justice, they refuse cooperation with the tyrant who seeks to dominate us.⁶²

Once again, Nicaraguans were "orphans" determined to fight against their "brothers" should they try to impose a pater who was revered by some and abhorred by others. However, all Nicaraguans could agree on the notion that obedience was a virtue, that the nation was a family, and that where once the king had stood now ruled the constitution -- a divine document in their eyes (and lettre morte in ours).

As for the localities and cities, unable to establish mutually-agreed stability, they settled for mutually-agreed

paralysis. So-called peace treaties formalized the intricate arrangements.

The treaties between the government of Segovia and the government of Leon are ratified on condition that Segovia cannot under any circumstances attack Granada, and should this happen, either by Segovia alone or in alliance with Managua, then Leon will succor the people of Granada and attack Managua.⁶³

Managua and León, too, entered into a similar "peace treaty". Indeed, when Arguello attacked the Villa of Managua, the Villa, invoking the terms of the treaty, asked for assistance from León.⁶⁴ But León failed to comply. Managua faulted Arguello.

Arguello's occult hand, guided by the ancient maxim of tyrants -- divide and rule -- tries to undermine the social edifice which is grounded in the peaceful union of pueblos, and prevails in its advances because of the pueblos' credulity. Segovia, the Department of Leon and this Villa entered into inviolable treaties of peace and alliance. But now the authorities of this Villa look with pain upon the fact that as this Villa suffers the most unjust attacks from Arguello, allied pueblos, such as those of the department of Leon, look upon her fate with certain indifference, and have even tried to block the assistance that Segovia might provide [Managua].⁶⁵

If Arguello was indeed behind Leon's noncompliance, he was merely undermining an already weak sense of solidarity among the allied localities. Moreover, if Arguello pursued a "divide and rule" strategy, he succeeded only partially. He divided; but he did not rule in Leon, where his intentions were deemed

suspect at best. On February 9, 1829, the municipality of León declared that Arguello had no supporters to help him "enthroned" himself.⁶⁶ Finally, the municipality, in rapid sequence, disavowed Arguello's decree of convocation, elected a new Political Chief, agreed on the "expulsion of the factious", took preventive measures against an attack from Arguello, ordered his trial, and arranged for the creation of a "weekly" newspaper to "publicize the ideas of the true system".

c. Struggle Over the Federation: Good and Evil Revisited

To say that opportunistic alliances were forged according either to localist or familial interests, is to say that they were struck in pursuit of a moral goal: the defense of virtuous identity and attendant worth. By the late 1820's, it was common throughout Central America to see former allies turn into foes, and vice versa. Their sense of moral outrage, however, was a constant. Defeat at the hand of a rival notable, for example, was offensive to another because in their shared theatrical games of deceit, the central objective was the preservation and improvement of rank -- in turn a reflection of one's identity and worth.

Thus, in 1829, Guatemalan liberals, in an effort to prevail over their former ally, Aycinena, suppressed their own localist sentiments and forged an alliance with the man who was preparing to invade their country: the Honduran liberal

caudillo, Francisco Morazán. For his part, Aycinena, now dominant within Guatemala, set out to protect the preeminence both of his clan and his locality. Not surprisingly, he was a "centralist" who advocated concentrating as much authority as possible in Guatemala City, the residence of the Federal executive.

Also not surprisingly, Aycinena evoked suspicion among his rivals in his own province and among those of other provinces, particularly in cities that had long resented Guatemala City's dominance. Thus, San Salvador harbored Aycinena's Guatemalan enemies, who, like Morazán, demanded that Aycinena resign as Guatemala's Chief of State and that his ally, the Salvadoran liberal, Arce, resign as president of the Central American federation.

Their refusal to do so "obligated" Morazán to make ready to invade Guatemala. In the meantime, Aycinena's enemies inside Guatemala argued that their country should break away from the Federal government, a move that would have further isolated Arce. Soon there were two governments in the state of Guatemala, a liberal one in Antigua, which supported Morazán; the other in the capital.

Finally, in April of 1829, Morazán prevailed militarily in the capital of Guatemala. The Federal President (Arce) and Guatemala's Chief of State (Aycinena) went to prison. Now Morazan, like Arce before him, demanded new elections to change the functionaries of the Guatemalan state. In the

interim, he would be the latter's acting head, while the Guatemalan liberal, José Barrundia, became the president of the Federal Republic.

Morazan's victory over Guatemala City represented a victory of the provinces over the collective identity which, in their eyes, for so long had unjustly subordinated them by feigning its superiority of character. As in 1823, in 1829 the winners strove to construct an effective "national" government for the five states while repudiating "unjust" exercises of power by that government.⁶⁷ In Nicaragua, the city of León celebrated each of Morazan's triumphs as if they were the fulfillment of providential design. Upon receiving the news that [Morazan's] army, "the protector of the law", had emerged victorious after an important battle, the municipality decreed that there was to be ringing of church bells. And upon receiving news of Guatemala's capitulation before Morazán, the municipal government called for the celebration of "a solemn mass in the Cathedral to give thanks to the Almighty".⁶⁸ Finally, the municipal government decreed that the "patriotism" of the barrios was to be "incited" so that they would put on festive displays and celebratory "entertainments" as "best they could".⁶⁹

Morazan's victory established the regional dominance of the liberal alliance between Honduras and Salvador. Harmony within the individual states, however, did not flow naturally from the liberals' military triumph, or their alliance. In

Nicaragua, for example, Leon's municipal government had annulled its peace treaty with Managua, and threatened both Managua and Arguello with war. Finally, in July of 1829, Morazán decided to pacify the areas in Nicaragua and Honduras still fighting a civil war. He crushed the rebellion in Honduras, and instructed Nicaraguans to recognize Arguello as Chief of State.

After reiterating its disavowal of Arguello's legitimacy, Leon's municipal government decided to heed the orders of the Federal Government and recognized Arguello as Chief of State. The language of the municipal decree is telling.

By order of the Federal Government, Juan Arguello is recognized as Chief of State.

[this municipality] ratified the separation of the Vice Chief [Arguello] impelled by the torrential of public opinion which decidedly disavowed him.

[But now] taking account of the horrible state of orphanage of our peoples, it finds it recommendable to second the votes of such honorable and meritorious officialdom [members of the Federal Govt.] which has always been distinguished by the noble pride which great deeds inspire, and by love for independence and the federal system.⁷⁰
[Emphasis added]

Obedience to the federal government, however, was not unconditional. León recognized Arguello for a limited period, until there was a "convocatoria", calling for new elections. Nor did the continued aspiration of electoral democracy imply a change in mutual perceptions. Again, León accused the "evil

men who dwell in the city of San Miguel" of intercepting the mail dispatched to the federal Government in an effort to prevent the public announcement of the "convocatoria".⁷¹

Furthermore, the clash between good and evil, as always, became the core of the new narrative -- the core of history as story. Morazan's manifesto to the Central Americans pit "the efforts and sacrifices of the "free" in Salvador and Honduras and their illustrious allies in Nicaragua and Guatemala against their evil foes, who even "robbed humble huts, violated virgins, and took the lives of anyone who lived in them".

But as had been the case at previous turning points, the new official narrative, this time imposed by Morazán, required adaptation if there was to be hope; if there was to be a future for Central America as a viable nation. Once again, denial about the internal divisiveness that plagued Central Americans provided a temporary escape route. "Such ferocity," Morazán declared,

[was] not credible in Central Americans, who have always distinguished themselves by the sweetness of their character and their humane sentiments. Men of a different character must have been amongst them, inciting them, keeping their tenacity, encouraging their fierceness. And indeed, later it came to be known that they had relations with Spaniards of Trujillo and Havana.⁷²

Denial, however, could not explain the villainy of the Central American leaders deserving of punishment. Those, Morazán

treated as innately corrupt. And what about their Central American followers? How did Morazan justify their conduct? They, predictably, had been misled.

Former President Arce seems to have been born to incite civil war and bring woes upon the peoples whose cause he has feigned serving, when in fact he had no other than his own. If he worked for Independence it was to aggrandize himself. He offered the state of Salvador to Iturbide on condition that he would be its ruler. Cowardly, he delivered the plaza of that State to General Filisola. In order to get the votes of Nicaragua, he flattered both parties, thus sowing discord between them. And finally, after the peoples of the Center of America heaped honors upon him, he tried to subjugate them. He undermined their constitutional laws, persecuted their legitimate authorities, attacked his own patria, and was the first author of the civil war and the calamities that Central America has suffered for over two years...⁷³

In short, Arce's liberal deeds, once lauded by other notables like Morazán, had been a sham; the artful career of an impostor. And against this background of stark villainy, Morazán, like so many leaders before him, now offered his own sincerity and self-abnegation as swords against their "internal enemy".

Peoples of Central America: my frank character and your interests compel me to inform you of the storm being gathered against you and the dangers that surround you. It is up to you to discover the internal enemy; it is up to me to offer you once again the sacrifice of my life and my rest. Keep united. Repel discord and partisanship. Beware of the forces of deceit and of the machinations of all those who sow distrust against true patriots. [the

wicked] are well known; the revolution has exposed them, so you cannot make a mistake ... Soon I shall march to confront the enemies of the Republic.⁷⁴

Conciliatory efforts, too, were premised on a sharp distinction between good and evil. The champions of the former were to exorcise the latter from the nation and thus reconstitute the national family. To this end, in April 1830, José Barrundia, as president of the republic of Central America, named Dionisio Herrera, Morazan's uncle, as "Conciliator, Mediator, and Provisional Chief of Nicaragua" -- a country which, as Barrundia put it, found itself "in utter disorganization after a long and calamitous civil war". Herrera was also instructed to "convene elections, clear the path for election through mediation and negotiation, and punish the factious".⁷⁵

Finally, the distinction between evil and good -- again applied within the context of the familial model -- was the basis for the pacification policy to be implemented in Nicaragua. Consider the manifesto Herrera issued to the Nicaraguans.

This horrible monster that has dominated the State of Nicaragua has poisoned the hearts, has banished familial peace and banished the benefits inspired by kinship and friendship, by gratitude and paisanaje [local ties] and all other relationships of love and solace ... has corrupted morality, the most solid foundation of freedom and other rights ... Nicaraguans, do not drive me to resort to force; do not compel the entire Nation [Central America] to march upon you, as will surely happen if you are deaf to her clamors for peace and

harmony ... let us persuade the outside world that if in Nicaragua there are wicked men there are also good citizens, virtuous men who know the value of honor and probity ... [emphasis added]

Herrera handed down his warning as a national paterfamilias whose duty was to rid the corporate body of the "wicked" and restore its unity. And as "head" of that body, he alone was to utter goals and directives and to articulate disciplinary principles.

Military men, listen to the voice of the patria, which speaks to you through me: do not wage war on one another; do not slit your brothers' throats... The sons of Managua and Segovia, Leon and Granada must form a single family ... and defend one another from the external enemies who threaten to rob us of everything we have.⁷⁶

Nicaragua's disunity, of course, was not solely Nicaragua's problem, as it damaged the image that the Central American "family" presented to the world (at least in the minds of the region's notables). Thus, in May of 1830, when the Honduran (Herrera) assumed his position as Provisional Chief of the State of Nicaragua, he stressed the point that: "Nicaraguan society is a member of a greater society [Central America], which gives responsibility and power to each of its members; and which presents them as a single nation before the other nations of the world".⁷⁷ This fact could only add urgency to Herrera's mission. Soon, he purged the municipal government of Managua, getting rid of people suspected of supporting "the faction" and replacing them with "trustworthy" people. He then

proceeded to his residence in Granada. Leon was no longer the capital city. In a final act as Chief of State, Arguello, claiming that León could not afford him the necessary security, took revenge on the city by designating Granada the seat of the capital. The irony merely illustrates the convoluted paths of Central American politics: Arguello, once a popular leader in León and a foe of Granada, felt betrayed by the former, and in order to punish it, was willing to favor the city that had rejected his leadership.⁷⁸

The issue of trust remained crucial in the rest of Central America as well, because rivalry over institutional preeminence continued to provoke struggles and shifting alliances among notables and localities. Prominent liberals, for example, turned on one another precisely because they clashed over matters of prerogative, their struggle pitting, among others, two Guatemalan liberals against one another -- Barrundia, interim President of the Federation, and Molina, Guatemala's Chief of State.⁷⁹

In 1830, the Legislative Assembly ordered the trial of Pedro Molina, the head of the Guatemalan liberal party and Chief of State of Guatemala. The trial was sponsored not by conservatives, but by other liberal notables, among them Barrundia.⁸⁰ Indeed, in May of 1830, Barrundia tendered his resignation in response to counter-accusations levelled against him by pro-Molina congressmen. In a gesture of self-abnegation, Barrundia addressed the Congress.

It is both my duty and my right to separate myself from power. I have the satisfaction that organization and tranquility prevail, and that I have earned the approval of patriots. I therefore vehemently request Congress to put an end, at this agreeable moment, to my modest career, thus rewarding the painful sacrifice I made by obeying the law. If only one particular enemy of myself and federal authority were making accusations, I would not even think about it. But other, respectable, patriotic representatives have suscribed to the accusations, which makes me fear their influence on public opinion, the base of all good government. Therefore, I must not remain [in power] one more day.⁸¹

The majority in Congress, however, rejected the resignation, citing Barrundia's address, which "revealed" his "genuine and liberal principles" and his "patriotic vigilance and good sentiments".⁸²

An internal dissolution of the liberal bloc was thus postponed. By the end of 1830, Morazán had Nicaragua and Honduras under control, was military head of the Federation, and mantained his alliance with Guatemalan liberals.

Still, El Salvador now posed an increasingly serious challenge to Central American unity in general and to liberal dominance in particular. In 1831, Salvadorean conservatives headed by Arce revolted, and though Morazán prevailed once again, he was unable to establish a sufficiently strong national government, in good measure because El Salvador continued to fear and mistrust Guatemala. In February of 1832, the Salvadoran Arce invaded Guatemalan territory, only to be defeated by one of Morazan's lieutenants. And the State of El Salvador disavowed recognition of the authorities of the

Republic.

Guatemalans, too, harbored localist resentments of their own. Under the colonial regime, Guatemalan notables had often fought with the Captain General and other Spanish authorities over prerogatives, and had grown accustomed to exercising influence over the governance of the entire region. Their sense of entitlement did not cease with independence. And it did not cease in 1831, when Morazan became President of the Central American Republic. Indeed, a tug of war between Morazán and his fellow liberal, the new Chief of State of Guatemala, Barrundia, was soon underway,⁸³ adding to Morazan's troubles, which included various rebellions throughout the isthmus, most notably from Salvadorans.

Caught between the hostility of the Guatemalan Chief of State and the defiance of various camps in Honduras and Salvador, Morazán decided to strike out against both by transferring the federal capital from Guatemala City to San Salvador. In January of 1832, Morazán announced that the federal congress had authorized the move.

The residency of the federal authorities in Guatemala has served continuously as a pretext for complaints and disagreements between these authorities and the state of Salvador. The latter has habitually resisted laws issued by the national congress based on the erroneous opinion of the sons of Salvador that in Guatemala everything is done through 'intrigue, as a result of the immediate influence of Guatemalans and their spirit of capitalismo' [allegiance to their capital city and attendant sense of superiority], to quote a distinguished Salvadoran San Salvador maintains that its complaints are not heard in Guatemala, and in order to obey the national authorities 'thinks

it necessary that [these authorities] should be closer, so that [San Salvador's] voice can be heard more clearly and be better understood ...'⁸⁴
[emphasis added]

Morazan's reasoning was quite similar to that of the Mexican emperor, Iturbide, who once had sought to gain the allegiance of Central Americans partly by promising them direct access to his ear, unimpeded by the kind of intermediary power-holders who, under the colonial regime, had blocked or diminished creoles' access to their "benevolent" king. And in this strict sense, Morazan's proposed transfer could only be appealing to Salvadorans. But the latter also knew that Morazán was making the move in part to be better located to deal with insurrection. And so, Salvadoran troops stopped Morazán on his way to San Salvador. He in turn "requested" further instructions from the national senate, which instructed him to wage war on El Salvador.⁸⁵

Morazán issued a decree publicizing his reasons for waging war. There were three: first, the "machinations" of Manuel José Arce, which "threatened the nation" from its borders with Mexico; second, the "machinations" of the "foreigner" Vicente Dominguez (an Arce lieutenant who was not a Central American), which "threatened the nation from Omoa". Finally, the third was that El Salvador not only "[resisted] the authority of the federal government" by "not providing the assistance required, but [had] separated the country from the union".⁸⁶

Soon thereafter, Morazan's uncle, Herrera, as Chief of State of Nicaragua, issued a decree in which he declared that his government no longer recognized El Salvador's government as legitimate or constitutional.⁸⁷ Herrera also imposed contributions on the State of Nicaragua to support Morazán, and placed the Nicaraguan contingent under Morazan's command.⁸⁸ In his reasoning, Herrera revealed a perception of the "nation" as an emblematic identity, with an image and honor to protect, not only from external attack, but also from the internal offenses of sinister leaders capable of duping the "simple" and "gullible" people by force of sheer eloquence.⁸⁹

Ultimately, Morazán entered San Salvador victorious. In March of 1832, he reported his victory in a brief circular to the Ministers of the Federation: "At this moment I have occupied this plaza by sheer force, with divisions from Honduras and Nicaragua ... Long Live the Republic!".⁹⁰

Control over San Salvador by no means guaranteed regional stability. Guatemalans, for example, were more than ever in the grip of localist suspicions. A Guatemalan writing in the early 1830's put it succinctly: "Morazán is not the son of Guatemala. He is the representative of San Salvador and Honduras in the task of destroying Guatemala". Indeed, even key Guatemalan liberals were once again a problem for Morazán, though this time the problem did not begin with Barrundia but with Molina. Accordingly, pro-Morazán Nicaraguans in the

National Congress led a counter-attack on Molina. In typical fashion, they issued a broadsheet addressed to "El Público", or The Public. Their avowed purpose was "to exterminate the wicked", particularly Molina, "whom we are certain is more evil, more prejudicial, and a worse traitor to the patria than the Salvadoran functionaries who are in prison ... for having broken the federal pact and taken up arms against the supreme authorities".⁹¹

Yet how did liberals explain this turnabout in Molina, the preeminent member of their ranks? Perhaps he was in the thrall of a less worthy person.

Molina has been misguided by a drunken, noisy woman [his wife], thus committing political errors that have spread discord, ignited civil war, and covered the nation with blood and mourning ... displaying [his influence] in the papers that he publishes so frequently to affront the most distinguished patriots ... we are his enemies because we profess different principles. Our political faith is liberty, peace and order; Dr. Molina's is employment for himself and his family, as well as commotion and servile submission to his wife's precepts".⁹²

The attack on Molina's wife brought Central Americans full circle since independence. To begin with, the attack impugned her character on the basis of the leading role she had played in gathering the crowds that had pressured the Guatemalan cabildo into drafting the declaration of independence from Spain. Thus, liberals now attacked one another for behavior displayed by all in the pursuit of a common cause. Once more,

common practices were acceptable one moment, objectionable the next. Moreover, their partial and imperfect interpretations of events were again articulated in the shared absolutism of the discourse of good and evil. Accordingly, the pamphleteers concluded with a warning: the patria would take revenge against the "bats" that dwelt "in dark caves"; against the "monster always thirsty for Central American blood" and who had "offended the patria".⁹³

Yet even as Guatemalans turned on one another, mistrust of Guatemala continued unabated among the rest of Central America. The Guatemalan Assembly admitted as much when other Central Americans began to clamor for a fair trial, outside of Guatemala, for the Salvadorans who had rebelled against the Federal authorities: "It is insinuated in connection to the trial of the Salvadoran prisoners, that Guatemala exercises undue influence on the Federation, which goes against the sons of other states".⁹⁴

Conclusion

Between 1821 and 1833, the pressure of intra-state and inter-state mistrust and conflict was unrelenting in Central America, as was the breaking and making of alliances. Throughout, however, Central Americans held on tenaciously to two visions. One upheld the procedural sanctity of elections. The other was ideological, and it idealized the national family. Thus, the organization of institutions and their

guiding worldview were not the central point of contention. Rather, rivals fought for the right to institutional preeminence and for the privilege of "leading" the family to its natural state of perfect harmony. Simply put, Central Americans fought for roles and rank, in turn the visible expressions of moral worth, or more precisely, the tangibles of identity.

Struggles over role and rank, however, were not easily settled. Time and again Central Americans "elected" their leaders, and time and again, feeling they had been "duped" by the elected, deposed them either militarily or through trickery of their own. Also, time and again they exalted familial harmony, which they sought to ensure by "purging" the corporate body of "wicked" elements (who were often one and the same as the elected officials). In short, the suspicion that came with a long tradition of dramaturgical obedience now invaded and sabotaged the workings of novel institutional arrangements.

The result of this internal corrosion, as we have seen, was a gradual chipping away at the federal system, which only became increasingly ineffectual with time. Even the Liberal camp contributed to this debilitation, to the point that on January 27, 1833, the Liberal Chief of the State of Guatemala, Galvez, declared the state of Guatemala as antecedent to the Central American Federation.⁹⁵

In the next chapter we will see how the Federation

finally collapsed under the pressure of intra- and inter-state jealousies and rancor. This led the most violent of all the five states, Nicaragua, to look for the resolution of its own ongoing struggles by refining its view of the "national family".

1. Francisco Ortega, Nicaragua en los Primeros Años de su Emancipación Política (París: Librería de Garnier Hermanos, 1894), 42-54.
2. José Coronel Urtecho, Reflexiones sobre la Historia de Nicaragua; de Gainza a Somoza, Volume I (León: Editorial Hospicio, 1962).
3. José Coronel Urtecho, "Paradojas de las Intervenciones de Valle y Arce en Nicaragua," Revista Conservadora del Pensamiento Centroamericano, Volume XXVIII, no. 140 (May 1972), 45.
4. Ibid., 46-50.
5. José Dolores Gámez, Historia de Nicaragua (Managua: Fondo de Promoción Cultural, Banco de América, 1975).
6. For the intricate story of elite exodus from cities and restoration of dominance, See Coronel Urtecho's Reflexiones.
7. "Acta, Se acuerda auxiliar a Granada," León, July 10, 1824, Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volume I (1936-1937).
8. Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volume VI, no. 1 (April 1944), 181-185.
9. Ibid., 169-170.
10. Coronel Urtecho, "Paradojas de las Intervenciones de Valle y Arce en Nicaragua", in op. cit.
11. Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volume VI, no.1 (April 1944), 170-171.
12. "Nicaragua pide que se retire la División Salvadoreña que está de Guarnición en León," 1824, Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Vol. I (1936-1937).
13. Coronel Urtecho, "Paradojas," in op. cit.
14. The Salvadoran's success in his pacification effort was also due to the death of the caudillo Sacasa after receiving a mortal wound in battle.
15. "Un Guatemalteco", Memorias para la Historia de la Revolución de Centro América (Jalapa: Impresa Aburto y Blanco, en Oficina del Gobierno, 1832), 32-33.

16. R. L. Woodward, Jr., "The Aftermath of Independence, 1821-1870", in Central America since Independence, Leslie Bethell, ed., (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 12.
17. Hubert Howe Bancroft, The Works of Hubert Howe Bancroft, Volume VIII, History of Central America (San Francisco: The History Company Publishers, 1887), 145.
18. J.C. Pinto Soria, Centroamérica, de la colonia al Estado Nacional, 1800-1849 (Guatemala: Editorial Universitaria, Colección Textos, 1986), 69.
19. Manuel Antonio de la Cerda, "A Ciudadanos Secretarios de la Asamblea Constituyente," León, May 10, 1825, Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volume I (1936-1937), 255.
20. Ibid.
21. Manuel Antonio de la Cerda, "Bando de Buen Gobierno," León, May 25, 1825, Revista Conservadora, Volume 1, no. 2 (August 1960), 22-24.
22. "Asamblea Constituyente al Jefe de Estado," León, May 21, 1825, Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volume I (1936-1937), 256-257.
23. "Del Jefe de Estado de Nicaragua a los Ciudadanos Secretarios del Congreso Federal," León, May 22, 1825, Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volume I (1936-1937), 257.
24. "Discurso," given at the Ateneo, September 15, 1881, Revista Conservadora, Volume 2, no. 10 (July 1961), 137.
25. Juan Arguello, "Proclama," León, 1825, Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Vol.I (1936), 61
26. "Discursos pronunciados en el Congreso Federal de Centroamérica el año de 1826, por José del Valle", Anales de la Sociedad de Geografía e Historia de Guatemala, Volume II, no. 2, (December 1925), 239-272.
27. President Arce arrested Chief Barrundia on September 6, 1826. Vice-Chief Cirilo Flores assumed the office of Chief of Guatemala. See Bancroft, op. cit., 85-86.
28. Woodward, Jr., op. cit., 13.
29. Bancroft, op. cit., 88-89.

30. Ibid., 120.
31. Ibid., 86-88.
32. Louis E. Bumgartner, "The Attempted Assassination of Honduran President Dionisio de Herrera," November 3, 1826, The Hispanic American Historical Review, Volume XLII, no.1 (February 1962), 60-62.
33. Bancroft, op. cit., 89.
34. "Un Nicaraguense," "Relación del Origen y Progreso de la Revolución del Estado de Nicaragua," May 10, 1827, Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volume II, no. 1 (September, 1937), 43.
35. "Discursos pronunciados en el Congreso Federal de Centroamerica el año de 1826, por Jose del Valle," Anales de la Sociedad de Geografía e Historia de Guatemala, Volume II, no. 2 (December 1925), 239-272.
36. Ibid., 239-272.
37. "Acta," Municipalidad de León, November 22, 1826, Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Vol.I (1936-1937), 67-68.
38. Dictamen de la Comisión Especial nombrada por la Asamblea Legislativa del Estado del Salvador para examinar los documentos remitidos por el Supremo Gobierno de la Federación al del Estado, relativos a la posición peligrosa de la República en cuanto al orden interior y exterior de ella, (San Salvador: Imprenta del Estado, October 21, 1826), in Pinto Soria, Op. cit., 177.
39. "Acta," Municipalidad de León, December 19, 1826, Revista de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Vol.I (1936-1937), 68.
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41. Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volume VI (1936-1937), 155-156.
42. Gámez, Historia de Nicaragua, 389.
43. See Ortega, Nicaragua en los Primeros Años.

44. "El Jefe Cerda describe la situación de Nicaragua en agosto de 1827", Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volume I (1936-1937), 75.
45. José Milla, "Don Antonio José de Ibarri," Anales de la Sociedad de Geografía e Historia de Guatemala, Volume XII, no. 1 (September 1935), 85-96.
46. "Discurso," delivered at the Ateneo, September 15, 1881, Revista Conservadora, Volume 2, no. 10 (July 1961), 137.
47. "Cerda da cuenta al Ejecutivo Federal de los asuntos de Nicaragua," 1827, Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Vol.I (1936-1937), 78-79.
48. See "Cartas de don Manuel Antonio de la Cerda que informan de la situación," 1827, Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volume I (1936-1937), 80-82.
49. Bancroft, op. cit., 90.
50. "El Vice-Jefe Juan Arguello relata cómo y por qué lo depuso Cleto Ordoñez el 14 de setiembre de 1827," (San Salvador: Imprenta del Gobierno, 1827), Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volume VI, no. 1 (April 1944).
51. Ibid..
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53. See "Acta de 16 de setiembre, 1827," Libro de actas Municipales de León, Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volume I (1936-1937), 84.
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55. "Cerda trata de reunir la Asamblea," 1827, Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volume I (1936-1937), 86.
56. "Acta de 13 de noviembre," 1827, Libro de actas Municipales de León, Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volume I (1936-1937), 91-92.
57. "Acta," November 16, 1827, Libro de actas de la Municipalidad de León, Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volume I (1936-1937), 93-94.

58. "El Jefe Político de Granada no opina por elecciones para Jefe y Vice Jefe," 1828, Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volume I (1936-1937), 100-101.
59. Ortega, op. cit.
60. "Acta," December 13, 1828, Libro de actas Municipales de León, Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volume I (1936-1937), 104-105.
61. "Acta del barrio de San Juan de Dios," 1828; "El barrio de Saragoza reconecerá a Arguello para que convoque a elecciones," Decembre 12, 1828; "El barrio de Guadalupe opina lo mismo," Decembre 12, 1828. See *Ibid.*, 108-109.
62. "Acta," León, January 10, 1829, in *ibid.*, 112-113.
63. "Acta," León, January 23, 1829, in *ibid.*, 115-116.
64. See "Acta," Managua, January 29, 1829, in *ibid.*, 117-119.
65. "Acta," León, January 30, 1829, in *ibid.*, 119-121.
66. "Acta," León, February 9, 1829, in *ibid.*, 122-123.
67. "Decree of August 22, 1829," in J.C. Pinto Soria, op.cit., 243.
68. "Acta," León, April 22, 1829, Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volume I (1936-1937), 133.
69. "Acta," León, April 25, 1829, Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volume I (1936-1937), 134.
70. "Acta," León, August 5, 1829, in *ibid.*, 141.
71. "Acta," León, August 24, 1829, in *ibid.*, 144-145.
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73. *Ibid.*
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75. José Barrundia, "El Presidente de la República Federal de Centro América, nombra a Don Dionisio Herrera Conciliador, Mediador y Jefe Provisional de Nicaragua, 1830," Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volume XI, no. 1 (April 1951), 193.

76. "Dionisio Herrera, Jefe electo y pacificador del Estado de Nicaragua, nombrado por el Supremo Gobierno Federal," Chinandega, April 7, 1830, Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua. Volume X, No. 3 (December 1950), 258-262.

77. "Discurso pronunciado por Dn. Dionisio Herrera al tomar posesión del Gobierno de Nicaragua," May 12, 1830, Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volume I (1936-1937), 151-155.

78. See "Decreto de 30 de Enero de 1830, designando a Granada por residencia de las Supremas Autoridades," Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volume VII, no.3 (November 1945), 34.

79. Bancroft, op. cit., 153.

80. Antonio Batres Jauregui, La América Central Ante la Historia. 1821-1921, Volume III, Memorias de un Siglo (Guatemala: 1949), 135-136.

81. "Renuncia Don José F. Barrundia ante el Congreso," Guatemala, May 7, 1830, Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volume X, no. 3 (December 1950), 267-268.

82. See "Al C. Presidente de la República," Guatemala, May 11, 1830, Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volume X, no. 3 (December 1950), 268-269.

83. "El Jefe de Estado D. Dionisio de Herrera decreta contribuciones para sostener el Gobierno del General Morazán," Granada, January 21, 1832, Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volume I (1936-1937).

84. Francisco Morazán, "Manifiesto del Presidente de la República Federal de Centro América" (Jalpatagua: January, 1832).

85. "El Jefe de Estado D. Dionisio de Herrera decreta contribuciones para sostener el Gobierno del General Morazan," Granada, January 21, 1832, Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua. Volume I (1936-1937), 263-264.

86. Francisco Morazán, "Decreto" (Zacapa: January 19, 1832), Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volume XI, no.1 (April 1951), 158.

87. "Decreto de 10 de febrero de 1832, por lo que se declara que el Estado de Nicaragua no reconoce por legítimas i (sic) constitucionales a las autoridades que actualmente rigen en El

Salvador", Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volume I (1936-1937), 265-266.

88. "El Jefe de Estado D. Dionisio de Herrera decreta contribuciones para sostener el Gobierno del General Morazán," Granada, January, 1832. See *ibid.*, 263-264.

89. See *ibid.*, 265-266.

90. *Ibid.*, 270.

91. Los Ciudadanos Angel Vidal y Gabino Sousa, "Al Público" (Guatemala: Imprenta de la Unión, May 6, 1832).

92. *Ibid.*

93. *Ibid.*

94. Exposición de la Asamblea guatemalteca al Congreso Federal, "Para que los reos detenidos en San Francisco sean juzgados fuera de Guatemala" (Guatemala: Boletín Oficial, 1832), in Pinto Soria, op. cit., 177.

95. *Ibid.*, 208.

CHAPTER 9

From Anarchy to Paternal Governance and the National WarIntroduction

Central America remained a federal republic until the late 1830's, bound both by the ideological force of the "familial" organizational model and a shared fear of foreign aggression. But as we saw in the previous chapter, the Central American "family" was internally fragmented from the start. Indeed, the earliest violent conflicts came about as a result of insoluble conflicts over preeminence within the "natural order": that is, within the familial model of government.

In practical terms this meant that even as Central Americans felt compelled to form a single republic in 1824, rival identities still disputed one another's "true worth" and proper rank. From this perspective, Guatemalan centralists found the federalist constitution too permissive of state autonomy, and Salvadorans in general found it too favorable to Guatemala. As early as 1825, the Salvadoran legislature sought to "correct" Guatemalan de facto dominance with a decree which stated that no federal law could be applied in Salvador without its prior approval.

The localist tensions undermining the federalist framework transcended camps. The Salvadoran decree, for example, was a liberal project, yet it was the liberal

caudillo Morazan, who annuled it after he rose to federal power in 1829. And it was still during Morazan's tenure that, in 1831, Salvador disavowed federal authority. Morazan, at the head of Guatemalan troops, restored federal authority, but at a cost. In Salvador, the impression that Guatemala was the "despot" of the federal republic deepened; and resentment grew over this "monstruous" situation.¹

Moreover, localist and clannish drives for dominance within each of the Central American states led to violent inter-regional entanglements. By 1833, the states of the Republic, particularly Nicaragua, were internally divided between those clamoring for reform of the federal constitution and the liberal defenders of the status quo. The former sought a reduction of federal prerogatives; the latter sought their preservation. Their divergent stances reflected their conditions as "winners" and "losers" in the extant distribution of status and power.

Conflict over status and power, we have seen, was at base conceived as a moral and existential struggle between true and false identities. Hence the entrenchment of suspicion and the intractability of conflicts. This chapter demonstrates that, by mid-century, rivals came to share the view of paternal government as the solution to "anarchy". Underlying both the fear of anarchy and the paternal solution was a conflation of "difference" and "disorder". For example, in the early 1830's, the liberal incumbent in Nicaragua believed that opinions on

the constitutional issue ought to be rendered "uniform". For uniformity, in turn, would deny "harbor" to the "wicked", taking away from them "the opportunity to express their passions and satisfy their vengeance".²

This was also the discourse at the core of official exhortations to peace. In this discourse, civil war came of the opportunity that differences of opinion afforded "evil". And war in turn threatened the core of morality: that is, "sacred religion" and its commandments, institutions and rites.³

Finally, this was the discourse of the pro-reform movement, which in Nicaragua defied local governmental authority, and forced the liberal Chief of State to rely on the military strongmen of the country for his very survival in office.⁴ The rebels spoke of their "loss of trust" in the incumbent.⁵ And they presented this loss as the culmination of an unfolding narrative plot -- a familiar story depicting a manichean universe in which "evil" incited violence while "virtue" tried not to "scandalize the world".⁶

Thus embedded in the discourse of good and evil, loss of trust not only gave Nicaraguans license to disobey their Chief, it also forced them to choose between loyalty to him and loyalty to their society.

You [the Chief] are considered the root-cause of social dissolution ... Pay heed: Public opinion conspires not against the government but against your person and your administration.⁷

But in fact, the next elected Chief of State faced the same type of repudiation, with the additional complication that in his case the two military strongmen who had jointly supported his predecessor were now at war.⁸ In typical fashion, the fighting between the military caudillos was triggered by the election itself, as the two commandants and their rival cities, Granada and León, competed for control of the government. Agreed on the rules of the game -- elections -- neither could trust the other to play fairly; rumors of deception, even when quickly proven false, were enough to sabotage electoral procedures.⁹ And once war exploded, the antagonists could not trust one another to engage sincerely in peace negotiations.¹⁰

a. Justification and the Future

At the conclusion of the war, the discourse of good and evil, so central to political struggle, was marshalled to explain its outcome; to justify both victory and defeat. In politics, the victorious commandant of León told the legislative assembly in 1834, the forces of light and dark do battle. The latter foment "remembrance of old rivalries", the former promote their "perpetual forgetfulness"; and where the former offer their "frankness", the latter meet them with "impostures". Faced with this fact, the victor could do no less than order the execution en masse of the military

officers under the command of Granada's vanquished caudillo.

Moreover, this harsh measure would serve as the foundation of future governance. The military victor, now as Chief of State, became the "father" who reluctantly punished the "infidelity" of those "wicked" pueblos which, "mistaking the executive's frank and humane language for weakness", engaged in "scandalous" disobedience.¹¹

If the government's paternal response to infidelity and disobedience was legitimate within the context of the nation as family, the national family was the "ideal" because it linked the "natural" and the "moral". This maxim applied both within the individual states and at the level of the federation. Indeed, the federal system, for liberals as much as for conservatives, was "not a creation of men". Rather, it was a reflection of the "natural" universal order, which was in turn the "stupendous work of the Creator". If there was a problem, it was with the constitution, which "denaturalized" the federation.¹²

"Denaturalization" legitimated disavowals of federal authority. Conversely, the preservation of authority required the identification of rebels with "factions" that threatened the "integrity" of the natural order. In 1834, the bloody military confrontation between El Salvador and President Morazán turned on these two complementary oppositions, both of which derived from a shared worldview. For as long as this vision remained intact, military victory, like elections,

could not guarantee stability, as rivals, in a strategic effort to advance both the cause of the "natural order" and their own standing within that order, forged tactical alliances.

But if tactical alliances enabled the parties to carry out practical tasks, these accomplishments were invariably temporary. The alliance between President Morazán and Chief Gálvez, for example, enabled them to organize a federal government and to convene a federal congress that was overwhelmingly Guatemalan. In addition, Morazán, backed by Guatemalan troops, finally managed to transfer the Federal District to San Salvador. In short, Morazan and Gálvez both seemed to be on the verge of a historic resolution that would benefit Guatemala and Salvador, as well as promote the cause of Central American unity. The day Morazán transferred the Federal District to San Salvador,

Guatemalan functionaries accompanied their federal counterparts for about a league, stating their wishes along the way that the transfer would have the desired consequences ... the Chief of Guatemala vowed to the Federation's President and Senators that Guatemala would be as obedient from a distance as it had always been.¹³ [emphasis added]

Morazán was leaving behind a self-declared "dutiful" Guatemalan Chief of State, but he was also "imposing" the federal capital on the Salvadorans. This was ironic. As we saw in the previous chapter, Morazán had initially been driven to

seek the transfer by the hostility of the Guatemalan Chief of State toward the President and by Salvadoran complaints that their "voice" could not be "heard" in Guatemala City.

Such ironies only added to the misreadings of Central American politics by outsiders and insiders alike. Because Central Americans lacked the discourse that would have enabled them both to articulate to themselves the moral depth of their strategic objectives and to justify their tactical measures, their struggles over rank appeared to outsiders either as naked contests for power or as selfless attempts to save the nation. In other words, outsiders took the discourse of archetypical identities at face value. Thus, the observer John L. Stephens saw a stark contrast between the unionists in San Salvador and other Central Americans:

[San Salvadorans] are the only men who speak of sustaining the integrity of the Republic as a point of honour ... They [are] resolved to sustain the Federation, or die under the ruins of San Salvador. [Listening to them] was the first time my feelings had been at all aroused. In all the convulsions of the time I had seen no flash of heroism, no high love of country. Self-preservation and self-aggrandizement were the ruling passions. It was a bloody scramble for power and place.¹⁴

Just as the clarity of the outsider's judgement depended on a superficial reading of the motives involved, the veil of suspicion that alienated insiders depended on an equally erroneous interpretation of "the other".

[Salvadorans] did not speak in the ferocious and sanguinary spirit I afterward heard imputed to them in Guatemala, but they spoke with great bitterness of gentlemen ... who, they said, had been before spared by their lenity; and they added, in tones that could not be misunderstood, that they would not make such a mistake again.¹⁵

Misreadings in politics obviously matter because they influence our actions in the short term. The ferocity and mutual disdain of the camps could not be explained otherwise, particularly if we take into account the rapidity with which foes became friends (and vice versa). Guatemalan "serviles", for example, now allied themselves with the Indian Caudillo, Carrera (whom they had dreaded). And Morazán, who had had to fight Salvador, now marched at the head of Salvadoran and Honduran troops against Guatemala and Carrera. Yet, Morazan and his troops came into Guatemala shouting "Slit throats! Slit throats!" and "Long Live the Federation"¹⁶ not because they were naturally inclined to do so, but because they felt compelled by others to do so. The same applies to the Carrera forces, which by next morning were claiming the "extermination" of the "aggressors".¹⁷

Misreadings, in brief, also shape our long-term views -- our vision of the world we inhabit; and thus they tell us not only what reality is, but also what we must do if we are to survive in it. Unable to break the vicious cycle of "deceit and revelation" that eroded intra-camp solidarity and entrenched inter-camp suspicion, Central Americans found themselves fighting former allies to the death while former

foes fought on the same side of these wars. Baffled, our observer Stephens noted that only a

[a] year before, the people of Guatemala, of both parties, had implored [Morazán] to come to their relief, as the only man who could save them from Carrera and destruction. At that moment he added another to the countless instances of the fickleness of popular favour ... [Now] denounced personally, and the Federation under which he served disavowed, he had marched against Guatemala.¹⁸

As Central Americans forged and broke alliances, mutual anticipation of betrayal rendered unstable institutional arrangements designed to manage localistic pulls and clannish drives within the individual states. In Costa Rica, for example, the "ambulatory" presidency was instituted so as to distribute fairly the prestige and power of the executive among rival localities and their notables. Thus, the executive resided in various cities, spending a fixed amount of time in each. In 1835, however, the city of Cartago, once preeminent under the colonial regime, remained the object of suspicion among rival cities. The notables of Cartago, for their part, could tolerate neither the loss of their city's preeminence nor the distrust of its rivals.

The municipal government of Cartago argued that it very much aspired "to a sincere peace and a permanent union, when as a single family and our wishes in unison, we shall affirm our glorious Independence." Cartago, however, went on to

qualify the statement:

If ... on some pretext, that which can be restituted is not, ills shall grow, and the most eloquent proposals for union shall be taken as puerile, because it is innate in man to miss that which he has always possessed and distrust he who unjustly took it away. This idea grows with remembrance, and causes agitation and turbulence which invariably lead to harmful and painful consequences.¹⁹ [emphasis added]

b. Discursive Potency and Anarchy

Ironically, if Central Americans lacked a transformative discourse that could have been employed to reformulate their vision of societal harmony and political competition, they also clung tenaciously to their faith in the transformative power of discursive eloquence. Impelled by this faith, governments and opponents alike founded their own "newspapers", all of which seemed to depart from the premise that an impassioned writer could explain the inexplicable.²⁰ Thus, the first Nicaraguan official paper announced in 1835 that:

The voices of the servile and the liberal are today received in their proper meaning. They have been substituted by the voices of the enlightened, the virtuous, the meritorious, the men of probity and good sense.²¹

On the official view, the virtuous had come to power in Nicaragua, and for this reason, the expectation that socio-

political life would naturally reach a point of perfect harmony seemed at last confirmed. So why the need for the "special tribunal" which the government had set up to deal with dissenters? The official publication replied as follows:

Observing this brilliant scenario of tranquility, peace and constant order, all of which are the result of the veneration and respect given to equal guarantees and public liberty, enthusiasts of these same liberty may find it curious that, amidst all this peace, a special tribunal has been formed to judge the raucous. But this must not induce horror.²²

Repression of the "raucous" ought not cause alarm because, as the newspaper's motto said, "Liberty is more frequently destroyed by excess than by its enemies". In other words, now that power was in the proper hands, and fundamental harmony had been attained, the crucial task of governance was the protection of limits -- limits which those who succumbed to excess transgressed.

Inciting turmoil was the most deplorable of transgressions for Central Americans, who, perceiving themselves as bearers of an "image", had always despised "scandal". But we have also seen that even Central America's proudest notables had a tradition of secret political agitation and "mob" violence. Indeed, "collective ire" remained essential to the political theatre that preceded the imposition of official policies. The Nicaraguan Congress of 1836, for example, approved the reforms of the Federal

Constitution in order to avoid an "explosion" among the "pueblos".²³

But if inexorable collective ire served governments, it also served revolution. In 1837, for example, a mob executed the same Chief of State who only recently had declared Nicaragua to be in a state of enlightenment, the protection of which required the "special tribunal". Predictably, a group of Leon's notables and military officers operated behind the facade of the "mob" in a successful bid to eliminate the Chief (who was an ally of Morazán and was himself working to maintain the federation).

And as always, political camps abhorred the deployment of theater by others, yet privileged it among their own array of practices. Thus, the new government ignored the behind-the-scenes planners of the assassination, and concentrated its punitive force on those who had actually seized the victim. The government then singled out the leader of the mob for execution.²⁴ But identifying the embodiment of "evil" in a particular individual was not enough. The problem remained that the "evil" had been committed by one of Leon's own "sons". Hence the need to specify the "kind" of evil that had impelled the mob leader: a "cannibalistic" impulse explained the disruption of order from within.²⁵

Finally, isolating the "human beast" who had turned against his own kind and devoured them was not enough to maintain the order that had been restored. That difficult task

called for a constant attempt at the "moral" education of the public. Hence the creation of the official paper, Aurora de Nicaragua, or Nicaragua's Dawn, which departed from the explicit premise that: "A people without morality cannot endure; a people with morality not only preserves itself but progresses".²⁶

The publication of such newspapers was quickly becoming common among governments and opponents alike. The year of Nicaragua's Dawn also saw the emergence of the anti-government Nicaragua's Sentry. Put out by exiles living in Salvador, the paper's objective was "vigilance" and criticism of the government, as its name implied. Moreover, as newspapers engaged in verbal warfare, readers and actors alike fed into their ongoing disputes by issuing "hojas sueltas", or broadsides, which either supported or refuted the allegations made by rivals.

As in the case of colonial narratives and post-independence journals, the twin object of these broadsides was to "reveal" the merits of the "truly virtuous" and to "unmask" vile impostors. Reacting to an issue of the anti-government Sentry, a broadside printed in León charged that an "impudent hand" was trying to foment the kind of "disturbances" that had culminated in the killing of the Chief of State. The broadside concluded with a threat. "The Sentry has done nothing but slander grossly the current administration and utter falseties which it will see painfully refuted".²⁷

Mixed with the notables' acrimonious disputes were their discursive efforts both to make sense of a crumbling federation and to articulate the ideological foundations of unity for the future. The task was not a simple one. By 1838, leaders faced a bleak scenario, as one state after another proclaimed its independence from the Republic which, by 1840, no longer existed. Compounding the inter-state jealousies and rancors that tore apart the federation were the mistrusts internal to each of the states and their camps. In Guatemala, for example, the liberals combined with Morazan to bring down the state government led by fellow liberal Galvez, going so far as to propose that the legislature confer the title of "Benemerita" -- Notable and Worthy-- on the city of Antigua for sheltering the armed opposition.²⁸

The speech given by the deposed Chief during his trial by the Legislative Assembly suggests that intra-camp political struggle remained a zero-sum game between emblematic identities.²⁹ Indeed, when the deposed functionary named the representatives in the Assembly whom he felt ought to recuse themselves from the proceedings, they turned out to be the preeminent members of his own camp.³⁰ They were the ones, said the former Chief, who could not participate in the proceedings in which his "good name", "more dear than life," was at stake.³¹

Finally, intra-camp conflicts were inextricable from inter-camp and inter-state hostilities. Between 1838 and 1840,

for example, Morazán fought Rafael Carrera in Guatemala, as well as state leaders in Honduras, Nicaragua and Salvador, who openly rejected the President's authority. And in Costa Rica, an anti-Morazán caudillo deposed the Chief of State and assumed power.

Caught in this web of animosities and violent conflict, "liberals" and "serviles" alike came to share a profound fear of "chaos". Throughout the states, the dissolution of society itself no longer seemed unfathomable. But what was the solution? A liberal notable who had been a major participant in the independence movement and was now an ally of Morazán condemned "excess" as the culprit.

All passions share the same property: total abandon. It is in this property that pleasure lies. To enjoy a passion, it is necessary to deliver oneself entirely into its arms, without thought or care for the consequences. This is what happened to us with Independence.

And excess was usually the result of the "divergence" inherent in a plurality of opinions. Central Americans, our liberal argued, had lived under "the illusion" that they knew liberty, when they only knew "half". So they paid dearly, falling into "chaos". Indeed, "disunity and imprudence" had led them to "the brink of an abyss", at which point, the "barbarian" -- Carrera -- seized the opportunity.

Thus, the Central American liberal warned,

If we disunite again and surrender to disputes, if we deliver ourselves to liberal plans and notions of inalienable rights, this barbarian shall rise again, or perhaps another one who does not know how to read or write [Carrera was illiterate].

If unity would come of the awareness that the foe could rise again at any moment; success would come from "outsmarting" the enemy.

The ancients waged their wars more through stratagems than brute force, and the most memorable victories were won through guile. In war, Saint Augustin said, artfulness and valor have the same rank ...

And in the land of masks and impostors, outsmarting the enemy depended not only on the astuteness of the virtuous but also on seeing the true nature of the enemy.

Barbarians, even though they frequently utter the word "Religion", in truth have no virtue or morality or any humane propensity. They understand "Religion" to mean apparitions and superstitious practices. True religion is a code of virtues and morality, of gentleness and union among men, of practicality and civility ...

But once victory was attained, then the ideal world -- free of deceit and suspicion -- could be constructed.

Because of our good comportment and rectitude of intentions we shall reestablish trust ... We shall enter a new order, a new life, a new path; we shall navigate under the two stars of our purpose: forgetfulness of the past, brotherhood for the

future.³² [emphasis added]

Until then, however, disorder remained a threat for liberals and opponents alike. "Anarchy" was as dreaded by pro-federation camps as it was by the anti-federation forces; and "anarchist" was their shared insult.³³ More importantly, "revolution" became for incumbents a "reactionary" force, propelled by "ignorance" to destroy "civilization".³⁴ Hence the dilemma of governments which came to power by force: their mission was to establish unity and structure, but without the open deployment of violence.

Once again, they solved the dilemma by resorting to theater; that is, by creating yet another variant of dramaturgical obedience. Thus, when in 1839 the caudillo Carrera became the de facto ruler of Guatemala, he proceeded to establish a "civilian" government. But when the civilian Chief of State defied the caudillo's supremacy, he was quickly persuaded into renewed submission by an armed group of men who fired shots at his door. As if he had nothing to do with the attack, Carrera came to the rescue of the Chief, thus asserting the importance of his military power to the survival of the civilian incumbent.³⁵

And as in the past, such theater entrenched suspicion and rancor. The "farces" put on by Carrera offended liberals, one of whom wrote a poem connecting the caudillo's misdeeds to his humble origins. Carrera, said the indignant liberal, was a

"Son of misery and of nothingness". Or borrowing the colonial terminology, Carrera was "immoral" because he was a "no-one". Soon, however, Carrera's liberal critic was to be "converted" to "servilismo" ("servility"), and once a convert, he was commissioned to deliver a speech laudatory of the "serviles".³⁶

In Nicaragua, a similar dynamic had led to behind-the-scenes military dominance. In 1838, Nicaraguans drafted a new constitution, which reduced the faculties given to the Executive by the constitution of 1826, changed his title of "Chief of State" to "Director of State", and stipulated that administrative periods were to last two years. At the same time, the new constitution created a Supreme Military Power -- Comandante General de Armas -- which was nominally subordinate to the executive. Significantly, the first man to occupy the military post was the leader who had instigated the mob assassination of the Chief of State in 1837. In other words, the manipulator of inexorable collective ire now rose to power. And for the next decade, it was military men who, after vanquishing their foes, would reach for the highest office in the land, from where they would fight off the incessant attempts of contenders to wrest away the most cherished symbol of social and moral worth.

But as coups debunked governments in various states and war raged among them, foreign observers reached a familiar conclusion. The British consul, for example, opined that

the war which is carrying on between several of the States of this Republic involves no public principle whatever, and is a mere struggle between the members of two or three families for acquiring direction of public office.³⁷

The Consul failed to see that foes felt compelled to fight because they believed they saw the "truth" about one another. In their struggles, they sought self-vindication -- in the form of emblems, status, power, and pecuniary compensation.³⁸ And once vindicated, they entertained the dream of peace based on "forgetfulness" of past horrors.³⁹

On this tabula rasa, they might begin the labor of moral edification that would in turn preclude future institutional disarray. Hence the creation of yet more newspapers, one of which, under the heading "Morality", argued that the problems of society came from disobedience to the Christian injunction: Love Thy Lord God Above All Else, and Thy Neighbor as Thyself. Solution would come from adherence to this commandment.⁴⁰ The ultimate hope was that Central Americans might put in place a new federal pact that guaranteed their union and therefore their safety from the rapacity of foreign powers.⁴¹

However, this was the time when Mrazán, the great champion of the federation, saw his camp as "submerged in calamity". Addressing his foes, he complained: "You have never dared face us, and instead insult us ferociously through your printing press". Indeed, he claimed that "serviles" had been the enemy of the patria through its national history. At every turning point -- 1821, 1823, 1826, 1827, 1828, 1831, 1835 --

they had committed "atrocious crimes" and "perfidy" and "vengeance", while Morazán and his allies worked for "liberty".⁴²

And yet, when Morazán returned from exile in 1842, he incited the mistrust that disunited Central Americans in the first place.⁴³ The government of Salvador, for example, protested when it "heard" that Morazán had "introduced" himself and his officers into San Miguel, where they recruited soldiers without previously consulting with the authorities in the capital. The government saw this as "hostile conduct toward the State of El Salvador and all the others in the Republic" and as negating Morazan's "avowed intentions" which "now are clearly seen as nothing but a ruse." Finally, the government concluded, "if your intention is not to promote a fratricidal war in the State that has conferred upon you so many distinctions, you must retreat to the Port of La Unión".⁴⁴

Morazan's reply gives us an indication of the intractability of collective suspicion.

If I left the Port of La Unión to go to San Miguel it was precisely to calm down the agitation of many people upon hearing the news of my arrival ... [because of specious stories about my designs on the capital of the State, my presence] would have provoked similar disturbances in other places, disturbances for which I would be blamed by those who always seek a pretext to wage war on me, even though the facts attest that my intent is to promote the fraternity and reconciliation of all Central Americans.⁴⁵

His explanation fell on deaf ears. The government of Nicaragua, in its official newspaper, urged the people to assist the government of Salvador in its fight against Morazán, whose characteristic "subterfuge" had blocked Central America's reorganization.⁴⁶

Morazan's "subterfuge" would not have been effective and Central America's "reorganization" would not have been necessary if the societies of the region had not been so deeply divided. Indeed, Morazán now found support in Cartago (Costa Rica) because the former capital city set out to "recover" what it deemed its rightful distinction from San José, the new capital.⁴⁷ Ultimately, Morazán and Cartago prosecuted a successful war against San José.

Upon victory, the notables of Cartago vindicated themselves in a manifesto to other Central Americans. The manifesto touched on a classic theme: trust, truth and family doing battle against the trickery of evil, which had operated through the "guile" of San Jose's deposed leader.⁴⁸

The official newspaper in Nicaragua saw it differently, and had already warned of the catastrophe about to befall Costa Rica.

The children of Costa Rica will be torn from the bosom of their families and their honest occupations to be carried off to the field of death, only to serve the goals of this old monster of perfidy and destruction.⁴⁹

By then, Morazán had appealed to the two great hopes that all

camps harbored: erasure of the past through a "decree of forgetfulness", and a future of familial harmony.⁵⁰ To symbolize his determination to fulfill the latter, for example, he reinstated the traditional flag, which showed Costa Rica "as belonging to the same family [Central America]".⁵¹

The reunification of Central America was later to become a core element of the "Liberal" identity, but at that moment, it was anathema to that camp; and Morazán, the champion of the cause, was detested by fellow liberals. Conversely, "Conservatives" would become foes of reunification, but at that point they were its advocates.⁵² Thus, in Granada, the Chamorro family believed that only when the five states reconstituted the "the national whole", would the "regeneration" of the Republic begin.⁵³ In León, on the other hand, the government stated:

The perfidious tyrant is also a traitor; this can be said of Morazán in all his interventions in Central American affairs, but never before has he given more clear evidence of this detestable vice ... Twice he invaded Salvador, where he formed the faction he calls the National Army, with which he usurped the administration of Costa Rica, that unfortunate State whose resources he will use to reconquer the rest of Central America.⁵⁴ [emphasis added]

If to the notables of León Morazán's army was a "faction", to Morazán the permanent dissolution of the federal republic was unfathomable. To him, formal disunity was the outcome of an

anarchic situation in which Central America had lost its identity as a "nation". Nor could he tolerate the "scandalous" fact that the isthmus lacked a chief that commanded its states either "in the name of the law or by force". Central America, in short, was denaturalized, without a head to direct it and without a face to present the world. And this, he explained, is what became of people who fell under the spell of "demagogues".⁵⁵

Nothing Morazán was saying was at odds with the dominant ideology of the day. And yet, a motley alliance of Central Americans united to defeat him. They had come to see him as being on the wrong side of the manichean war he so well depicted and they so clearly saw. A witness to Morazan's execution in Cartago (Costa Rica) captured the scene as the caudillo and a group of allies and followers stood before a firing squad.

After they fell dead, their corpses were placed together. 'That's right' said some of the soldiers present, 'they should go together, as always, plotting their malicious deeds'. Another added, 'cover them with the same blanket, as they always covered themselves in life'. Three or four days later after they were buried, some people, doubtful that Morazan was actually dead, disinterred the cadavers.⁵⁶

Thus ended the life of the last president of the Central American federation, now a defunct republic. In a telling remark, the prominent Guatemalan liberal Pedro Molina blamed not Morazan's foes, but his followers. "The ones who truly

caused Morazan's death", he said, "were his own officers and advisers". Conspiracy from within, he intimated, had finally defeated the caudillo.

c. Political Practice: A Ceaseless Farce

Molina's claim was not implausible in a time and place where image and substance were equally valued yet appearance and reality were rarely the same. Consider the narrative of a prominent Guatemalan liberal relating the events that followed his publication of "Fear", a pamphlet he wrote under the pseudonym "Some Guatemalans". The ruling caudillo in Guatemala was Carrera, who had seized de facto power after defeating Morazan. The thrust of the pamphlet was a harsh criticism of the caudillo, whom the pamphleteer claimed had executed nine men without due process after putting on a "show" and pardoning a convicted criminal.

I was ordered to appear immediately before General Carrera. I gathered my weapons, which were several decrees that authorized the publication of the pamphlet, left the house without telling anyone and headed for the Palace. Upon entering that grim mansion of servility I encountered my first cousin, who was Section Chief of one of the ministries. He said: 'You don't think about your deeds; your foolishness leads you astray and compromises the family'.

Born himself into a "servile" clan, our young liberal now found in the Carrera government relatives and family friends

who felt impelled to help him out of his predicament. But convinced that right was on his side, he reminded one of his secret protectors that an 1839 law entitled him to publish the offending pamphlet. The ensuing dialogue and narrative reveal a world in which the rules of the game were subverted by formal obedience.

"Never mind that [law]", replied the functionary. "Go find yourself a hiding place."

"And why should I hide from the government if I have not broken the law?"

"You have nothing to fear from the government, but you do have to fear the military officers you offended with your paper".

"I thought that the military was subordinate to the Executive" "You are a child; go hide".

The reminiscence went on to expose deeper layers of reality in contradiction to appearance.

That night I was visited and complimented not only by liberals but also by serviles ... The following morning, an officer [also a friend] came with a patrol. He left the soldiers outside and stepped inside alone. 'What are you doing here still? Why aren't you hiding? I have orders to take you to the Castle', the officer announced. Then the officer himself took me to a hiding place. After that, he brought in the patrol, searched the house, and finally reported that he had not found me.⁵⁷

The deployment of theater, however, still carried a steep

price. For it blocked inter-partisan cooperation, even when the conditions were otherwise favorable for an understanding between liberals and conservatives. In Guatemala, during a Carrera administration, for example, the conditions arose at an unexpected moment when the president took ill, and his second in command, Vicente Cruz, assumed temporary power. What follows is the reminiscence of our liberal notable, who tried to reach an understanding with Cruz.

I asked [the other liberals] why they had excluded Vicente Cruz who was vice-president of the Republic. They told me that Barrundia and Molina distrusted him. I reminded them that Vicente Cruz, as vicepresident, was called to exercise executive power when Carrera fell ill. Cruz formed a liberal cabinet. He placed my uncle [who had been] a very active cooperator of Doctor Galvez [the liberal Chief], in the Ministry of Finance; and he entrusted foreign relations to [another liberal notable]. I reminded them that the Cruz administration undertook such progressive measures that they made the serviles tremble and call Carrera back to take charge.

Some of the notables listening to this reasoning were persuaded by its logic. But once persuaded, rather than enlist on the project of rapprochement between the conservative Cruz and the liberals being proposed by our conciliator, they dredged up the past and turned angrily on some of their fellow liberals. They reprimanded the notables Barrundia and Molina for having opposed the liberal Gálvez, and for their role in Carrera's entry into Guatemala City. Our conciliator grew alarmed at the unexpected turn taken by the discussion, and

"tried to change the subject in order to avoid yet another division among liberals".

The notables went back to the Cruz matter, and explained their exclusionary stance by narrating an incident that had deeply wounded Molina, the preeminent liberal in Guatemala. The stage was the Congress.

The serviles filled the galleries with people from the recalcitrant party, while [a conservative notable] read a speech which addressed cruel insults to El Salvador and its president and the entire liberal party of Central America. The gallery, I was told, applauded in furor. [The speaker] animated by the applause, which he himself had prepared, continued his affronts to the point that Doctor Molina, presiding the session, yelled from his seat: 'That is false!'. The speaker went on with his diatribe, so Molina brought the session to a close.⁵⁸

Our conciliatory narrator grasped the point immediately: the serviles were incorrigible practitioners of manipulation. The "servile" party, he remarked, was as "astute" as a "serpent". So astute in fact, that it had "dazzled" the liberal Barrundia into proposing at the Constitutional Assembly a formal endorsement of the Carrera decree that reasserted Guatemala's sovereignty and independence. Our narrator could still remember vividly that occasion.

There was long and thunderous applause [at the Assembly] ... those of us who were in the dark, thought that this was a spontaneous manifestation of popular sovereignty. We fell into the trap. The serviles tried to prolong this hallucination. Many of them -- prepared in advance -- went up to the

seats of the deputies to embrace them. A military parade was immediately suggested. The parade led the individuals of the Assembly in a triumphal march to the castle, where artillery salvos were fired all day. The bells of all the churches rang ... [Even victims and enemies of Carrera] were deceived by this apparatus.

Guatemalan liberals -- purely as Guatemalans -- were as vulnerable as their opponents to localist sentiments, because they were just as "loyal" to the country that had once been the preeminent province in the Kingdom of Guatemala. But as "liberals" who, in their struggles with Guatemalan "serviles", often entered into alliances with Salvadoran partisans, they were also expected to be "loyal" to the ideal of the "union". Indeed, their behavior at the Assembly had been a "political slap in the face" to Salvadoran liberals, who felt "betrayed".

The split behavior of the Guatemalan liberals was a direct result of conflicting demands imposed on actors by the "duties" of the virtuous identity. But the conflicting demands arose at that particular point because Salvadoran liberals were facing the same dilemma. As liberals, the Salvadorans were asking Guatemala to form and join a union. But as Salvadorans, suspicious and afraid of Guatemalan hegemony, they were also asking that Guatemala diminish its own size by slicing off the section of Los Altos.

In the past, Central Americans had conciliated the conflicting demands of identity through dramaturgical obedience. Now, too, they solved them through a variant of

that practice. As we just saw, the Guatemalan liberals claimed to have been "duped" into disloyalty toward Salvador by a Guatemalan "serpent". As for their Salvadoran counterparts, they did not have to make a distinctions among Guatemalans, not even liberals. For the Salvadorans, the collective behavior of the Guatemalans once again confirmed their worst suspicions about their neighbors to the North.⁵⁹

d. Despondency and Hope at Mid-century

Between 1842 and 1852, Nicaraguans, like the other Central Americans, poured great energy into their "locutions" to "The Public" through pamphlets, newspapers and broadsides. In each of the five countries, rivals competed for the "trust" and "credence" of "The Public", which, like a church icon, was both revered and ignored.⁶⁰ And they aimed to foment the "moral" development of the people, a task which turned on a sharp distinction between benevolent tutelage and the kind of verbal sorcery that "dazed" the innocent and led them to commit deplorable acts.

Accordingly, authors advanced various contentions about events and their sequential ordering in an effort to establish the "true" origins of a particular conflict. The other was unintended: both the practice of acrimonious public exchange and the texts themselves ensnared participants and readers in a web made up of pre-existing rancors and new suspicions and resentments, thus reinforcing old, and establishing new,

subjective connections between past and present.

To begin with, the content of the view being expressed was inseparable from the identity of its exponent. Hence the recurrent perception that a rival's public text merely publicized the "false rumors" so frequently born of "vulgarity and the imagination of those men who always wish to divide and disturb the patria".⁶¹

In addition, pamphlets, broadsides and newspapers often made hyperbolic assertions that aimed to impose a perception of reality by the sheer force of words. "The State enjoys a perfect peace, which years ago it could not obtain," declared one official publication.⁶² Such exaggerations were bound to evoke strong rebuttals, which in turn further involved localities, families and camps in disputes about the sincerity of rivals.

The disputes crossed state boundaries at a time when actors were in a state of high alert. Salvador's leader, for example, was convinced that Guatemala was trying to "lull" the other states. Fortunately, he knew the "tactics" of Guatemalans "in depth" and would frustrate their "perfidy" and "machinations".⁶³ Leon's Boletín del Pueblo, though edited by the "Fraternity Press", in clear alusion to the historic aspiration of federal brotherhood, accused the Redactor (from Honduras) of "imposture" "pompous style" "vengeance" "fury" "despicable hatreds"; and asserted that, in contrast, "the editors of the Boletín del Pueblo [were] the people itself,

who neither fears nor suffers".⁶⁴

Newspapers and pamphlets also assumed responsibility for the moral instruction of the people, as well as the correction of popular misperceptions. A printing press in León, for example, put out an imaginary dialogue between two a Leonese and a Granadine in order both to educate Nicaraguans in civility and to prevent renewed conflict between Granada and León. The dialogue took place in Granada, where a Leonese arrived to "disabuse" its people, and to assure them that "the [prudent] man who [led Leon's government]" knew that "a labyrinth of gossip" kept alive the "mistrust" against Granada, thus creating misunderstandings between the two rival cities. That wise leader ignored those who came to him "dressed in sheep's clothing", and now instructed Granadines that "Good faith is the tissue that keeps society together".⁶⁵

But as in the colonial narratives to the king, the narratives to "The Public" now contributed to the constant erosion of trust, as authors hid behind emblematic pseudonyms -- "The True Sons of Nicaragua", "The True Lovers of Order", "The Friends of Liberty". Protected by these masks, authors defended themselves with counter-accusations. One typical broadside, for example, depicted "venomous men" engaged in "malevolent machinations" against its author, who stood accused by the villains of "hindering" the elections of november 1843. So, in self-defense, he now felt compelled to provide the "public" with a blow-by-blow account of his "true"

activities during the electoral period. Having done this, our narrator revealed that "assassination plots" were hatched against him while he did everything in his power to avoid "disorder".

This classic confrontation between truth and falsehood ended with an exhortation that captured the archetypical self-abnegating identity in all its simplicity.

Open your eyes Nicaraguans and remember: wisdom and intelligence mean nothing without virtue ... I am ignorant but the light of reason allows me to distinguish between evil and justice ... I am a friend of the law and a liberator, as it is proved by my scars and the blood I have spilled in battle, and for this reason I shall always defend the sacred system to which I belong and will be an eternal enemy of its opponents.⁶⁶

Elections were a recurrent topic of broadsides because, as we saw in the previous chapter, political theater obfuscated even the most transparent of procedures. Sincere investigations into possible disturbances surrounding elections, for example, might be publicly denounced by opponents of the authorities as "inquisitorial". And given the nature of socio-political identity, such denunciations, rather than trigger an institutional corrective, would in turn evoke a personalist defense. Hence the familiar occurrence of Prefects resorting to broadsides to "satisfy" their "honor".⁶⁷

In this regard, broadsides were an essential instrument to all socio-political actors. There was, for example, the priest who, in his own view, had been working for two years in

the pueblo of Nandaime, trying to eradicate "hatreds and vices", but was forced to "defend his honor" before the people of Granada after an "unjust detractor" accused him of "promoting revolution against the government". The aggrieved priest concluded with a warning: his accuser and others of "his ilk" would never have the satisfaction of "transforming into contempt the esteem in which he [the priest] [was] held by honorable men".⁶⁸

Broadsides, often printed under a pseudonym, also enabled fellow members of a camp to castigate one another for changing their minds, or for breaking the party line. Predictably, the shared use of pseudonyms, like the practice of dramaturgical obedience, exacerbated mistrust. Thus, if it came from a rival, a publication without the proper signature was treated as an object of contempt: an "anonymous, vapid" document; the "miserable work" of a "coward". Indeed, perhaps that coward might be one of those who had "shamefully gone over to the ranks of the recalcitrants" -- some out of "perfidy", others out of "weakness and inconsistency", and others motivated by "thievish interests", all "vices" which the respondents -- themselves writing under a pseudonym -- claimed to lack themselves.⁶⁹

Broadsides, pamphlets and newspapers, of course, also served as the textual media of localist fights: through them, antagonists explained their motivations, conducted diplomatic maneuvers, and waged war by other means. Granada, for example,

used the publications to reassert its historical claim to superior rank over Managua.⁷⁰ Granada's rebels used the publications to seek a rapprochement and forge an alliance with the new local Prefect.⁷¹ The new prefect, for his part, issued a manifesto to the "pueblos" depicting his acceptance of the "dangerous" post as a "sacrificial" gesture -- a valiant attempt to restore order in a society where both "familial ties" and "bonds of friendship" had been broken.⁷² As for the "paternal" government and the military in Leon, they used the publications to offer Granada "an olive branch", which it hoped the rebels accepted lest it turn into an "avenging sword".⁷³

Finally, the publications helped shape Central Americans' understanding of their collective context. By the mid 1840's, Central Americans, particularly Nicaraguans, tended to see themselves as oscillating between "excesses".

[Centralism] would have been beneficial immediately after independence, but not now, when the pueblos have tasted excessive freedom, and functionaries, demoralized by continuous revolutions, tend either towards despotism or towards dejection, and their subjects either toward servility or toward anarchy.⁷⁴

From the despondency of this perception, one Nicaraguan administration after another began in the mid 1840's to make conciliatory efforts. If a centralist system of government was a good idea whose opportunity had come and gone, Nicaraguan

Directors of State could still seek to include in their cabinets members of both camps and their respective bastions, León and Granada. Linking historical learning to their moral worldview, various administrations sought conciliation. But they did so on the basis of an unmodified discourse.

After so many years of tragedy, so many days of suffering, disdain and killings, we have yet to learn a simple truth, which is that, being the government republican, of all and for all, all must bring together their enlightenment, power, and influence to put the government in a majestic march forward so that it may never again fall prey to the stalking of the wicked.⁷⁵

Because "evil" thrived on "disorder," the conciliatory administrations set out to eradicate "factions". But such attempts at eradication merely compounded the localist and familial intrigues that beset the administrations from within, and the rebellions that challenged their authority from outside.⁷⁶ "Factions", in short, thrived (both on their own and assisted by other Central American governments).⁷⁷

Even in the rare instances when discursive adaptations were indeed proposed, the adaptation was minimal. The first of the conciliatory governments in Nicaragua, for example, upheld freedom of the press and speech as worthy of defense, but also drew limits around it.

In publishing printed matter [authors] ought to do so under their own name, and without any other goal than to improve the welfare of the country, and to point out the both the administrations' defects and

the progress it makes, for it is a pity that [authors] should abuse the innocence and simplicity of the pueblos and sacrifice their peace.⁷⁸
[emphasis added]

The first adaptation, then, had to do not with the discourse itself, but with the derivative practice of "emblematic" identities for the "virtuous", and conversely, "hiding" and "concealing" for their less worthy foes. The second adaptation --a more balanced discourse capable of finding both merits and flaws in the same administration -- could have been more significant had it not been for its rationale. Note that this rationale was anchored in the traditional notion of the "ignorant" as thoroughly pliable and ready to be "dazed" into disorderly behavior. Leaving this notion intact rendered suspect all popular demonstrations of dissatisfaction aimed at incumbents. Indeed, as instability reached a new peak, so did narrational denunciations of "intrigue-mongers" and their destructive work among the "naive".⁷⁹

Governments, however, went beyond denunciation. As in the past, they surreptitiously joined the practitioners of dramaturgical obedience. In León, for example, the government came up with the practice of the "Panteonenas" -- firing shots in the vicinity of the cemetery, thus alarming the citizenry and creating an opportunity to persecute the enemies of the government.⁸⁰

Finally, the practice of dramaturgical obedience continued to mediate conflicts internal to governments,

particularly those involving the military and the civilian authorities. Consider the events surrounding the controversy that erupted when the Director of State first proposed that the Congress was to move from Leon to San Fernando (1846).

The Commandant in Chief and local notables advocated that Leon remain the seat of the legislature. This, to them, was the "legal" option; a way to restore the laws "violated" by the previous administration. One notable said so to the new Director in a polite letter that subtly aimed to flatter the Director into taking the side of "legality".⁸¹ The tactic backfired.⁸² The Director decreed that Congress was to meet in San Fernando, for as he saw it, the government resided in Leon at that moment not because it was so decreed by law or custom, but because it was the government's prerogative to "visit" different localities.⁸³

The primacy of civilian authority and the autonomy of the government, however, were soon challenged by the Commandant in Chief, who, in an act of "obedience" to the "sacred constitution", intervened in the matter in order to avoid "an interminable civil war", and decreed that Congress was to choose its location as dictated "literally" by the Constitution.⁸⁴

Faced with this direct challenge, the executive backed off by rewording his decree. He had never meant "to force" the Congress to assemble in San Fernando, he said. He simply had meant to "encourage" it. Promptly, the military welcomed the

Director's semantical adjustment: the Commandant in Chief announced that he was pleased to hear that the executive decree had been "reduced" to an "encouragement".⁸⁵ The Commandant also justified his actions in a public account that appealed both to the moralist ideology of the age and to the fears that came of the ideology's practical history, with all its violence and chaos.⁸⁶ Indeed, the story upheld his virtuous image.

Image mattered, it bears repeating, because image was essence. Image even mattered to "cities". When the ambulatory executive moved its offices away from León, that city, as a collective identity, addressed the "public" in an effort to preserve its "reputation".

It has been murmured that the populous and sensible city of Leon looked disagreeably upon the departure of the Supreme Powers to San Fernando and even tried to stop it by force. This unfounded error must be rectified; it must be demonstrated that the people of Leon observed the most satisfactory, harmonious and submissive conduct. Accordingly, we relate the departure of the Government from the City.

The "demonstration" of Leon's true conduct was classic: an emotive display of affection by the local notables and their followers as they bid the Director of State farewell.

The Señor Prefect [of León] and other companions were profoundly pained to accompany the Supreme Director for only eight leagues. All the pueblos along the Supreme Director's route manifested their

jubilation. This narration -- of so many demonstrations of joy and happiness, so much display of consideration for the First Magistrate of the State -- contradicts even at first glance the displeasure and opposition attributed to the respectful city of León.⁸⁷ [emphasis added]

e. The Avidity for Order, the Dynamic of Disorder, and Variants of the Familial Model of Governance

As the host of the executive government, Managua could not remain a mere Villa -- its colonial title. Thus, the executive, assuming the prerogative once reserved for the Spanish monarch, "elevated" the Villa to the "rank" of City.⁸⁸

But the days of monarchical authority and its institutional structure, though not so removed in fact, seemed distant in the perception of Central Americans who, regardless of camp, were beginning to crave "order" above all else. The perception of "anarchism" was heightened by the proliferation of loose sheets, as rivals set out to disentangle the hopelessly convoluted allegations and counter-allegations that accompanied the moves and countermoves made by public officials and their opponents during the course of political theatre.⁸⁹ This was particularly true of the contestation of power at the local level, in small municipalities where Prefects, Commandants and Mayors played out their rivalries by proxy -- allying themselves with various groups outside the government, each government official surreptitiously providing his allies with the support of their respective offices and resources.⁹⁰

Anarchism concerned notables profoundly because it tarnished the image Nicaragua presented to the world. And image, as always, was crucial on two counts: honor and security. Notables imagined other nations "gazing" upon Nicaragua and -- seeing all the strife and rancor -- reaching the conclusion that "our motherland is a country of savages." To reclaim Nicaragua's image, one newspaper proposed to "detroy intrigues" by giving space in its pages to all kinds of opinions, signed or anonymous, and to publish even those erroneous ideas that "hallucinate the incautious". The expectation was that such a thorough "compilation" would eliminate "all pretext for revolutions and broadsheets": like a wise monarch from the past, the public, assisted by the newspaper, would assess all the points of view and reach a decision.⁹¹

By then Nicaragua, Salvador and Honduras had formed a Confederation, in the hopes that the union, under a general government, might protect them from external threat while leaving intact the internal jurisdiction of the states. In short, the general government was to be "confederate vis avis the states it represent[ed], and national vis a vis the other peoples of the globe".⁹² Indeed, some even associated regional integration with integrity, and hoped that reunification would bring the "regeneration" of the various states, which, after the breakdown of the federation, had been governed by men of "vice and ambition". Advocates of this solution worked under

the rallying cry: "Let there be no more parties".

But the de-factionalization of Central America was further hampered by the very same people who called for it. Consider the language of the newspaper that pled for the disappearance of partisanship. Comparing the publication of its prospectus to an accurate "machine gun" that had managed to hit its targets on the left and the right, the newspaper now defended itself thus: "Having opened fire, we are attacked from all sides, and even the centre itself, where we grounded our forces, attacks us now and then. What shall we do in such dire straits? Win or die. There is no other choice".⁹³

No wonder, then, that the Confederation failed to stop internal fragmentation. In fact, the Confederation failed to improve relations among the peoples of its member states. Indeed, the same newspaper that had hoped to "compile" all the political opinions of Nicaragua, soon found itself pleading for kindness from newspapers when it came to topics related to any of the three confederate states. "When speaking of the States, let us excuse rather than exaggerate their faults. Let there be uniformity in the press, good faith, for if [the press] is corrupt, then the people will drink tainted water. Let us put out the torch of discord rather than ignite it. What do we gain from mutual insults?"⁹⁴

Of course, the Confederation did nothing to improve relations between Salvador and Guatemala. The former nourished more than ever its historic rancor toward the latter.⁹⁵ The

Confederation, moreover, gave rise to friction between Salvador, which championed the union, and Costa Rica, which tried its best to remain free from Central American entanglements.⁹⁶

The failure of the Confederation only deepened the general craving for "order", which in turn entrenched the elite's conception of good government as a paternal enterprise. A Honduran general asked: "What good would it do to have broken our familial ties with mother [Spain] if we were to succumb to abuses perpetrated on our rights and territory by foreign ambition and rapacity?" The general then promised to retreat to his "natural element" -- his "private home" -- if the people so wished, and to return with his "sword" to their "rescue" if they were to call for his help.⁹⁷

Against this background, "dictatorship" was increasingly formulated as the alternative to "anarchy". Thus, the official newspaper of one liberal administration, though "celebrating the establishment of a democratic republic" in Nicaragua, seized the opportunity to tell a tale of post-independence degeneration reaching a nadir where "the Central American nation became lost in the chaos of immorality and anarchy". At that low point, according to the narrative, "rulers who governed the states broke the national link that united them into a Republic" and *manu militari* "brought down the Constitution". Out of that disastrous situation, however, there emerged two strongmen -- Carrillo of Costa Rica and

Carrera of Guatemala -- to establish viable strict governments in their countries. It was they, the liberal narrative posited, who put an end to the "democratic frenzy." Indeed, the narrator could only conclude that these dictators had rescued their peoples from disaster. "We must confess this [truth], even if it goes against our hopes and self-esteem".⁹⁸

Sophisticated proponents of disciplinarian government differentiated between "despots", who "usurped" authority and ruled according to "caprice", and strong leaders who ruled by "reason" and provided their followers with "paternal protection". On this view, the means by which a ruler assumed power did not necessarily determine whether he would be capricious despot or reasonable pater. Indeed, "personages" who deserved the "trust" of the people, having been "legitimately" placed in positions of power, often abused the prerogatives of the office.⁹⁹

Corresponding to the distinction between despot and pater, was the distinction between justifiable and unjustifiable disobedience. The liberals of El Salvador, for example, argued that "order" and "liberty" were not inherently incompatible, because "only savages rebel against a just authority". In Guatemala, authority was not just, not for as long as it was in the hands of Carrera, a "hungry tiger" at the head of "Indians" bent on rapacity and terror. The same savages who had been responsible in 1839 for the "fractioning" of Central America and the "loss of its name and dignity".¹⁰⁰

Against this choice between anarchy and dictatorship, there emerged an incipient third alternative for Central America as a whole: the "cooperative" fraternal confederation of Nicaragua, Honduras and Salvador. This union of "three brothers", not anarchy, was the true alternative to the "tyrants" such as those who "dispossessed Guatemala of its honor and glory". In short, the confederation fostered the hope that "the extended family", that is, the five states of Central America, could and would reunite.¹⁰¹

As for the internal governance of the individual states, the third alternative to the dictatorship-anarchy disjuncture that emerged was nothing less than monumental in difficulty: to subordinate the military to the elected national leader. In other words, to create a civilian government that was both resilient and legitimate. But legitimacy depended on many factors extrinsic to the definition. To Salvadorans, for example, the government in Guatemala was merely strong, while their own was both strong and legitimate. Comparisons between the two were an affront.

How can one of Guatemala's degenerate sons, accomplice of its oppressors, compare the government and administration [of Guatemala] to those of El Salvador and to the political conduct of its president? The brazenness of this dishonorable and vile comparison is barely conceivable... Guatemala is in the hands of a bloody savage; El Salvador's authorities emanate from public elections.¹⁰²

In Nicaragua the challenge of combining legitimacy and

strength seemed so impossible that the new Director of State (selected by the Assembly after a deadlock between two other candidates in the general vote) immediately tendered his resignation, which was not accepted. Surrendering to his fate, the Director had his testament drawn up, and beseeching heaven for "divine assistance" he "ascended to the [office] as if were going to the gallows".¹⁰³

The sense of danger associated with leadership was not unwarranted. By mid nineteenth century, politics was clearly defined as a moral-existential battle. Even in Costa Rica, for example, a caudillo, after vanquishing the "perverse", ascended to the presidency determined to combat "evil".¹⁰⁴ And in all the countries, even Salvador, opinion began to turn in favor of concentrating power in the hands of a central government, so that it might in turn protect the "moral" component of republican institutions.¹⁰⁵

Though waged in public, the moral-existential battle of politics reached into the most private aspects of life. For the "moral essence" of a man was to be found precisely there, in the private realm. From this "pure and natural fountain" -- private life -- flowed the "sentiments" that "animate" man from cradle to grave. "He who is not a good son, or a good father and husband is less than nothing in society". Indeed, the three major familial roles -- son, father and husband -- were the "social trinity" that guaranteed "perfect morality". If a public man fulfilled all these duties, then "history"

could look behind the "veil" of private life and find "God's most accomplished creation".¹⁰⁶

Publications stripped archetypical identities down to their moral essence for "The Public" to see -- "The Public" being perceived as an entity that was composed not of a variety of groups but as a monolith. "When one speaks with you [the public]," one pamphlet asserted, "one speaks with each and every one of you and with no one at the same time, and since writers are convinced of this truth, they are happy to know that they speak with your spirit; the public spirit becomes our interlocutor". And what did this particular author have to say to the public? He had to expose a particular army officer from Honduras whom he claimed was "possessed" by Satan.¹⁰⁷

In Nicaragua, as in the rest of Central America, the war of words reached a new peak by mid century. Pamphlets, either written under pseudonyms or completely unsigned, as well as newspapers, pit localities against one another, each trying to "expose" the archetypically evil character of the other locality's government. In Granada, for example, the newspaper The Guerrillero described the government of Chinandega as "an expert in the political noxiousness known to the world -- calumny, gossip, treachery, rancor, resentment, and vengeance".¹⁰⁸

Publications also continued to pit notables and their clans against one another, all feeling "slandered" by a

"miserable and cowardly author"; all rising to defend their "integrity, honor and decency" from "infamy and villainy".¹⁰⁹ Others still set out to "unmask" their attackers and their "diabolical inventions".¹¹⁰ And from country to country, interlocutors leveled "insults" at one another, mixing personal and collective affronts.¹¹¹

Such insults could exarcebate passions to the point of physical violence. If such violence erupted between the debaters, then the incident itself would become the subject matter of a new round of publications. The prospect of violence only increased if the attacks smeared the family name, that is, if in any way they called into question the virtue of any of its members, most particularly the females of the clan.¹¹²

This state of affairs deteriorated to the point that our reluctant Director of State, upon assuming office in Nicaragua, promised to "tolerate" opinions that did not affect order and tranquility; and to transcend "local and personal sensitivity".¹¹³ Yet soon he tendered his resignation yet again, this time in response to an "immoral pamphlet" that was "tormenting his spirit".¹¹⁴

The notables behind the offending publication were bent on retaining the executive branch of the government in the city of Leon. The Director was bent on transferring it to Managua, in part to distance it from the Commandant in Chief, who had established his de facto supremacy over the previous

civilian governments; in part to stop the ongoing struggle over the capital city between Leon and Granada. Indeed, the Director's ambitious agenda included the deposition of the military leader, which he planned to carry out after moving the office of the executive.¹¹⁵

But before the Director even got to that point, he and the General had reached an impasse. Claiming that his troops had not been paid, the Commandant, in an attempt to render the city vulnerable to agitation, surreptitiously incited his men to abandon their posts. From then on, the soldiers were no longer at the service of the government; and in practice, they were the Commandant's army. The Director publicly denounced the dissolution of the troops, and challenged the Commandant's credibility -- an intolerable affront to the Commandant, who publicly declared that the "Supreme Executive" was seeking "war to the death" because "dignity, duty and honor" were now at stake.¹¹⁶

The transfer of the executive to Managua triggered a new round of behind-the-scene agitation by the Commandant and his allies, including the bishop.¹¹⁷ Soon, "disorder" invaded the city of Leon, and its Commandant was able to justify a coup d'etat. "Clergy, families, friends and everyone we hold dear," the Commandant asserted, "descended upon me [imploring me] to save society". Predictably, the notables of Granada saw in the Commandant and his allies men who "having lost all honor and morality, based their conduct on infamy, perfidy and

treachery." In response to this accusation, the Commandant reaffirmed his decision to "sacrifice" for the "motherland", which was threatened by a "foco" -- a miniscule faction -- in Granada.¹¹⁸

Thus, the Commandant seized de facto power, then created a provisional government, and banished the Director of State from the country. The deposed leader proceeded to strike an alliance with Honduras's Chief of State. Simultaneously, Granada, in temporary alliance with the León notables who had been deposed by the Commandant, prepared for war. Ultimately, Honduras' troops combined with Granada's to defeat the Commandant and his provisional government.

Victorious, Granada and its caudillo claimed to have vanquished a "revolutionary movement" which had set out to "foment the moral degradation of the masses".¹¹⁹ Rather quickly, the alliance between Granada and the Leon groups that opposed the Commandant began to dissolve. As the next elections rolled around, relations became more than strained. One Leonese pamphlet complained that

When the Conservative party wages armed struggle against another armed party, it calls its adversaries assassins and bandits; but if these same men fight on their side against others, then it calls them valiant patriots of good will. And after these [allies] part ways [with the Conservative Party], then [the Party] goes back to calling them [assassins and bandits]

Unwittingly demonstrating the classic problem of ephemeral

alliances, the pamphleteer then unselfconsciously lapsed into the kind of normative pragmatism he had just criticized: that is, as a member of the liberal camp, which often entered into alliances with conservatives, he now demonized the latter. Constructing an elaborate narrative of betrayal -- betrayal expressed both in the form of alliance-shifts and constitutional violations -- the pamphleteer set out to demonstrate that the conservatives were a "black party" whose influence far exceeded its "scant membership" thanks only to its "sinister machinations" and "intrigues." Indeed, the tale of perfidy and defilement aimed to prove that "the black party" was an "assembly of monsters" bent on the "destruction" of everything good and noble.¹²⁰

Still, as the victors of the war, Granada and its caudillo went on to win the next elections. So, if Managua was now the permanent seat of the executive government, it was a member of one of Granada's most powerful clans -- Fruto Chamorro -- that would occupy the executive office.

f. Between Anarchy and Tyranny: The Constitutional Pater

Predictably, the electoral process was contested by the losers. However, this time the winners not only held on to power, but their candidate delivered an inaugural speech that revealed a clear intent to expand executive power. The speech made four crucial points, which taken separately were either familiar or understandable, but if taken together became both

familiar and intolerable to the opposite camp. Firstly, Chamorro pronounced socio-political stability to be the highest priority of government.

I understand that the first of my duties is to preserve order, as this is the primordial objective of society, for it secures the happiness and prosperity of the associates.

The second point in the speech was a broad assertion of presidential discretionary powers.

In this endeavor [the preservation of order] I shall follow the wise rule of law which prescribes prevention of ills rather than their remedy ... with regards to the discretionary faculties conferred upon me by the constitution, I shall not present you with a detailed programme of the conduct I shall follow ... I simply will assure you that the welfare of the State -- as I see and understand it to be -- will always be my guide.

Tagged to that assertion came the third point: an invitation to supporters and opponents alike to influence the executive. Like the kings of past centuries, the executive was now a grand listener; and like his immediate predecessors, he was in a conciliatory spirit.

The welfare of the State will always be my guide [as I see it and understand it to be], or as I am persuaded to see it by anyone who wishes to assist me with their knowledge, be they educated [men] or [notables] of any political faith. [emphasis added]

The fourth point Chamorro made was by then a conventional one.

I consider myself a paterfamilias, a loving and stern father who, willingly and as a matter of duty, seeks the welfare of his children, and only in case of necessity and with an oppressed heart, raises the whip to castigate he who gives him motive.¹²¹

Indeed, the speech itself was at base traditional. We have seen, for example, how the conviction that "order" ought to take precedence over all other goals came to be shared by liberals during the anarchic post-independence period. Nor were the paternalistic underpinnings of Chamorro's ideology of governance any different from that of his liberal predecessors. Even his openness to information and opinions regardless of the informant's "political faith", was in keeping with the conciliatory attempts of the preceding administrations. The addition of all these traditional views and gestures to Chamorro's newly-articulated claim on broad discretionary prerogatives, made the speech a turning point. For in explicitly articulating that claim, the Director of State combined many of the attributes that had once defined the royal sovereign; and upheld, a priori, the pater's judiciousness as both the source of legitimacy and the guiding force of disciplinarian government. In practical terms: the pater need not wait for the violation to be committed before punishing the deviant.

The boldness of the speech alarmed even members of

Chamorro's camp, who privately criticized the caudillo's excessive "frankness" and opined that he should have been more "subtle".¹²² The reaction of Leon's liberal notables was one of outrage. Chamorro tried to placate them by ordering a series of public works for the improvement of their city. And in another attempt at conciliation, Chamorro tried to incorporate their preeminent notable, Maximo Jerez, into his cabinet (a move that was blocked by Chamorro's ~~an~~ ~~sel~~ ~~man~~ ~~de~~ ~~las~~ ~~divas~~.¹²³

The liberal notables soon began to wage a campaign of broadsides and pamphlets against Chamorro, and as the fiery publications caused the desired agitation (with varying degrees of success in different localities), the authors went from writing to conspiring against the government.¹²⁴ But as we have seen, camps were riddled with internal jealousies and rancor. Leon's liberal notables were no exception, particularly now that they were faced with a formidable military opponent (Chamorro), and the prospect of yet another war seemed dreadful.

Thus, responding to Chamorro's invitation to "influence" him through information and counsel, several liberal notables secretly provided the Director with the names of the conspirators. The Director, in return, guaranteed the informants their anonymity. Next, the Director applied the dictum he had upheld in his inaugural speech -- prevent ills, rather than remedy them -- and arrested the notables named in the conspiracy. The names were never released. Instead,

Chamorro told the Assembly that evidence of the plot was to be kept in the government's "secret archive".¹²⁵

From prison, the liberal leader, Maximo Jerez, issued a pamphlet challenging both the executive's raison d'etat and the attendant claim on broader discretionary power.

A manifesto by the Supreme Director of the State gives first rank to the political principle which prescribes preventing ills rather than punishing them.... but it looks to us that [as things stand now] preventing a crime means punishing it on the basis of simple denunciations and minimal suspicions ... [as for the secret archive] Who can defend himself against calumny if it is armed with secrecy, the shield of tyranny?¹²⁶

To blunt the liberals' attack, Chamorro proposed a radical reform of the Constitution (of 1838), so as to remove a series of legal restraints on executive power. Originally intended to prevent abuses of power by executives (who were in fact subordinate to the army), the restraints now were seen by the Chamorro camp as leaving "rulers who were respectful of the law exposed to the illegitimate attacks of the disgruntled".¹²⁷

The reform passed. Thenceforth, the title of the executive would be, not "Supreme Director", but "President", and presidential terms would run not for two but four years.¹²⁸ Moreover, once the constitutional reform went into effect, the Assembly declared that Chamorro was to finish his two-year term, and then, without holding elections, serve for

another four years.

The Assembly's dictum exarcebated the preexisting conflict between the new government and the opposition -- a conflict which dated back to Chamorro's inaugural speech but, as we saw, had been shaped by centuries of colonial and post-colonial history. Departing from the shared premise that government ought to be strong, that anarchy was the deadliest foe of society, and that societies were like families, liberals and opponents once again came head to head on the question of authority.

The war would last three years. The Chamorro party assumed the name of Legitimists, to emphasize the constitutional legitimacy of its government. Their opponents formed a Provisional government and called themselves Democrats, to signal their demand for a popularly-elected government.¹²⁹ At stake for Legitimists and Democrats alike was the control of the national family.

Conflating unity and uniformity -- a conflation that obtained in the realm of the natural family as well -- both camps referred to one another as "factious", thereby denoting the divisive nature of their opponent's identity. But Chamorro's followers, as the camp of the incumbent, had the advantage. For example, they were able to characterize the notables of Leon as a "patricidal faction", that is, a small, divisive group intent on killing their pater (Chamorro). This accusation, which the Granada camp based on a prior suspicion

that the Leonese had made an assassination attempt on Chamorro, was published in the first issue of the newspaper The Defender of Order. The newspaper's second issue referred to any citizen of Granada who might cooperate with the enemy as "bastardos", or "bastard sons" -- the illegitimate, and unacknowledged, children of the pater. And in another issue, the paper referred to the liberals as "four spurious sons of the motherland" who had involved her in a "fratricidal war" that was "tearing apart" her "entrails". These examples are illustrative, not exhaustive; the use of imagery corresponding to the familial metaphor abounded.¹³⁰

The practical implications of the familial model were profound. As we saw in the previous chapter, even when the model was emerging, it rendered war particularly savage. Now, more fully formed, the model raised the stakes. From the perspective of Chamorro and his camp, their cause was "just, noble and sacred", and "private and public interest [were] one". Identity and power, honor and morality were at stake, but so was the very existence of society and its members. Thus, as the Defender of Order put it, the expression of "opinion knows no obstacles and will spare no sacrifice". In other words, the truth had to be told, and once told, it would inexorably lead the virtuous to displays of "military prowess and tactical astuteness"; inspiring them to fight against the enemy to the death, under "heavy rains" and amidst great "physical exhaustion".¹³¹

The liberal notables of Leon took a complementary stance to that of Granada. The charge that Leon's camp had conspired to assassinate Chamorro evoked a telling public self-defense from the head of the Provisional Government. The liberal leader, drawing on the revelatory power of the virtuous identity, declared before "The Public" that, he, the accused, was in fact a benevolent leader who invariably demonstrated "Christian charity" in his treatment of opponents, while his accuser, the national pater, was in fact a capricious ruler of little stature.¹³²

This theme of the "true" nature and worth of the pater became central to the liberal narrative of the clash between the two camps, particularly in the newspaper Boletín del Ejército Democrático (Bulletin of the Democratic Army). In the typical liberal tale, Chamorro was not a stern but reasonable pater. Rather, he was a "tyrant" at the head of a band of "recalcitrants"; and an "ambitious, cowardly and vile man who brazenly tried to rob the sovereignty of the Nicaraguan people".¹³³

Another variant of this theme turned on the fact of Chamorro's own illegitimate birth. In this variant, Chamorro was referred to as Perez (his mother's maiden name). The moral indictment was implicit but unmistakable: the pater himself had no father, and was the fruit of an immoral union. In the narrative of this variant, Chamorro, an illegitimate son, was an "impostor" who slandered his foes in an effort to satisfy

his own "uncontrollable rancor". This impostor, moreover, had "absolutist" pretensions that not even the "Monarchs themselves" had entertained.¹³⁴

A second theme transcended the caudillo, and concentrated on the intrinsic value of the "causes" being championed by each camp. If Chamorro claimed his cause to be a "sacred" one, his opponents countered that his camp committed "black crimes" just to "satisfy their brutal passions and to please their monster." And though they tried to hide their sins, "heaven" would one day "punish" them.¹³⁵

Indeed, the liberal perspective on political struggle, like that of the Chamorro camp, explicitly entwined three categories of inviolable "laws": the law of "political integrity", "natural law" and "divine law" (as set down in the Bible). Worthy liberals, knowing that to break one was to break another, revered all three. Hence the "sanctity" of their own political causes.¹³⁶

Attempts at a mediated peace failed precisely because each side felt morally entitled to dictate the fundamental terms of the agreement, that is, the formal identity corresponding to either side. Thus, Chamorro and the Legitimists refused to acknowledge the Democrats as a political party, insisting instead that they were an "anarchic and delinquent movement". The Democrats, for their part, demanded moral parity and equal status with the Legitimists, even though they had formed their own "provisional

government".¹³⁷

Moreover, both sides continued to see morality as entwined with an absolute and immutable truth that had to be expressed if morality was to prevail. The Democrats believed this, and went so far as to tie the fate of "civilization" to the incessant "demonstration" of "The Truth".¹³⁸ The same applied to the Legitimists. In Granada, the newspaper Las Avispas (The Wasps) was founded in 1854, expressly to "sting" the opponents of the "legitimate" government.¹³⁹ The newspaper's prospectus departed from the premise that "truth" was a language -- a language, moreover, which its editors "spoke beautifully". In this language, Las Avispas would attack the "wretches" (Leon's notables) and their "rabble" (their army), "drawing on ridicule and satire whenever necessary". In this language, Las Avispas also promised to praise the "worthy".¹⁴⁰

Against this background of strict conviction, members of each camp were expected to express their opinions and beliefs unambiguously, lest they be classified as a kind of hybrid whose heart was neither here nor there. To be a hybrid -- in a system in which political dynamics turned on the assertion of identity, and in which trust was of incalculable value -- was a losing proposition.¹⁴¹ Simply put, notables could forge and break unholy alliances time and again and still be recognizable as an archetypical identity (evil to some, noble to others). Yet if they assumed a nuanced perspective of "the

other", they were no longer recognizable as implacable champions of either good or evil. Accordingly, their ability to command political allegiance diminished radically.

Thus, political dynamics both polarized actors and entrenched the view of politics as part of a divine creation in which struggle played itself out within the boundaries of "virtue and vice". For this reason, the prospects for bilateral peace agreements within the context of a military stalemate were nearly nonexistent. The Legitimists saw in the Democratic military commander the man responsible for the "militarization of treachery" and the institutionalization of "vice". Conversely, they saw in their caudillo Chamorro a leader who stood without reservation against the "blackest of passions".¹⁴²

The "cause", though embodied in one man, transcended the personal. In 1855, when Chamorro died of natural causes, the Legitimists refused to abdicate. The war went on, each side adhering to its view of "the other". At most, the Legitimist leadership, drawing a distinction between the Democratic elites and their "naive" followers, issued a pardon to the Democratic troops, but left their caudillos and officers exposed to the "law of the vanquished". The pardon proved counterproductive: those whom it favored did not hear about it, and those it excluded became more recalcitrant.¹⁴³ Indeed, the Democrats, who had been assisted by Honduras in the earlier stages of the war, continued their campaign even after

Honduras, now involved in a conflict of its own with Guatemala, withdrew its support. Seeking a new source of additional military power, the Democrats turned to William Walker, an American advocate of slavery.

Walker and his men arrived in León in 1855. In his first meeting with the Democratic leadership, Walker detected that their two preeminent notables -- the military commander and the civilian chief -- detested one another. Nevertheless, the two jockeying notables agreed to appoint Walker as a Colonel in the Democratic Army. Soon thereafter, the military chief of the Democratic army died in battle, leaving Walker free to exercise even greater autonomy. Consulting with his Nicaraguan superiors less and less on tactical and strategic matters, Walker began to look like a caudillo in his own right, and all the more markedly so after the civilian Democratic leader succumbed to cholera. Thus, when the situation in Granada turned desperate, its leaders made attempts to engage in secret negotiations with Walker. The attempt came to naught, and the American eventually devastated the city. Leon and the Democrats celebrated Granada's fall with displays of public jubilation; and they rebuffed the Legitimists' suggestion of a bi-partisan anti-Walker alliance.¹⁴⁴ Indeed, the two parties joined against Walker only in mid-1856, after it became patently clear that Nicaragua no longer belonged to either camp and was now in the hands of a foreigner. In short, the alliance became possible only after both Nicaraguan camps saw

the oldest Central American fear realized: external dominance. And even then, the camps united because Granada, from a position of utter weakness, finally accepted the provisional government in León as the sole civilian ruler; and because both Granada and León agreed to postpone all discussion of their internal disagreements.¹⁴⁵

Conclusion

The fear of "anarchy" and the search for "order" that ensued in Central America between the 1820's and 1840's were both rooted in and shaped by the familial model of societal unity and political governance that had gradually replaced the regnant metaphor of the colonial period. Recall that the older metaphor had linked the temporal and spiritual realms to create an overarching ideology that legitimized the Spanish state and sovereign in the Americas. Recall further that this metaphor was "dethroned" in the transition to independence; and that during the decade immediately after independence (1821), Central Americans sought to link the moral and the political with reference to the "natural family", which they took as a model in their efforts to unite the various states into a single republic.

This familial effort, we saw in Chapter 8, led to bitter conflict both inside the various states and between them, as rivals strove for "deserved" preeminence. The present chapter argued that Central Americans sought to control the ensuing

"anarchy" by a) making limited conciliatory efforts from positions of power; and b) refining the familial model and establishing clear lines of authority. By limited conciliatory efforts, I mean that military "winners", once in government, tried to include the "losers" in their new administrations. By clear lines of authority, I mean that camps set up alternative variants of the familial model along fraternal and paternal organizational lines.

But as this chapter also demonstrated, both the conciliators and the proponents of alternative lines of authority made only minor modifications to the traditional discourse of identity-formation and its attendant practices. In other words, they left untouched the origins of mistrust and its dynamics. Consequently, their points of agreement proved isolated and ephemeral, their disagreements insoluble. The next and final chapter will show how, even after the Walker invasion, it was deeper modifications in the discourse of identity-formation and in its attendant practices that finally opened the way in Nicaragua for a distinct and more resilient political regime -- a regime that in turn made possible strategic economic, institutional and cultural gains and thus rendered the national "state" a more tangible reality.

1. According to a "son of Salvador", the federalism adopted by Central Americans was "different from that of the U.S. because the constitution of 1824 placed the entire republic at the disposal of the state of Guatemala.

Pamphlet issued by "Un Hijo del Salvador y Ciudadano de Centroamérica", under the title "Escrito que demuestra y persuade la medida que únicamente conviene tomar para establecer facilmente un gobierno nacional que ser a Centro-America (San Salvador: Imprenta del Estado, November 10, 1845).

2. "Decreto de 26 de febrero de 1833, que dispone que se nombre una comisión que pase al Salvador, Honduras i (sic) Guatemala con el objeto de uniformar la opinión sobre reformas," Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volume I (1936-1937), 273-274.

3. "Every day the voices of orators resound from the rostrums, seeking to scare away from the land the monster that haunts and devours it ... Civil war attacks our sacred religion, for it: 1) destroys its cornerstone, charity; 2) allows for the violation of the ten commandments and the precepts of the church; 3) diminishes the devotion and the funds which make worship decorous and majestic; and 4) often involves priests, against canonical dispositions".

La Opinión Pública, May, 1833.

4. The Chief of State, Herrera, sought and obtained the support of the two military strongmen in the country, the Chiefs of Arms of Granada and Leon. Various municipalities from around the country demanded Herrera's resignation, which he tendered and the Assembly accepted. The news led to a military uprising in Leon, led by the Chief of Arms, which in turn led the Assembly to request Herrera's continuation in power. Herrera accepted. This time Rivas, Managua, Masaya, Matagalpa and other towns rebelled, demanding that Herrera step down. In an effort to mollify them, Herrera offered them a constitutional reform. The rebels, however, refused to believe him and attacked Leon, where they were defeated by pro-government forces on May 1, 1833. The clamor for reform was quieted by force.

5. "Manifiesto, De las Autoridades de la Villa de Nicaragua a los Pueblos del Departamento," San José de Costa Rica, June, 1833, or "El Departamento de Nicaragua [Rivas] manifiesta al público su conducta en las agitaciones que had padecido el Estado," Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volume I (1936-1937), 277-280.

6. "El Gefe (sic) Político Accidental del Departamento de [Rivas] al Gefe (sic) Político, Municipalidad y Comandante de Granada," Rivas, May 12, 1833.

7. "Al Ciudadano Jefe del Estado Dionisio Herrera, Villa de Rivas 24 de Mayo 1833". First published in Boletín Oficial of Guatemala, No. 36, June 22, 1833. Later quoted in J.C. Pinto Soria, Centroamérica, de la colonia al Estado Nacional, 1800-1849 (Guatemala: Editorial Universitaria, Colección Textos, 1986), 264.

8. The Chief of State was José Nuñez, elected in 1834. The chiefs of arms were General José Zepeda, from León, and General Candido Flores, from Granada.

9. Both military chiefs agreed via an intermediary that their cities' delegations to the assembly in Managua, where the votes were to be registered, would go without troops. In compliance, the representatives of Granada arrived without military backing. But that afternoon, the rumor circulated that the representatives from Leon were approaching with 200 troops. Alarmed, the representatives of Granada left, and shortly thereafter the representatives from Leon arrived, without a military escort. Upon learning that that Granada representatives had been misinformed, the Leon delegation sent them an invitation to return. Their fears dispelled, the representatives from Granada were on their way back to Managua when rumor spread in that city that they were coming with troops. Predictably, the Leonese left. Promptly, their counterpart sent them an invitation to return and assured them there was no reason to fear. The Leonese returned, but the rumor circulated in Managua that now they were coming with troops. Their rivals left. See Anselmo H. Rivas, "La Verdad en su Punto" (Managua: Tipografía La Prensa, 1936), 195-199. First published in El Centro-Americano, March 6 and 13, 1880.

10. For example, the Chief of State appealed to the Federal Congress, which appointed two peace commissioners. One was from Granada, the other from Leon. The government trusted the latter, but suspected the former of partiality, since his brothers were involved in Granada's rebellion. For the obvious reasons, mediation failed. Ultimately, the Chief of State, in alliance with Leon's Commandant, crushed the Granada forces. See Pedro Joaquín Chamorro, "Cómo vino al mundo el traidor Ubaldo Herrera" (Managua: Tipografía La Prensa, 1939), 159-160.

11. "Mensaje que el Presidente del Consejo, Doctor José Nuñez, encargado del Poder Ejecutivo, presenta a la Asamblea Legislativa al abrir sus sesiones," 1834, Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volume I (1936-1937), 293-299.

12. "Mensaje del Jefe del Estado de Guatemala, Ciudadano Doctor Mariano Gálvez en la apertura de las sesiones de la asamblea legislativa, verificada el 2 de febrero de 1834," Anales de la Sociedad de Geografía e Historia de Guatemala, Volume II, no. 1, (September 1925), 7-17
13. Pinto Soria, op. cit., 226; 267.
14. John L. Stephens, Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas and Yucatan, Volume II (New York: Dover Publications, Inc. 1969), 44. First published in 1841.
15. Ibid., 51-2.
16. Ibid., 85.
17. The Gobierno Supremo of the Carrera forces issued the following decree:
 "Long Live the Patria! Long Live General Carrera! The Enemy has been completely exterminated in his attack upon this city, which he intended to devastate. The tyrant Morazan flies terrified, leaving the plaza and streets strewn with corpses sacrificed to his criminal ambition. The principal officers associated in his staff have perished ... Eternal glory to the invincible Chief General Carrera, and the valiant roops under his command". See *ibid.*, 77.
18. Ibid., 90.
19. Francisco María Iglesias, Pro Patria, Una Biografía y Algunos Recuerdos Históricos (San José: Tipografía Nacional, 1899) in Letras Patrias, no. 11, 60-61.
20. In what was to become a pattern, the first Nicaraguan official publication was created by the Chief of State elected in 1835. Zepeda was the victorious military commandant from the previous war. The man who had served as Chief at the time, José Nuñez, now became his second in command (Nuñez too had been a military commandant).
21. Telégrafo Nicaraguense, August, 1835.
22. Ibid.
23. "Considering that the pueblos would explode if their just desires are in any way ignored.
 "Observing that the majestic march of the Nation is undermined by the divergence of opinions.
 "And convinced that sanctioning this accord will provide new improvements ...
 "The Ordinary assembly of the State of Nicaragua agrees to the reforms decreed by the Federal Congress on February 13th

of this year".

See "El Congreso de Nicaragua aprueba las reformas a la Constitución Federal," 1836, Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volume I (1936-1937), 302-303.

24. Decree:

"Obliged to save the State, the Executive decreed the extermination [of the assassin] who was shot by a firing squad at six o'clock yesterday evening".

25. "Circular que relata la sublevación contra el Jefe Zepeda y su asesinato," 1837, Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volume I (1936-1937), 304-305.

26. Aurora de Nicaragua, September, 1837.

27. "Contestaciones al Centinela de Nicaragua," hoja suelta, León, May 6, 1837, in Catálogo de la Exposición Treinta Años de Periodismo en Nicaragua, 1830-1860, (Managua: Instituto Centroamericano de Historia, Universidad Centroamericana).

28. Francisco Fernández Hall, "1838-- 11 de septiembre -- 1938, Primer Centenario de la jornada de Villa Nueva, en la que combatió en defensa del Gobierno de Guatemala el Prócer de la Independencia Nacional don José Francisco Barrundia," Anales de la Sociedad de Geografía e Historia de Guatemala, Volume XV, no. 2 (December 1938), 218-219.

29. "How can I abandon my good name and reputation to those who would lose theirs if my administrative conduct were to be found correct? Yes, citizen representatives: if I am absolved, those who attacked my government cannot be innocent. My vindication is their condemnation as rebels. Can they be my judges? By sentencing me, they absolve themselves. Can they be my judges?"

"Exposición del Dr. Mariano Gálvez a la Asamblea Legislativa el 9 de abril de 1838," Anales de la Sociedad de Geografía e Historia de Guatemala, Volume XXV, nos. 1 and 2, (March and June, 1951), 118-119.

30. "Among them," said the former Chief, "are the citizen deputies José Francisco Barrundia, Dr. Pedro Molina, José Gandara and Dr. Mariano Padilla. The first two are well known as the authors of the conspiracy that overthrew the constitutional government. They prepared and fomented it, and they consummated it with the rebels' weapons. Barrundia went further: he personally brought to this capital the criminal forces whose triumph is today our worst calamity. Citizens Padilla and Gandara enticed, gathered and armed people in Antigua against my government".

31. "Exposición del Dr. Mariano Gálvez a la Asamblea Legislativa el 9 de abril de 1838," in *ibid.*, 118-119.

32. "Discurso que en el Aniversario de la Independencia, 15 de Septiembre de 1838, pronunció el Ciudadano Miguel Larreynaga, Presidente de la Corte Suprema de Apelaciones," Anales de la Sociedad de Geografía e Historia de Guatemala, Volume XV, no.2 (December 1938), 220-230.

33. The government of Honduras sent the following message to the Government of Nicaragua, both allied in 1838 against Morazán.

"Morazan and his agents have two objectives: To wage war forever until we accede to his sinister plans; and to make believe that they seek peace. Thinking men have for a long time known and published the [true] designs of this ruler. Nevertheless, I am sending you the documents that prove his perfidious intentions. In the first letter from Cabanas [Morazan's ally] to father Aguilar, he says: 'it is convenient to make war to the anarchists.' Apparently, he considers the government and its defenders to be anarchists. There is nothing strange in the impropriety of this expression, since [Cabanas] has previously shown that he does not know how to speak or write the language of his country..."

See the official publication NRO, September, 1838.

34. "Discurso del Presidente del Congreso Federal, Diputado J. B. Basilio Porras, pronunciado al cerrar sus sesiones ordinarias de aquel Cuerpo, el 20 de Julio de 1838, y otros documents," Anales de la Geografía e Historia de Guatemala, Volume XIII, no. 3 (March 1937), 317-330.

35. Antonio Batres Jauregui, La América Central Ante la Historia. 1821-1921, Memorias de un Siglo, Volume III (Guatemala: 1949), 176.

36. Lorenzo Montúfar, Memorias Autobiográficas (San José: Libro Libre, 1988), 79-88.

37. Miles L. Wortman, Government and Society in Central America, 1680-1840 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 265-266.

38. "Trinidad Cabañas, soldado de la Patria a los pueblos de Nicaragua. Compatriotas (Nacaome: Imprenta del Estado, October 28, 1839).

39. See the following documents:

1. "Del Representante del supremo Gobierno del Estado de Nicaragua, C. Felipe Molina, Comisionado del Supremo Gobierno del Salvador cerca del de este Estado, D-U-L-Chinandega, Diciembre 21 de 1839";

2. "Al Sr Comisionado del S G de Nicaragua, Chinandega Diciembre 22 de 1839, F. Molina (Sic)";

3. "Ministerio General del Gobierno Supremo del Estado de Nicaragua, Al Sr. Comisionado del Supremo Gobierno del Estado del Salvador, Seccion de Gobernación, justicia y negocios eclesiásticos -- Casa de Gobierno León, Diciembre 27 de 1839 (sic)";

4. "Del Comisionado del Gobierno del Salvador, Al Sr. Ministro de Relaciones del Supremo Gobierno del Estado de Nicaragua, Felipe Molina, D-U-L-Chinandega, Diciembre 30 de 1839 (sic)".

All these documents were compiled by the Ministerio General del Supremo Gobierno del Estado del Salvador, in "Documentos Oficiales, Publicados por orden del Gefe (sic) del Estado para conocimiento de los pueblos" (Cojutepeque: Imprenta del Estado, January 8, 1840).

40. El Mentor Nicaraguense, Granada, November 6, 1841.

41. El Redactor Nicaraguense, León, January 1841.

42. Francisco Morazán, "Al Pueblo Centro-Americano", at David, July, 1841.

43. "Documentos que el General Francisco Morazan PUBLICA sobre su regreso a Centro-America" (San Jose de Costarrica (sic): Imprenta del Estado, June 4, 1842).

44. "Ministerio General del Supremo Gobierno del Estado del Salvador al Señor General Francisco Morazán," Casa de Gobierno, San Vicente, Febrero 23 de 1842, in "Documentos que el General Francisco Morazán PUBLICA sobre su regreso a Centro-América" (San José: Imprenta del Estado, June 4, 1842).

45. "Documentos que el General Francisco Morazán PUBLICA sobre su regreso a Centro-América" (San José: Imprenta del Estado, June 4, 1842).

46. Voletín (sic) Nicaraguense (León: Imprenta del Gobierno, March 3, 1842).

47. In 1823 and in 1835 the two cities had entered into civil war over this matter. On that last occasion, San Jose and its notables emerged victorious. They also supported the dictator Carrillo, who kept the capital in San José. The notables of Cartago, however, did not forget, and in 1842, when Morazán was in exile, they called him in, hoping that he would help

them obtain retribution from San José. Immediately, the notables of that city feared that Morazán would take away the government from them. Open conflict broke out between Morazán and San José, from which the caudillo emerged victorious.

48. "Manifiesto de la Asamblea Constituyente del Estado de Costa Rica, A los Pueblos de Centro-América", San José, July 13, 1842, in "Decretos Expedidos por el Gobierno del Estado de Costa Rica, Imprenta del Estado," Letras Patrias, no. 190.

49. Boletín Nicaraguense, no. 8 (León: Imprenta del Gobierno, April 30, 1842).

50. "The General and Temporary Supreme Chief of the State of Costa Rica, bearing in mind that the [Republic's] happiness demands a sincere and frank reconciliation among all her sons, decrees that a general forgetfulness now covers all political deeds prior to this decree".

"Decreto del General Gefe (sic) Supremo Provisorio del Estado de Costarrica (sic)," (San José: Imprenta del Estado, April 14, 1842), in Letras Patrias, no. 190.

51. Morazán also annulled the decree whereby Costa Rica's deposed dictator had ordered the pueblos to stage spectacles of "public jubilation" celebrating the anniversary of his ascent to power. See "Decretos Expedidos por el Gobierno Provisorio del Estado de Costarrica (sic)" (San José: Imprenta del Estado, April 20 and May 18, 1842), in Letras Patrias, no. 190.

52. Pedro Joaquín Chamorro, "Tres Cartas Sobre Morazán" (Managua: Tipografía La Prensa, 1939), 56-57.

53. El Mentor Nicaraguense, Granada, April 9, 1842.

54. Boletín Nicaraguense, No.9 (León: Imprenta del Gobierno, June 18, 1842).

55. "El General Gefe (sic) Supremo Provisorio del Estado de Costarrica Francisco Morazan, por si i (sic) por el Egercito (sic) de su mando, a los habitantes de Centro-America," in "Decretos Expedidos por el Gobierno Provisorio del Estado de Costa Rica" (San José: Imprenta del Estado, July 29, 1842) in Letras Patrias, no. 190.

56. "Carta Relación de la llegada de Morazán a Costa Rica, sublevación del pueblo, su fusilamiento y el de Villaseñor", Cartago, October 4, 1842, Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volume IV, no. 2 (August 1942), 131-137.

57. Lorenzo Montúfar, Memorias Autobiográficas (San José: Libro Libre, 1988), 99-104.

58. Ibid.

59. "The servile-aristocratic party is astute, like a serpent. It approaches liberals and flatters them when it is advisable. Flattery, unfortunately, has great power over the human heart. Few are the superior men who know how to reject it. In 1826 the serviles flattered the President of the Republic, Manuel José Arce, and forced him to launch a coup d'état against the Chief of State Barrundia. That was the origin of all our political ills".

Ibid., 128-151.

60. "The celebrated orators [from the ancient democracies] who thousands of years later still capture our spirit" said one paper, "were at the service of a deity: the People ... [But in] our state, nothing is more forgotten, perhaps even demeaned, than the people".

El Ojo del Pueblo. First issued on November 18, 1843 by the Imprenta de la Libertad in Granada.

61. "Alcance" al Boletín No. 8 (León: Imprenta del Gobierno, May 6, 1842).

62. Eco de la Ley, first issued on July 6, 1843 in Leon, by the Imprenta de la Fraternidad.

63. "El General Francisco Malespin al Gral Fruto Chamorro dandole cuenta de sus movimientos, y que Guatemala se apresta a invadir El Salvador", Santa Ana, May 14, 1844, Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volume IV, no.2 (August 1942), 183-184.

64. Boletín del Pueblo, No. 7, León, August 7, 1843.

65. "Diálogo No.3 entre Militón y Sompronio, Militon Meneces, Sompronio Fernández," October, 1843. See Revista Conservadora del Pensamiento Centroamericano, Volume XXVII, no. 134 (November 1971), 69-72.

66. J. Darío Rojas, "Al Público" (Rivas: Imprenta Nueva (sic) del Señor Pedro Díaz, January 5, 1844), Revista Conservadora del Pensamiento Centroamericano, Volume XXVII, no. 134 (November 1971), 73-76.

67. Juan Ruiz, "Al Público," (Rivas: Imprenta de la Libertad, January 31, 1844), Revista Conservadora del Pensamiento Centroamericano, Volume XXVII, no. 134 (November 1971), 93-94.

68. Santiago Solorzano, "Al Público", Granada, May 9, 1844, Revista Conservadora del Pensamiento Centroamericano, Volume XXVII, no. 134 (November 1971), 95.

69. "Los constantes patriotas de la nueva tertulia", "Al Público" (Granada: Imprenta de la Libertad, September 14, 1844), Revista Conservadora del Pensamiento Centroamericano, Volume XXVII, no. 134 (November 1971), 96.

70. "Managua has legally obtained the separation it desired; and it now ascends to the rank of city and obtains other prerogatives for which we congratulate her before hand. But then Granada could not be blamed if it aspired to the rank of State".

"El Ojo del Pueblo" (Granada: Imprenta de la Libertad, February 10, 1844).

71. They wrote the new Prefect a public letter about the "desolation" caused by his predecessor, whose "crimes and aberrations against families, morality, commerce and religion", had earned him the label "Cain", as it was written "on his forehead."

The Christian scene was thus set for the next stage, as the petitioners proceeded to call into question the legitimacy of the Mayor, whose election had been "illegal"; and to request permission for the return of several notables who had been exiled by the government. Soon, a refutation appeared, accusing these petitioners of "malicious intentions" in their "brazen and acrimonious censure" of the previous prefect.

"Señor Prefecto del Departamento de Granada Coronel Agustín Hernández (Granada: Imprenta de la Libertad, September 22, 1844); and "Exposición que contesta la que datada el 22 del actual, fue publicada hasta el 25 del mismo, Sr. Prefecto del Deptamento Oriental" (Granada: Imprenta de la Libertad, September 27, 1844).

72. José L. Sandoval, "Pueblos" (Granada: Imprenta de la Libertad, October 6, 1844).

73. See Casto Fonseca, "El Gran Mariscal del Ejército Nicaraguense al Pueblo Granadino" (León: Imprenta de la Fraternidad, September 28, 1844), Revista Conservadora del Pensamiento Centroamericano, Volume XXVII, no.134 (November 1971), 101.

74. Rafael Miranda, Consejo Federal, San Vicente, December 28, 1844, Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volume I (1936-1937).

75. Registro Oficial, March, 1845.

76. Pedro Joaquín Chamorro, "Significado Patriótico de los Convenios del 12 de Septiembre de 1856" (Managua: Tipografía La Prensa, 1939), 108-109.

77. "Documentos que manifiestan la intervención que varios Gefes (sic) principales del Estado del Salvador, han tenido en la facción perturbadora de la paz de Nicaragua, remitiendo a los facciosos oficiales, armas, pertrechos y toda clase de auxilios", Imprimense De Orden Suprema en la Imprenta de la Libertad, 1845, J.A.M.

78. José León Sandoval, "Al Público", Managua, September 22, 1846.

79. "Al Público", Granada, July 11, 1848, Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volume IX, no. 2 (August 1947), 14-18.

80. Anselmo Rivas, "Nicaragua, Su Pasado, Ojeada Retrospectiva", first published by El Diario Nicaraguense, Granada, issues from November 6, 1895, to February 16, 1896; later compiled (Managua: Editorial La Prensa, 1936).

81. The notable Pablo Buitrago wrote to the Director on January 17, 1846, arguing that the Assembly's convocation in San Fernando was illegal, and that there was "no question that the the two Chambers must establish themselves in León, where the Supreme Director now exists legally".

The notable said he expressed his opinion because he was "always desirous of contributing to the straightforward march of the State"; and was "persuaded" of the Director's "sound intentions toward the legal order". "I am satisfied", he went on, "that you [the Director] know my own intentions to be of the same ilk as yours". Finally, he added that their central objective ought to be the restoration of the laws "so fiercely violated by the previous administration". See "La Controversia que decidió", Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volume VII, no.3 (November 1945), 43-54.

82. Reply from the Director to Pablo Buitrago, León, January 23, 1846:

"My dear Sir:

I answered you letter verbally because I am not capable of entering into a polemical debate with enlightened men, who know how to embellish their reasons, whereas I can only produce what commonsense dictates, without any adornment". See *ibid.*, 43-54.

83. See *ibid.*, 43-54.

84. J.T. Muñoz, "Acta de Limay", March 23, 1846.

85. Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volume VII, no.3 (November 1945), 43-54.

86. "We were in the deep confines of the State, in the harsh mountains, trying to extinguish the last of the wicked who had tried to disturb Nicaragua's majestic march, when we heard of the fatal decree of January 22, which was understood as a severe mandate. It sounded like the dismal ringing of a bell announcing anarchy, confusion and disorder. At the same time, I could hear Nicaraguans pleading, shouting: Peace, Peace, Peace! What should those who sacrifice just so that you can have what you now enjoy, do? You shall see from the documents that follow and that I publish, because frank and patriotic politics must not be a mystery to the Nicaraguans".

Documents: 1. "Al Señor Don José León Sandoval, Director Supremo del Estado," January 17, 1846"; 2. "Al Señor Licenciado don Pablo Buitrago", León, January 23, 1846"; 3. "Al Señor Licenciado don Pablo Buitrago", León, February 18, 1846; 4. "El Acta de Limay", March 23, 1846; 5. "Señor General en Jefe del Ejército", León, March 29, 1846; 6. "[Al Ministerio de la Guerra] del Ejército del Estado General en jefe", León, March 28, 1846.

Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volume VII, no.3 (November 1945), 43-54.

87. "EDITORIAL", Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volume VII, no. 3 (November 1945), 55-56.

88. "Decree of July 24, 1846," issued in Managua.

89. See Felipe Saenz, "Manifiesto que hace el que suscribe a los pueblos de Centro-América, del motivo por que fue arrojado con otros fuera de su patria la ciudad de Rivas; y en el que se propone contestar el papel llamado Vindicación, suscrito por doce individuos, sobre las calumnia que se hace a su familia con motivo de los atentados del 3 de diciembre de 1848" (Costa Rica: Imprenta de La Paz, 1849), Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volume VI, no.1 (April 1944), 41-61.

90. José Lejarza and Leandro Zelaya, "Al Público" (Granada: August 13 de 1848), Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volume VII, no. 3 (November 1945), 87-88.

91. Correo del Istmo de Nicaragua, Prospectus (León: Inprenta del Estado, May 1, 1849).

92. "Dictámen sobre el Pacto de erección de un gobierno jeneral (sic) provisorio", Asamblea Constituyente, Comayagua, January 15, 1848.

93. Integridad de Centroamérica, first issued on December 18, 1849, in Granada, by Imprenta del Orden. Issue No.2, December 18, 1849 exhorted for the disappearance of parties. Issue No.3, December 25, 1849, asserted that assemblies and governments had lost their virtue with the loss of the federal union; and that the states had since then been governed by men of "vice and ambition". Issue No.7, January 22, 1850, threw down the gauntlet, "Win or Die".

94. Correo del Istmo de Nicaragua, No. 7, León, August 1, 1849.

95. In San Salvador's eyes, the administration of Guatemala was "scandalous" (like many before it) but Guatemalans were "brothers".

Doroteo Vasconzelos, "El Presidente del Salvador a sus Pueblos y a los demás de Centro-América" (San Salvador: Imprenta del Triunfo, January 10, 1851).

96. The Costa Rican general, Flores, felt personally "offended" and "slandered" by the "liberal writers" of El Salvador, and launched a counterattack against the government of El Salvador. The general accused that government of "intercepting letters", "intervening in the internal affairs of others", and "disavowing the right of Guatemala and Costa Rica to become independent republics".

The Costa Rican notable also repudiated the charge made by Salvadoran writers to the effect that he was an "enemy of Central American Union". He stated: "I am not an enemy of the union; I simply believe it almost impossible".

Among the reasons he listed for the impossibility of reunification were the "hatreds" generated by wars and revolutions, and the historical fact that "the principal cities [of the various states] dispute the capital [of the union] for themselves, the one excluding the other without room for compromise".

"Contestación del Jeneral (sic) Flores a La Gaceta del Gobierno de San Salvador" (San José: Imprenta de la República, October 24, 1850).

97. "El Presidente del Estado de Honduras a sus Conciudadanos" (Comayagua: Imprenta de José M. Sánchez, March 2, 1852)

98. "Estado de los Pueblos al Establecerse la República Democrática", Registro Oficial, 1847, in Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volume XI, no.1 (April 1951), 67-77.

99. Correo del Istmo, No. 4, Leon, June 16, 1849, in Catálogo de la Exposición Treinta Años de Periodismo en Nicaragua, 1830-1860 (Managua: Instituto Centroamericano de Historia, Universidad Centroamericana).

100. El Progreso, No. 5, San Salvador, May 9, 1850.
101. José Barrundia, "Discurso Pronunciado el Dia 15 de Setiembre del Año de 1850 por el Ciudadano José Barrundia en el Aniversario de Nuestra Gloriosa Independencia" (San Salvador: Imprenta Nueva de A. Lievano, September 15, 1850).
102. El Progreso, No. 5, San Salvador, May 9, 1850; and no. 14, July 18, 1850.
103. Anselmo Rivas, "Nicaragua, su Pasado: Ojeada Retrospectiva", op. cit.
104. Juan Rafael Mora, "El Presidente de la República a la Nación" (San José: Imprenta de la República, June 8, 1850).
105. "Un Vicentino", "Reflecciones dedicadas a las Lejislaturas (sic) de los Estados sobre la Nacionalidad de la República de Centro-América", signed at San Vicente on January 1, 1853 (San Salvador: Imprenta de Lievano, March 16, 1853)
106. Pedro Francisco de la Rocha, "Eulogy," given in León on March 9, 1851. See Revista Conservadora, Volume 2, no.9 (June 1961), 125.
107. J. Estanislao González, "Al Señor Público" (León: Imprenta de la Libertad, December 24, 1851).
108. El Guerrillero, April, 1850 (May have been published both in Nicaragua and Costa Rica).
109. Doroteo Vasconcelos, "Al Público" (San Salvador: Imprenta del Triunfo, February 26, 1851).
110. Ibid; José de Marcoleta, "Al Público y a los Gobiernos de Centroamérica" (New York: October, 1851); "A los Gobiernos y al Público de Centro-América" (Guatemala: Imprenta de L. Luna, July 22, 1851).
111. "I feel contempt for the insults levelled against me by the Guatemalan press, but I will not tolerate an affront to the State", said Doroteo Vasconcelos in "Presidente del Estado del Salvador, a sus conciudadanos" (San Salvador: Imprenta del Triunfo, December 4, 1850).
112. "Vindicación Relativa a la Calumnia Forjada el 17 del Corriente por los Adversarios de José Manuel Selva," April 30, 1852 (Tegucigalpa: Imprenta de la Academia, 1852).
113. "Discurso inaugural que el Supremo Director, Licenciado don José Laureano Pineda, pronuncio despues de haber prestado juramento y tomado posesion el día 5 de mayo de 1851," Revista

de la Acemia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volume XII, no.1, (April 1951), 76-77.

114. Renuncia que el Señor Director Supremo Don José Laureano Pineda Dirigió a la Asamblea Extraordinaria del Estado", Santiago de Managua, July 3, 1851, Revista de la Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volume XI, no.1 (April 1951), 96-97.

115. Pedro Joaquín Chamorro, "Fruto Chamorro, Apuntes Biográficos," Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volume I (1936-1937), 376.

116. José Trinidad Muñoz, "El Comandante General de las Armas del Estado, José Trinidad Muñoz, a los nicaraguenses" (León: June 28, 1851).

117. The Bishop defended himself from the "atrocious calumny" levelled against him by the notable Francisco Castellon, who in a note to the minister of foreign relations of El Salvador accused the prelate of giving helpful advise to the military officers who had risen against Supreme Director Pineda (the note was published in the Gaceta del Salvador). "My honor is not just mine but also the honor of the church and of Nicaragua," wrote the bishop. "I demand that you legally corroborate the calumny you offer me; should you fail to verify it, I shall make you feel the weight of the law".

Jorje (sic), Obispo de Nicaragua, "Atrocious Calumny", León, August 26, 1851.

118. "El Jeneral (sic) A los Nicaraguenses, José Trinidad Muñoz", (León: Imprenta de la Libertad, August 10, 1851); reprinted in La Bagatela (Granada: Imprenta del Orden, August 19, 1851).

119. Prospectus for the Nueva Gaceta, Granada, November 11, 1851.

120. Francisco Zapata, "Breve Compendio" (León: Imprenta de la Paz, October 24, 1852).

121. Rivas, Nicaragua, Su Pasado, 29-30.

122. Ibid.

123. Pedro Joaquín Chamorro, "Fruto Chamorro, Apuntes Biográficos," Pedro Joaquín Chamorro, Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volume I (1936-1937), 377.

124. "El Señor Obispo Viteri que no debe tomarse en cuenta el libelo de Jerez. Al Excmo. Sr. General Supremo Director Dn. Fruto Chamorro", Santa Barbara, July 6, 1853, Revista de la

Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volume IV, no. 2 (1942), 186-187.

125. Rivas, op. cit., 33-38.

126. "Los Defensores de la Constitución y de las Leyes", "Al Público" (León: Imprenta de la Paz, November 30, 1853).

127. Rivas.

128. In a circular to all the Central American governments, the Nicaraguan Assembly explained that Nicaragua now called itself a Republic and not a state because "attempts to unite the family" into a federation had failed repeatedly, and Nicaragua wanted to be represented and respected abroad".

See "Decreto; Circular a todos los gobiernos en que se exponen los motivos que ha tenido Nicaragua para tomar el nombre de República en lugar de Estado," Gaceta Oficial, No. 9 (March 11, 1854), Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volume VI, no.1 (April 1944), 63-67.

129. Francisco Montero Barrantes, Elementos de Historia de Costa Rica, Volume II, 1856 to 1890 (San José: Letras Patrias, no. 28, 1894).

130. El Defensor del Orden, edited by Imprenta del Orden, in Granada. First came out on May 18, 1854. Issue No.1 contains the reference to the "facción patricida", which came from one of Chamorro's manifestos. Issue No.2, June 4, 1854, contains the reference to the "bastardos" -- sons born out of wedlock. The issue of August 9, 1854, contains the reference to the "spurious sons".

131. El Defensor del Orden, No.26 (Granada: Imprenta del Orden, September, 1854).

132. "Those who have known me since childhood, those who have dealt closely with me in all periods of my life, both public and private, who have seen me work for humanity, who know that I have practiced Christian charity, even with those who have offended me in the course of political quarrels ... to all these people who know my sentiments in favor of peace and order, I say: Can you see that everything that is said and written [by the Chamorro camp] is false -- product either of an agitated imagination or of petty tyrant who is tormented by his own distrust?" [emphasis added]

Francisco Castellón, "Al Público" (León: Imprenta de la Paz, December 8, 1853).

133. The newspaper Boletín del Ejército Democrático del Estado de Nicaragua first came out on May 15, 1854, in Leon. It was printed by Imprenta del Ejercito Democratico and by Imprenta Minerva. See Carlos Melendez and Mauricio Pallais Lacayo, "Correcciones y Ampliaciones al Fichero del Periodismo Antiguo de Nicaragua", Revista Conservadora del Pensamiento Centroamericano, Volume XXVI, no. 127, (April 1971), 51-52.
134. Francisco Castellón, "Al Público" (San Salvador: Imprenta de A. Lievano, February 10, 1854).
135. "Parte Oficial" (León: Imprenta del Gobierno Provisorio, November 24, 1854).
136. Francisco D. Zapata, "LECTOR" (León: Imprenta de Minerva, July 4, 1853).
137. "Documentos Creados Sobre Pláticas de Paz, Impresos de Orden del Gobierno de la República de Nicaragua" (Granada: Imprenta del Orden, 1854).
138. The Nueva Era del Estado de Nicaragua en la América Central
(New Era of the State of Nicaragua) first came out on July 8, 1854. It was the official paper of the Gobierno Provisorio (headed by Francisco Castellón); and was printed by the Imprenta del Ejército Democrático. Issue No.5. (July 22, 1854) of the Nueva Era argued that each of the Central American governments should remain within their boundaries in order to avoid conflict, but that their respective gazettes had the obligation to "look beyond boundaries" to "combat errors, to discover and demonstrate truth ... and to prevent that any step be taken away from civilization".
139. This was a private publication, edited in Granada, by the Imprenta del Orden. Its first issue came out on November 20, 1854. In 1831, a paper with the same name and purpose had been published in El Salvador to criticize the government there.
See Catálogo de la Exposición Treinta Años, op. cit.
140. Carlos Melendez and Mauricio Pallais Lacayo, "Correcciones y Ampliaciones al Fichero del Periodismo Antiguo en Nicaragua", Revista Conservadora del Pensamiento Centroamericano, Volume XXVI, no. 121 (April, 1971), 48-49.
141. The Legitimist notable J. Perez came to be perceived as such a hybrid; and was labeled "semi-Democratic" by his own camp. In the eyes of his fellows, he was not a "semi-Legitimist", that is "half ours". Rather, he was "half theirs".
See Pedro Joaquín Chamorro, Biografía del Licenciado Jerónimo Perez (Managua: Tipografía La Prensa, 1939).

142. "Honras Funerales del Exmo. Señor Presidente de la República de Nicaragua y Jeneral (sic) en Jefe de su Ejército, Don Fruto Chamorro" (Granada: Imprenta del Orden, March, 1855), Revista Conservadora del Pensamiento Centroamericano, Volume XXVII, no.134 (November 1971).

143. Rivas, op. cit., 59-60.

144. Pedro Joaquín Chamorro, Significado Patriótico, (Managua: La Prensa, 1939), 112.

145. Not until June 26, 1856 did the liberals (the provisional president Rivas and his Minister General Jerez) declare Walker a traitor. At that point, the other Central American states recognized the legitimacy of the provisional government, which was then emboldened to attack the Legitimists again.

Soon thereafter, the Legitimists' military leader (Martínez) sought once more an anti-Walker alliance with the Democrats. He was supported by letters from General Ramón Belloso of Guatemala and Mariano Paredes of El Salvador. Finally, talks began in León. The Legitimists notable, J. Perez, who was present, reported that "mutual mistrust, fear and personal caprice" were obstacles to peace, in addition to the Democrats' insistence that no man who had participated in the crafting of the constitution of 1854 could be president, not even if he were one of their own camp. Finally, on Sept 12, 1856 the camps agreed to unite, to recognize the provisional president as the sole president, and to postpone discussion of internal issues until after they expelled Walker. The agreement was guaranteed by Guatemala and El Salvador. There were Legitimists who considered the pact a betrayal, but the war against Walker awaited.

Ibid., 115-116.

CHAPTER 10

The Struggle for Political Innovation: A Democratic Exception

From the colonial to the post colonial period, we have seen, Central Americans engaged in incessant attempts to conciliate "virtuousness" with the pursuit of power. They succeeded in these attempts through the exercise of opaque practices like dramaturgical obedience, which in turn entrenched the mistrust that came of the discourse of good and evil.

This chapter examines the Nicaraguan regime which between 1867 and 1893 explicitly de-linkked virtuousness and power, and thus managed to govern the country in relative peace for almost thirty years. During this long period, the notables of the two parties created, by increments, a regulatory system which enabled them to share power even as they left intact the discourse of good and evil that would have otherwise precluded power-sharing.

A combination of symbolic craft and institutional design, this regulatory system had the president at its core. This chapter will show, for example, that the dramatic representation of "benevolent conciliation" became the principal executive role. The incumbent was able to play this role because of the deliberate creation of an institutional vacuum: the elimination of the vice-presidency.

By removing the threat of vice-presidential take-over

attempts, and precluding presidential jealousy and insecurity, the regime freed the executive to embrace the public duties of his virtuous identity. He was able to keep, for example, a decorous silence in the face of any rhetorical attack launched against him in the ongoing discourse of good and evil. Moreover, the president refrained from entering the battles over "identity" secure in the knowledge that his very restraint repudiated affronts to his dignity. In short, he was able to practice political abstinence, to the point that he could serenely adhere to the rule of no re-election.

Political abstinence earned the president moral authority, which in turn confirmed his right to preeminence. His status was that of a *primus inter pares*. For the apex belonged to the most virtuous. And yet, the president had little power. The struggles of politics were left to the other notables, until time came to choose a successor. On that occasion, the president, like a demi-king, anointed the future candidate.

This regulatory system stabilized elite politics to the extent that it minimized the opaque practices that in the past tainted electoral outcomes. Not only was the elites' traditional mistrust of concentrated power diminished, but bi-partisan power-sharing did not necessarily incite charges of "immorality" and "perfidy" from the parties' respective middle ranks.

The more elites were able to engage in bi-partisan power-

sharing, and the more the president was able to gather around him notables from both camps, the more there emerged a common mainstream in which Liberal and Conservative identities blurred. But absent a deep revision of worldview and discourse, the mainstream continued to share the conceptual framework of the "extremes": that is, the "true" Liberals and "genuine" Conservatives.

In practical terms, this failure of revision meant that each electoral contest represented a potential crisis. For it provided an opportunity for identity-clarification, which could only draw on the traditional resources of the manichean culture. As long as the president-elect espoused his role of benevolent conciliator -- embracing dissimulation of personalist attacks while eschewing restrictions on the press, and avoiding localism, nepotism, and re-election -- the regime survived. As long as he served as a symbol rather than a ruler, the president could count on the support of the mainstream. The regime, in short, relied heavily on each man it elevated to the presidency. And indeed, the regime imploded in 1893, when the president violated the code of conduct that had become crucial to the regime. Such transgression marked the end of the regime because it dissolved the mainstream, as the latter, still tied to the traditional worldview and its discourse, was unable to defend its conciliatory and cooperative stance. Thus, in 1893, the country reverted to oscillation between distatorial rule and civil war.

a. Wounds of Discourse: Obstacle to Peace

In October of 1855, after Walker vanquished the city of Granada, the city's "progressive" priest, despondent in the face of history, sermonized acceptance of the American's authority.

From the days of independence we have been perpetually divided and in almost constant armed struggle that has been punctuated by a brief truce now and then. As a result of these divisions and bloody fights, hatred took root in Nicaraguan society, which has been in combat against herself with criminal rigor, violating natural laws as well as those preached by Wisdom -- Our Lord Jesus Christ ... Let us meditate: the fruit of today is the consequence of past intransigencies ...

In the sermon, the Nicaraguans' historical ideal -- the unification of the national family -- remained both intact and unfulfilled. Our preacher saw Walker as instrumental to its fulfillment.

General Walker, an enlightened and talented man, has promised guarantees to persons, homes and work ... If he can make his laudable purpose acceptable both to our brothers the Legitimists [from Granada] and our brothers the Leonese [Democrats] ... he will be the providential envoy who cures the wounds and reconciles the Nicaraguan family, divided by others.¹

In short, the sermon expressed the central notions of a worldview in which societal harmony was a "natural" order, and the familial model was its purest expression. The role of Walker would be merely to facilitate the family's reconciliation.

This would be no easy task. The elites were both mutually rancorous and internally fragmented.² At the same time, the state of general exhaustion put increasing pressure on both camps to seek a truce through Walker.³ But negotiations, as well as double dealings, came to naught. And as it became patently clear to both Nicaraguan camps that they both would be subordinated by Walker, they finally forged a bi-partisan alliance against the American.⁴ The alliance, moreover, was possible because of the relative weakness of the Legitimists, which resulted from the deaths of their political and military leaders.

The alliance, in short, was a rational response to the prospect of a shared and total loss; it was not the product of shared conceptual framework that allowed the allies to reach a true understanding. Indeed, until the very last moment, the discourse of those who in 1856 resolved to combat Walker was as traditional as the discourse of those who still feared him less than their local foes.

On one side, the dictator of Guatemala, Carrera, in announcing that he intended to assist the Legitimists in their fight against Walker, appealed to his compatriots' sense of family in hopes of suppressing the localist rancors that alienated them from other Central Americans. Accordingly, Carrera "recommended" to his people the "strictest union" with their "brothers" from El Salvador, Honduras, and Costa Rica.

On the other side, in their initial reaction to the news

that the Nicaraguan Legitimists and Guatemala had united against Walker, the Democratic provisional president, still allied to Walker, warned his countrymen not to let themselves be deceived by the "wicked", and reminded them of a previous Costa Rican invasion and of Guatemala's invasion of Honduras. Naturally, Walker as General in Chief of the Nicaraguan army, counseled Nicaraguans to listen to their president's cautionary reminder.⁵

Soon, however, the Democrats themselves came close to losing all dignity at the hand of Walker, and forged the bipartisan "national" alliance.

There were three Nicaraguan generals in the "national" war against Walker. One was Tomás Martínez, a former resident of León who had been persecuted by the local Democrats when he tried to keep a neutral stance in the war of 1854. On that occasion, Martínez moved to Granada and joined the ranks of the Legitimist army, in which he served with distinction.⁶ The second Nicaraguan general was Máximo Jerez, an ardent Democrat who had been instrumental in the importation of Walker and until the very last had opposed an understanding with the Legitimists. And the third was Fernando Chamorro, a staunch Legitimist who had repudiated the agreement that his camp at one point reached with Walker.

The National War began in September of 1856 and ended on May 1, 1857, when the American capitulated in the department of Rivas (soon thereafter he left the isthmus but continued to

entertain the idea of a second attempt at conquest). All of the central American countries participated in one way or another in the war effort. But Guatemala and El Salvador provided crucial military support to the Nicaraguans. And both these countries played a central role in the equally daunting post-war task of establishing peace between the Nicaraguans.

To this end, the Liberal ruler of El Salvador, General Gerardo Barrios, convened a "junta of notables" to meet in the Nicaraguan city of León to discuss the reconciliation between the Nicaraguans, who had united only to expel Walker.⁷

The man who during the war had emerged as the dominant Legitimist military caudillo, General Martínez, declined to attend the junta. However, he did send two representatives, the notables Jerónimo Pérez (his brother-in-law) and General Fernando Chamorro, the staunch Legitimist mentioned above.

At the Junta, it was the echoes of their mutual verbal attacks, more than the death and destruction of the armed clash, that alienated the participants. A member of the Democratic legation complained to Pérez, "You are too fiery; your articles against [us] the Democrats are too strong".

Pérez replied, "It's true, but all I do is defend [our Legitimist camp] because you have hit us hard in your articles in the Official Register. I could no less than pay you back; eye for eye, tooth for tooth".

General Barrios of El Salvador interjected, "I've read your articles", he said angrily to the Legitimist notable,

"and I assure you that there were moments when I was on the verge of going [from San Salvador] to Granada to break that printing press of yours that keeps the country divided".

Pérez kept silent. Later, General Martínez heard the story, and was incensed by his brother-in-law's prudence.

"You've behaved like a child", he declared. "You've exposed your party to ridicule! Why did you not challenge [Barrios] to come [to Granada]? That cowardly patojo [derogatory name] with his two thousand Salvadorans would not resist Granada's first charge with the 500 Granadines we were going to pit against him."

In the meantime, Barrios regretted having been harsh with Perez. "It's convenient that we let this situation pass," the Salvadoran caudillo told the Nicaraguan Legitimist. "You must show yourselves to be conciliatory, and in time, apply opportune punishment to these wicked men [his own Democratic allies] who have caused so much misfortune by bringing in [Walker]".

"General," Pérez replied, "we don't want vengeance".

"I understand," Barrios interrupted, "but you're too much of a child to appreciate the full depth of the evil of this people; I know them well, and it's necessary that we clip their wings lest they endanger yet again the independence of Central America. Do you think the States can forget what they have suffered on account of [the Democrats'] treason"?

Pérez assumed that by speaking ill of his own allies,

Barrios was trying to ingratiate himself.⁸

These dialogues -- between foes as well as between friends -- reveal to us that the discourse and worldview of the belligerents were more than causes of war. They were also obstacles in the pacification process. For if Central Americans apprehended the connections among worldview, discourse, and the conflagrations that plagued their isthmus, they did so only partially. The newspaper Crónica de Costa Rica, for example, cautioned Costa Ricans not to make Nicaragua's mistakes thus:

if you wish to know the monstrous consequences of giving free rein to all to say it all in a society without a solid constitution or education or moral unity ... then contemplate and study Nicaragua's catastrophes ... [in that country] save a few exceptions, the press has been the rude word of anarchy, internal war, and the moral degradation of the people ... writers from one state [of Central America] to another have also spat on each other with ink ... thus weakening further a tenuous union ... Let us all preach: forgetfulness and forgiveness; union and toleration; faith and perseverance. We are all in danger [emphasis added].⁹

The Nicaraguan Boletín Oficial reprinted the Costa Rican article in the hope that Nicaraguans too would pay heed. For even after having narrowly escaped control by a foreigner, Central Americans remained suspicious of one another. Indeed, at the junta of notables engaged in peace negotiations, the leaders narrowly avoided war amongst their countries. The Guatemalan General, José Victor Zavala, arrived in the company

of several of his officers, one of whom remarked to his superior:

"Look how they show their contempt for you, the honor guard does not get in line for you".

Enraged by the disrespect shown to him, the Guatemalan General drew his saber and struck the chief of the Nicaraguan honor guard. The Guatemalan General also threatened Nicaragua's provisional President with strangling. In his own defense, the assailant claimed that while the Nicaraguan executive was not himself "evil", he did "allow the wicked to control him". He concluded with a warning: he would hang the president's entire cabinet except for one minister. "I'll keep that one [minister] alive to shine my boots," the Guatemalan explained.

After the Guatemalan General left, the government house became crowded with Nicaraguans coming to offer their support to their president. But even then, rancor threatened further internal fragmentation. One of the ministers (a notable who perceived Perez as writing against his "family" in various publications) turned to Perez: "Señor Pérez, you have said that I am a wicked thief and a scoundrel".

"To whom have I said it?"

"To the President, when you visited him yesterday"

"Let us meet with the President".¹⁰

By demanding a confrontation with the President, Pérez put an

end to a potentially explosive situation. But the danger of explosiveness was everywhere. For example, the Boletín Oficial, which not too long ago had implored Nicaraguans to work for unity and harmony, reprinted a broadsheet addressed to "The Public" relating the assault by the Guatemalan General on the Nicaraguan president. The Boletín also demanded punishment for this "affront" to Nicaragua's dignity, and published a letter from President Barrios of El Salvador to the Guatemalan demanding that he "calm down".¹¹

Given the animosity between El Salvador and Guatemala, Barrios' demand could only add to the tension. But like the Costa Ricans and the Nicaraguans, the Salvadorans saw no contradiction between the "demands" they presented to their antagonists and their pleas for peace in post-Walker Central America.

These pleas for peace were in themselves significant because they continued to treat the socio-political world the reflection of a moral one. In San Salvador a "patriotic acta", referring to the "fatal success" attained by Walker in "conquering" the state of Nicaragua, appealed for an end to "fratricidal wars" and for the combination of Central America's dispersed resources" in order to resist invaders.

The "acta" also argued that adherence to the constitution would assure tranquility and fraternal harmony, but that since virtue is the foundation of republican institutions, it was essential to impart "the purest elements of moral truth". To

this end, the "acta" called for laws in favor of

our religion, granting the church and its Ministers the necessary protection for the splendor of worship, and for the solid instruction of the clergy, who are the ones in charge of disseminating the principles of order.¹²

Ultimately, the junta of notables sponsored by the Salvadoran government failed to reconcile the Nicaraguans, mainly because the latter could not agree on who would be the post-war president. At the same time, however, the pressure for an agreement did not relent. Nicaragua was in chaos; the treasury was insolvent. Partisan emotions still ran high among the exhausted population. Moreover, Costa Rica seemed tempted to take advantage of Nicaragua's internal turbulence and seize part of her territory. And though Walker had been expelled, he was not repentant.

b. A Presumption of Trust: Bi-Partisan Dictatorship

Under such pressure, the elites of the Democratic (now Liberal) and the Legitimist (now Conservative) camps finally decided to hold negotiations of their own. Each caudillo -- Martínez and Jerez -- attended the meetings with 12 notables, who served as influential advisers and often impeded the two leaders in their effort to reach a settlement. As the negotiations stagnated, the two sides began to discuss the radical measure of partitioning Nicaragua.

This prospect -- dismal in itself for a country already

small enough -- seemed intolerable to the notables once they reasoned that partition might well cause various territorial departments to attach themselves to a neighboring country. And yet, the notables soon found themselves discussing the dismantling of their own country.

Ultimately, they recoiled from partition, but reached no peace agreement either. In brief, the notables left their caudillos zero degrees of freedom. The two caudillos bid each other farewell, fully prepared to resume hostilities.

Against this grim background, the caudillo of the Liberal camp took a gamble and went to see his opposite number in private. At this meeting, each caudillo had one trusted ally with him. No other notables were present. Presuming the "trust" of the respective parties, the two caudillos resolved to assume joint dictatorial power without consulting the rest of the leadership. In this power-sharing agreement, control of the military was left to the Legitimist Martínez.¹³

The Binary Government began operations on June 24, 1857; but the Conservative Party soon began to argue against an indefinite continuation of the dictatorship, clamoring for a return to constitutional government. Thus, the Binary Government convened elections for a constitutional assembly and for president of the republic. General Martínez, the Conservative caudillo who had resisted Walker, was elected almost unanimously. His election was supported by Jerez, the Liberal member of the bi-partisan dictatorship. While the

constitution was drafted, Martínez would serve as provisional president.

Both the Binary Government and the ongoing informal alliance between the two caudillos were embedded in a shared sense of urgency. Chastened, the Liberal caudillo vowed never to become involved in "fratricidal wars" again; and a Conservative notable who heard this vow expressed the hope that the caudillo would turn from "the spirit of evil" to the "spirit of good".

And yet, when Salvadoran exiles came to the Nicaraguan Liberal caudillo claiming that the Liberal leader of El Salvador (General Barrios) had turned out to be worse than the Conservative dictator of Guatemala (Carrera), and that he was an "assassin", the Nicaraguan prepared for war. "He must fall," Jerez replied about Barrios. The Nicaraguan Liberal then asked the Conservative notable -- the very one who had hoped that their foe would turn away from "evil" -- to persuade his relative, General Martínez, at least not to interfere with their war against Barrios. When the Conservative notable balked, the Liberal caudillo said in reference to the Salvadoran exiles: "These men helped us for democracy, and now we must reciprocate". To which the Conservative replied: "They helped you against my party, and now I must work against them".¹⁴

Absent revision of worldview and discourse, the guiding principles of good and evil impelled Nicaraguans to redress

what they continued to see as intolerable wrongs. And precisely because Nicaraguans were still oriented by the compass of good and evil in their pursuit of their ideal -- a united family -- leaders could either act accordingly and wage war, or, at perilous moments when acute internal division seemed to invite foreign aggression, advocate "forgetfulness".¹⁵

It was in a spirit of forgetfulness that the post-Walker provisional government began its administration in 1857. In his inaugural speech, General Martínez stressed the importance of reconciliation as a precondition for the nation's safety from external attack. And he made another claim: national peace was required if Nicaragua was to attract "honest" and "industrious" immigrants.¹⁶ In short, attending the erasure of local memory (and peace) was the hope that virtuous men might be imported to write on the tabula rasa of a new beginning.

Immigration never attained any significant importance. Moreover, Nicaragua was about to enter a turbulent period during which necessity and opportunity, and the conventional and the novel combined to push the country to the edge of systemic transformation.

c. The Perilous Transition

In 1859 Martínez ceased to govern as provisional president and became constitutional executive. Taken by many as the beginning of thirty years of peaceful and orderly

governance, 1859 actually marked the beginning of a treacherous period that would last until 1963, as friends became foes and revolution broke out.

The post-war government of General Martinez did begin under auspicious circumstances -- some conjunctural, others accidental, and others still the consequence of designs that were the work of men already dead. Conjuncture and accident, for example, came together felicitously because the President, though a Conservative, had roots not in Granada but in León, which he had been forced to flee, because of his neutrality, by the local partisans. He was, in short, an accidental hybrid. At any other point in time, this ambiguity might have earned him the distrust of everyone. But these were not normal times. The country had just come out of a war in which the President had demonstrated amply his military capability. Moreover, his post-war agreement with the Liberal caudillo Jerez continued to function according to plan because the latter was discredited among many by his participation in the Walker deal. And finally, the unrepentant Walker remained a threat until his execution in Honduras in 1860. In other words, at that moment, the President was perceived as strong, his natural opponent as weak, and external danger imminent.

Conjunctural factors also combined with the designs of previous institution-builders in favor of the post-war government. The caudillo Fruto Chamorro, whose attempt at the creation of a paternalist state ignited the war that in turn

brought in Walker, had dispensed with the office of vice-president. This measure was now deliberately continued by the notables in an effort to preclude vice-presidential take-over attempts and presidential jealousy and insecurity.

This calculated institutional vacuum was in itself conducive to intra-mural stability. But there was a conjunctural element that added to its beneficial effect: by the second half of the nineteenth century, the Conservative notables of Granada, always inclined to commerce, were successful enough as merchant-farmers that the opportunity cost of serving in government was now too high for them to bear.¹⁷ Put another way, because they did not perceive government positions as opportunities for graft (indeed, tenure entailed costs for the incumbent), abandoning their business affairs, which they trusted only to themselves, could mean financial ruin. This meant that many notables were inclined to exercise their influence over the executive as part of an inner circle without necessarily aspiring to the office themselves. Their disinclination, in turn, facilitated the establishment of the constitutional proscription of presidential re-election: the first major post-war rule of the game agreed upon by the elites.

Stability obtained until the next election, scheduled for the end of 1862. For as long as the presidential seat was not subject to inter-party contention, the two camps acted on the presumption that neither could afford another war. The impact

of this de facto understanding was crucial to the future. Anonymous broadsides and pamphlets, for example, were still a source of friction between the camps, but denunciation of their authors became more nuanced in that notables did not paint all rivals with the same brush.

Some members of our youth seem destined to suffocate the notion of order and morality. We say some members because we do not include all our youth. We are proud to recognize that there are young men who would be an honor to any society more advanced than ours. [emphasis added].

The distinction being made between "all" and "some" was as important as it was novel, for it separated the "honorable" from the "base" among rivals and allies alike. In other words, it made it possible for the "virtuous" members of the two opposite camps to unite in their condemnation of pamphleteers regardless of the latter's partisan identification. The content of condemnations, however, retained its traditional animosity.¹⁸

This effort to be selective in condemnation even as condemnation remained harsh reflected the fear of imminent foreign aggression prevalent among the more mature notables. In 1862, for example, the Conservative Jerónimo Pérez sent a diplomatic letter to all the governments of Central America, warning them to learn from the plight of Mexico, which was facing a French invasion.¹⁹

But more importantly, the effort at discerning censure

reflected the internal confusion of each camp when denied the war option. More specifically, the more the two camps were forced to deal with one another peacefully, the more factions formed internally and struck working agreements with their counterparts on the other side. As a result, notables were now selective in their censure of pamphleteers because often they knew them to be members of their own party and locality.

In a tactical response to this factionalization, and with an eye to holding their ranks together, the Conservative notables nominated in 1862 a very moderate and competent candidate for the upcoming presidential election. For their part, preeminent Liberals publicized the idea that President Martínez could be re-elected without violating the constitution because he had been elected for his prior term by the Senate. On this view, Martínez was free to run for a popular election this time around. Martínez, a Conservative, initially rejected the idea. But the Liberals insisted that Martínez, having demonstrated a "conciliatory character", was ideally suited to serve as "pacific conciliator".²⁰

In short, both parties were defining the presidential identity in historically-shaped terms, which dictated the primacy of conciliation. But they chose their respective candidates in response to their tactical needs at that moment. Hence the Liberals' support of a Conservative. And hence the split which their proposal caused between the Conservative President and the Conservative notables who objected to his

re-election as unconstitutional.²¹

Initially reluctant to re-elect himself, Martínez took it as a personal affront that his own Party would object to his reelection. And as the Conservative notables and the President grew apart, the latter and his loyalists grew closer to the Liberals.²² To cement their alliance with the principal Liberal faction, the Conservative President and his faction embraced the cause of Central American unification. And so it happened that when a Conservative notable attacked members of his own party for espousing this cause in exchange for the Liberals' support of Martínez' reelection, it was the Liberal caudillo who rose to the defense of the Conservative Party.²³

Inter-partisan factional rapprochments simultaneously brought the parties closer to one another and perpetuated their antagonistic relationship, which now turned inward on each party as well. But there was another unintended consequence to the complementary fragmentation of the two parties: it created the conditions for the emergence of a new response to the reelection controversy: dissimulation. Though rooted in the normative pragmatism that had animated dramaturgical obedience, the response was novel because it called for aloofness. Anonymous pamphleteers in the Liberal city of Leon, for example, urged the citizens to accept the reelection for the sake of peace, and "to turn deaf" when "they speak to us of revolution".²⁴

If this novel and pragmatic approach gave notables enough

room to maneuver around the contradictory demands they faced as virtuous identities, it did not solve those contradictions. For example, Nicaragua owed a "debt of gratitude" to both El Salvador and Guatemala for their aid in expelling Walker. But President Martinez of Nicaragua was also afraid that his Liberal ally Jerez might get too close to Barrios of El Salvador. So Martinez sought an agreement with Barrios on the matter of Central America's unification while he quietly struck an alliance with Barrios' enemy -- Carrera of Guatemala.²⁵

Carrera, for his part, was open to the suggestion because he himself distrusted Barrios, who in turn insisted that he harbored no bellicose intentions toward Guatemala.²⁶ And President Martinez' surreptition reflected his suspicion of both his own ally Jerez and of Barrios. The feeling was mutual. Barrios wrote to the Nicaraguan envoys Chamorro and Jerez:

I cannot believe that General Martinez harbors the intention of National Unity: he speaks of it simply to give impetus to his re-election by attracting important men like yourselves to his side. Once he has attained his objective, he will no longer speak of the nationality issue, and if he did, it would in unacceptable terms.

Barrios then urged the Conservative and Liberal envoys to oppose the reelection of Martínez.²⁷ Soon, however, Barrios seemed to despair in a letter to a friend.

Passions and ignorance put up a resistance which does not allow [Central Americans] to follow the path that will lead us to be a single family ... let them be happy with their impotent sovereignties, their ridiculous nations, and their localist interests, submerged in misery and at peace with nothingness, presenting to the world a parody of governments utterly without resources, incapable of affording the paper and ink they use; let them live in misery, let them take pride in their smallness and in the comedy they present, and may they be damned by the generations to come.²⁸

Determined to present a single front to foreign aggressors, the Martínez faction of the Conservative Party, Barrios and the Liberals of El Salvador, and the Nicaraguan and Honduran Liberals all agreed on the necessity of unity. But the unification process that was to gather El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Honduras into a single republic, there remained an unsurpassable obstacle: the President of El Salvador and Martínez disagreed on the location of the capital city. To break the impasse, Martínez suggested the inclusion of Guatemala in the prospective union, and Guatemala City as the capital.²⁹

The suggestion, not surprisingly, truncated the unification process. El Salvador could no more accept Guatemala as the capital than Nicaragua could accept a Salvadoran city. And once the unification process was truncated, the alliance between Jerez' Liberals and Martínez' Conservatives turned to enmity. Indeed, the Liberals now entered into a formal alliance with the anti-Martínez faction of the Conservative Party. United under the agreement they

called "La Fusión" -- or The Fusion -- they pitted their own candidate against Martínez.³⁰

The Fusion candidate obtained more popular votes than Martínez. But in January of 1863, by declaring nul certain electoral districts, Congress gave Martínez a majority by thirty votes.³¹ Several Conservative representatives dissented from the congressional decision. President Martínez and his faction took this dissent as a declaration of war, objecting to the "tone of voice and gesticulation" of Pedro Joaquín Chamorro in his statement of protest.³²

Upon being informed of the reelection of Martínez in Nicaragua, General Barrios of El Salvador issued this warning to the Conservative notable Fernando Chamorro.

I am deeply pained by the outcome of the elections in that republic [Nicaragua]. The maneuvers of power have prevailed over the manifest opinion of the pueblos. But this triumph shall be ephemeral because it establishes immorality and produces general discontent ... If Martinez continues in power, anarchy is almost sure to follow in that beautiful and fertile republic ... I still have three years to serve, and in that time I will never trust in a weak and incompetent Chief who has an instinct for treason and is naturally hipocritical ... It is grave matter that the government of El Salvador sees in [Martinez] a man without faith who cannot be trusted ... [emphasis added].³³

Soon the anti-Martínez factions of the Conservative and Liberal parties rose up in arms against the re-elected president.³⁴ El Salvador's Barrios supplied military assistance to the Nicaraguan Liberal caudillo, General Jerez,

who published a broadsheet claiming he had been deceived by his former ally, whose camp he called the "bastard sons of Central America".³⁵

In Leon, the bastion of Liberalism, there was considerable hesitation to go to war again. The same can be said of the major cities in Guatemala and El Salvador. Still, Carrera, like Barrios, chose sides in the Nicaraguan conflict. Both were moved to intervene in Nicaragua not only by balance-of-power considerations, but also by the passions ignited in them by offending pamphlets and broadsides.³⁶ A sense of betrayal -- betrayal by former "friends" -- was another contributing factor.³⁷ And so was the mistrust that came of broken alliances. "Jerez is capable of everything" Martínez said, "and has gone to El Salvador to prepare a revolution".³⁸ Soon thereafter, Carrera of Guatemala declared war on Barrios and gave his support to an alternative government formed by the Salvadoran opposition.³⁹

Pro-Martínez Conservatives, of course, denounced the alliance between anti-Martínez Conservatives and Liberals. One newspaper wrote:

Nicaraguans: You can now see it. Filibusteros [the name given to foreign assailants] invade us agains. But lamentably, today it is Jerez and the Conservatives form Granada who betray the Republic. Incredible! These are men of the best reputation; men who have called themselves Conservatives!⁴⁰

Martínez defeated Jerez, who ironically requested asylum

in Carrera's Guatemala (Barrios fell in El Salvador).⁴¹ Then, without hesitation, Martínez sought a reconciliation with the Conservative faction that had until recently so bitterly opposed his reelection and even fought him militarily. But the talks came to naught, and the Conservative opposition turned to rhetorical and political attacks on Martínez.

In response, the Martínez administration pursued a mixed policy of suppression and tolerance. On the one hand, the administration "scandalized" many Conservatives when it restricted freedom of the press through a decree that came to be known as The Law of the Muzzle.⁴² This suppressive policy reflected a profound fear of rhetorical potency in the hands of the wicked. As socio-political turbulence elicited suspicions of an evil plot, one newspaper argued that "demagoguery" was

giving impetus to anarchy, exercising everywhere its diabolical influence possessed of the kind of guile and humility shown by a serpent that lowers its head the better to aim its venom ... and which can be found in all the political circles of all the classes.⁴³

On the other hand, in the face of such "evil", executive policy also turned increasingly conciliatory. The president himself argued that the imperative for peace had led him to wish that there be "no opposition parties" and to try and "gather all around the government, as it should be with a "family". Indeed, after repelling several revolutionary

assaults against his administration, he had resumed his "paternal" policy and issued an amnesty.

If revolution had once evoked paternal discipline from the head of state, now it evoked paternal benevolence. As for the future, the President envisioned a society in which the Church and clergy would disseminate the principles of "peace and morality: the sole foundation for a government, without which all is confusion and anarchy".⁴⁴

Presidential tolerance, to be sure, had clear limits. The Liberal Jerez, for example, was banished from the country as a traitor. And many members of the anti-Martínez Conservative faction were persecuted and incarcerated as late as 1866, when they were still seeking to overthrow the president.

But presidential toleration was also dynamic because it responded to underlying shifts in collective identity-formation. In the Conservative bastion of Granada, for example, young notables began to feel free to define themselves as "liberal" in sentiment. In 1866, the newspaper Amigo del Pueblo announced with "republican satisfaction" receipt of a letter

informing us that the youth of this city have organized a junta ... we cordially salute this new organization of liberal aspirations, and wish it moderation, morality and wisdom in their determination because virtue is the principle of republican government.⁴⁵

Along with the shifts in identity-formation and the increasing

factionalization of the two major camps, came a sense of dangerous fluidity. Newspapers were created for the express purpose of placating, through "the sublime ministry" of the press, the "passions provoked by the current situation".⁴⁶

Of course, such an avowed higher purpose was inextricable from the goals of particular factions. The newspaper El Oriental, for example, was created in Granada to combat the newspaper El Amigo del Pueblo, another Granada newspaper which, unconvinced by the Conservative Party's two candidates, proposed a third notable for the presidency.

This faction's deviation from the Party line struck the editors of El Oriental as an act of "demagoguery", which they argued, was in turn the source of "great calamities among our nations". The situation, in fact, appeared dismal to the editors, who declared that "Nicaragua [had] never been enveloped by such darkness", and never in such need of a "press that illuminates the people".⁴⁷

This vehement repudiation of a third Conservative candidate by many Conservatives was in fact a repudiation of President Martínez, who was the power behind the third man. Nevertheless, Martínez' candidate -- Fernando Guzmán, a Granada notable -- was elected.

Looking back on his tenure, Martínez could only see one aspect of rule: the conciliatory and benevolent. As his administrative tenure came to an end, he told the Congress:

In return for my leniency [after the 1863 revolution] I have received unjust and tenacious opposition, making it necessary to exhaust all political resources and expend all my faculties and those of the men who compose my government just to avoid [sending people] to prison and resorting to terrible, exemplary punishment ... I received a Republic engulfed in anarchy, and after ten years of work I leave her at peace.⁴⁸

d. Continuity and Rupture: Toward Innovation

Martinez' successor, Guzmán, assumed power in 1867. The continuity between the conciliatory aspect of the Martínez presidency and the intentions of the Guzmán administration became apparent at once. In his inaugural manifesto to the citizenry, Guzmán emphasized even more than his predecessor the executive's role as benevolent pacifier.

I want to be the linkage that unites opposing parties, and I want to assuage miserable localist rivalries, as well as the exaggerated passions that the stubborn spirit of partisanship places above the public interest; I want to drown, if possible, with a conciliatory policy, the principal cause of our misfortune, the source of our ills: that dark political intolerance which poisons the patria's air and pronounces the dissident brother an irreconcilable foe... If as a private man, I can have my sympathies for any political camp, as a public man I recognize no political color. For me, there are only Nicaraguan brothers

The familial model still held, but the executive was no longer conceived as a paterfamilias endowed with disciplinarian responsibilities. Rather, he became a conciliatory exemplar of impartiality who could only work for "fraternal" unity

precisely because he recognized no other possible alternative for members of a single family.

This conception of the executive entailed for the incumbent a posture at once docile and aloof. On the one hand, the president was there to listen and learn from public opinion. On the other hand, he was there to ignore "calumny".

I know well that I am now in a place where for four years I shall be the target of harsh criticism, but rather than fear it, I wish to listen perpetually to the frank, authoritative voice of the supreme judge of this era, the sovereign tribunal of civilization [public opinion]. Opinion has its voice, and that voice is the press, a voice which I love and revere ... [Even] calumny will find me indifferent; I shall despise it, but I will never persecute it.⁴⁹

Note that the concern expressed here is that the "ruler" -- not the people -- will be deceived by the power of words. Moreover, the phrase "calumny will find me indifferent" suggests that if the traditional sense of political attacks as personal persisted, now there was also the notion of presidential restraint as the best response. In short, for the first time, freedom of the press was upheld as an absolute value by the head of state. Hence the president's explicit assurance:

Do not fear, there will never be a government agent who, armed with some wicked law, will go after anyone who has the energy and patriotism to censure the abuse of power.⁵⁰

By supplanting the "Law of the Muzzle" with a presidential commitment to freedom of the press, the new administration broke with its predecessor. Indeed, the President himself assured his compatriots that he intended to display a self-abnegating devotion to this freedom, so that the Republic might behold the ongoing spectacle of an honorable man accepting "slander" with utmost serenity.

And indeed, as public attacks from his own party turned increasingly harsh, the President adhered to the promises he had made in his inaugural address. Furthermore, in June of 1868, President Guzman joined in a pacifist agreement that had been put together by the Nicaraguan Liberal Máximo Jerez and several Costa Rican notables. The agreement stipulated that the parties to it would peacefully seek the "natural" union of Central America, as well as foment "liberal" advances in education, transportation, and industry. Harmony and even "fusion" between camps was also a goal. To these ends, the parties to the agreement were to create "secret societies" in the major cities of Costa Rica and Nicaragua.

More immediately, Guzmán issued an amnesty that brought the Liberal caudillo, Jerez, back from exile; and he gave this caudillo the status of a cabinet minister without portfolio. Guzmán also pardoned the Conservative notables imprisoned by his predecessor.⁵¹

The President's conciliatory benevolence was interpreted by his mentor and predecessor as personal betrayal. How could

his successor forgive the enemies that he, Martínez -- himself benevolent -- had decided to punish?

Martínez was soon alienated from President Guzmán, and almost simultaneously, Jerez grew unhappy with Guzmán and sought an alliance with Martínez. Together they rebelled against the President, and in June of 1869 they were in command of Leon's garrison. Only a few years earlier, as outgoing president, Martínez had chosen Guzmán as his successor. Now, in an address to his comrades in arms, Martínez had this to say:

From my place of retirement, where I have confined myself to avoid the abuses of the Guzman administration, I have come to share with you the fatigue and suffering of the military campaign ... You have me by your side. I have nothing to recommend to you. You understand me and I understand you [emphasis added].⁵²

Martínez, then, offered no other reason than a sense of betrayal for engaging in revolution -- a revolution, it is worth pointing out, that took no account of the Central American balance of power as it existed at the moment, which in essence was the legacy of the Conservative Carrera of Guatemala. In short, Martínez and Jerez could not count on support from any of the neighboring governments.⁵³

But if Martínez sought retribution, what motivated Jerez? Why did he break his alliance with President Guzmán in the first place? After all, the President himself formally espoused the cause of Central American unification; and he had given Jerez informal representation in the cabinet.

e. From Manichean Identity-Formation to Partisan Fusion

The blurring of collective identities -- here defined as "Liberal and "Conservative" -- actually had reached a point where major actors perceived themselves as part of a common mainstream. Indeed, the Liberal caudillo Jerez advocated the "fusion" of the two parties; and wrote President Guzmán complaining that the latter, though sympathetic to the "Liberal cause", had not taken efficacious measures to attain that "fusion".

The Liberal caudillo issued a manifesto to the Nicaraguans in which he declared the creation of a provisional government on the grounds that partisan divisions were no longer justifiable. Specifically, Jerez noted that all Nicaraguans now called themselves "liberals", and that boundaries that kept them apart were merely the result of a "pettiness" that had to come to an end. In short, revolution was afoot not because the antagonists were in conflict but because they were in harmony.⁵⁴

The need to fuse the two parties was proved to Guzman. And let us not deny it, that idea was a beautiful hope. However, Guzman and his secretaries used this idea to practice their treacherous policy ... [he] forged instruments of vengeance [and] became the separatist of the Nicaraguan family, provoking the present struggle ... every initiative that was made [by us], was maliciously misinterpreted and gave rise to suspicion. Every Nicaraguan that wanted to be close to him he rejected [emphasis added].⁵⁵

Revolution, in brief, was launched by men who did not take

issue with the President's policies, but instead sought proximity to his office. They fought for "fusion". Also interestingly, the revolution pit the President -- a Conservative -- against the church hierarchy in León.⁵⁶ In Central American history, the Church had often been at odds with Liberals and accused them of being enemies of "religion". Now, it levelled the charge at a Conservative.⁵⁷

This charge was credible at all because as the notables of the two political parties in government created a mainstream, they further blurred their collective identities, thus evoking suspicion in the quarters where they once would have found support. The Guzman administration referred to itself as "liberal" in spirit. And in the Conservative bastion of Granada and its neighbor Rivas, there was concern that the president's son -- a self-declared "radical" who was also his father's close adviser -- was plotting against his own father's administration.

Indeed, to assuage mistrust, a Conservative notable advised the President's son to follow a clear policy by drawing a visible line between the government's friends and foes. Foes, said the sagacious notable, were the disgruntled notables in Leon, while everyone else in the country was a friend.⁵⁸

Following the advice given to his son, the president responded forcefully to the revolution. But then he used his victory as a platform for a spectacle of forgiveness. At the

city gates of Leon, where the revolutionaries had taken refuge, President Guzman issued a broad and unconditional amnesty for all involved in the movement.

[The senior presidente] wishing to show his benevolence to the pueblos, and particularly to those Nicaraguans who took up arms against the Constitutional authority either because they were forced by their oppressors or were not aware of the [oppressors'] ignoble goals;

and with the purpose of putting an end to this revolution with the least possible loss of life and property, and hoping to avoid ruin and misfortune for the beautiful city of Leon and its prosperous department, whose fate is a matter of great and well-deserved concern to the Government,

Decrees ... that there shall be a general forgetfulness of all political and belligerent deeds carried out by those involved in the revolution, who will be covered by the most complete government guarantees, and will be able to enter and exit the Republic freely [emphasis added].⁵⁹

Beyond the spectacle of presidential benevolence, there was an attempt on the part of the victors to create a conciliatory historiography. In the regime's historical account of the failed revolution and its outcome, the identity of the executive was tied -- as the king's once had been -- to the virtues of benevolence and patience.

The government's conduct never clashed with its program of conciliation; the government never dismayed when faced by reversals, nor did it diminish its efforts in victory, and always saw the rebels as Nicaraguans gone astray ... The revolutionaries, however, violated a series of armistices, and neither accepted nor openly

rebuffed peace proposals. Tired of so much subterfuge, the General in Chief finally decided to resume military operations ... The Government had the upper hand but entered into peace negotiations with the good offices of the American Minister (ambassador).

The government, however, was not the only one to be given credit by this decidedly partial account written by the Minister of War.

It is my duty to inform the national representatives that this war was waged in a civilized fashion, to the extent that this is possible given that wars are in themselves scandalous and indicate that those countries that wage them are scarcely civilized. However, on this occasion it was noteworthy that the ferocious instincts of previous contentions were lacking. The vanquished was no longer an enemy but a brother.⁶⁰

f. Institutional Design: A Deliberate Vacuum.

The practice of dramatic presidential restraint and benevolence was rendered viable by the absence of a vice-president. As previously mentioned, this institutional vacuum assured the incumbent that no rival was at his side, trying to "usurp" the preeminent position in the country. Secure in this knowledge, the President was less tempted to "defend" his image from rhetorical attacks. And if the President abstained from such self-defense, then he avoided giving offense. A historical vicious cycle of affront and retribution was thus interrupted at the highest level of government.

This process of beneficial rupture was furthered by the next president, another Conservative who was chosen by the

incumbent and approved by the notables of the Conservative Party on the basis of his unassuming character (and perhaps also on the basis of his health, which was strong enough to see him through his tenure but frail enough to make him a sedate executive).

Their intuition paid off. Consider the candidate's address to Congress upon being notified of his election, which he clearly had not anticipated.

My conscience, my honor and my love for my country demand that I renounce the Presidency. And you -- your honor, your conscience, and the mission with which you been charged -- compel you to accept my renunciation for the nation's welfare, so that the people may choose a knowledgeable person ... This is not false modesty ... I do not know the science of government.⁶¹

But competence was not really necessary in a president that by now served more as a symbol than a functionary. Congress refused to release the president-elect from his duty. As the Congressional resolution stated, the renunciation might lead Nicaraguans to

a new partisan fight which, by reviving passions, might usher into anarchy ... If the sacrifice demanded of Senor Quadra [the president-elect] is great, so is his celebrated patriotism and his love for the preservation of public order.⁶²

By 1871 it was clear that the president, free from vice-presidential competition, could and did serve as a symbol of moderation, and that the man who held the position at that

moment was right for the task. The public treasury was depleted, and there was an urgent need to raise revenues. The severe shortage of revenue constrained recruitment for the police and the militias; and municipal governments, so important in the political history of the region, were losing their efficacy because of an almost total lack of funds. Against this domestic background, Nicaragua had to decide on how to cope with the conflict that broke out between El Salvador and Honduras. Nicaragua had friendship treaties with each, but even so, in the past, entanglement would have been a probability if not a certainty.

Now, it was avoided for two reasons. First, the President insisted on the need to maintain the strictest neutrality while taking precautionary measures internally by fortifying various key garrisons. Secondly, and more importantly, the President insisted that Congress must not delegate to the executive the task of drafting the necessary legislature, as Congress was planning to do. Thus, in a strange reversal of historical patterns, the executive and Congress struggled not for the prerogative to legislate, but for the opportunity to delegate legislative authority. Indeed, the executive went so far as to request that Congress both assume and execute that authority. In short, he asked Congress to rule.⁶³

The more harmonious the relations between the two branches of government, the less inclined either branch or party was to become entangled in Central American conflicts.

Indeed, soon the hallmark of Nicaragua's isthmian policy was one of neutrality and flexibility. As rulers fell in neighboring countries and new ones rose, Nicaragua quickly turned her back on the deposed and just as swiftly recognized the legitimacy of the winners.⁶⁴

If before one could only speak of Nicaraguan governments, now a Nicaraguan regime began to emerge -- one whose presidents called themselves Conservative but could also be perceived as Liberals. Indeed, Granada was now the bastion of a hybrid Conservatism -- to the point that Guatemalan Liberals reached out to one of the city's notables:

The triumph of liberal principles in Central America has returned to us the precious freedom of expressing our thoughts through the press ... we intend to found a newspaper by the name of The Central American. The purpose of this new publication will be to uproot the localist spirit, and to kill the rivalries of pueblos that are brothers ... This is our duty as sons of Central America.⁶⁵

The sense of a dawning "liberal era" was also due to the peaceful transfer of power from one elected president to the next. And indeed, for many years to come, the presidency would thus be transferred to the electoral victor. But the victor was always the man chosen and supported by the incumbent. More a symbol than a functionary, the outgoing president, due to his superior public conduct, became the one with the moral authority to anoint.⁶⁶ And invariably, he anointed a man very much like himself: not so much a disciplinarian as a

disciplined man; not so much a moderate in ideology but a moderate in temperament. In brief, a man likely to consider himself a (small-case) "liberal".

The self-identification of Conservative administrations as "liberals" was attended by an increasingly firm policy of freedom of the press (having learned the lesson from the Martínez administration, whose restriction of the press proved counterproductive). Application of this lesson, however, left the "conciliators" exposed to the dangers of "demagoguery", which they sought to preempt, often through demonstrations of tolerance and conciliatory gestures.

Indeed, this was the bind that trapped the President in his role of moderator (just as the discourse of good and evil and the attendant practice of dramaturgical obedience had rendered the king both legitimate and weak). Inclined to expel the Jesuits from the country, for example, the President hesitated out of fear of the "demagogues" that might rise to the priests' defense.⁶⁷ And "demagogues", for their part, managed to issue a warning to the government without making any explicit threats or affronting its dignity.⁶⁸

Ultimately, the President and the notables closest to him decided against the expulsion of the Jesuits. But this was not the only outcome. For even as the correlation of forces seemed to favor "demagogues" vis a vis a president that was as afraid of press-restrictions as he was of demagoguery, notables began to make the kinds of distinctions that marked

a return to identity formation in the manichean tradition. Put another way, even as the nascent presidential system encouraged the blurring of collective identities, discursive refinements relied on the ideology of virtue and vice.

Demagoguery is ordinarily defined as an exaggeration and as an abuse of democracy. I find this definition neither clear nor just, for it allows for the confusion of the democrat and the demagogue.... [The demagogue] sees his most detestable enemy in the democrat, who combats him in the name of his own principles. [The demagogue] accuses the [democrat] of being a moderate, an adulator, and seeks to reduce him to impotence when he is in power. [To the demagogue] respect for legal form is puerile.

The constant and permanent state of the human species is seriousness, calm and repose, both in ideas and in the heart. These are the necessary conditions for a march along the path traced by civilization. Violent expression of passions, agitation, tumult and ire -- rapid like a torrent, destructive like lightening -- are accidental in life, yet they cause the decadence and destruction of families and peoples.⁶⁹

g. Trust the Good President, Abhor his Evil Men

The blurring of partisan identities, then, was neither a linear nor an irreversible process. Rather, it was an ongoing process that both evoked opposition and allowed for pragmatic resolutions. These resolutions, however, were not always possible or lasting. Because presidential statecraft failed to accommodate the autonomous impulses of lesser municipalities, for example, these often became the stage for violent, albeit contained, conflict during local elections.⁷⁰ And though the conflicts did not turn into conflagrations, they left their

mark on the minds of those involved, often deligitimizing the electoral process.

"We have additional proof," wrote a Masaya newspaper when that Department was "prevented" from electing a local notable to the Congress, "that elections in this so-called republic are nothing but a comedy, save those occasions when the goal is to terrorize the public, and elections turn into a tragedy".

As the newspaper put it, Masaya had merely wanted one of her "sons" as deputy. This, in fact, was the case with all the other localities and departments. "The departments are correct in wishing this for their sons", the newspaper went on, "and they take it as an affront and an injustice that they are obligated to elect the sons of mothers [cities] other than their own".

The newspaper editors, however, sought to assure the president's allies that their localist aspirations in no way threatened the national government. Indeed, they too were of the opinion that certain elements of the Conservative Party were undesirables. "It should not be supposed that we want to include the Martinistas. No, a thousand times no. We already know that [Martinistas] have no place either here or there and must not be allowed participation in public affairs".⁷¹

If anything, what the municipality of Masaya wanted was integration. Almost echoing the reasoning behind the last revolution, which had been fought in the name of "fusion", the

notables of Masaya now stated: "We want [for deputies] men from the same circle that prevails here and who are members of the [Conservative] circle that prevails in the Republic".⁷²

In short, they wanted their local elite to be recognized as deserving of participating in the deliberations of the national elite. But this aspiration, they claimed, had been denied to them when the winner in their Congressional elections -- a Granada notable -- had been "elected" by a few against the will of the majority, who had been intimidated by a group of guards. Their fear, they said, was well founded, since the opposition to the government's candidate had also been assaulted in a mayoral election. So what did it matter, they concluded, if the official Gazette published the government's guarantee of free election? Violence has occurred under previous administrations that guaranteed the same thing.⁷³

Beyond the wish "to belong" -- as locals -- to the President's circle, something else can be gleaned from the editors' complaint: their trust in the President himself.

We do not believe that [President] Cuadra gave orders [to respond violently in Masaya] either in public or secretly, and we honor him by believing that he is saddened by the scandalous events of Subtiaba [in Masaya], which sully his Administration. But the more honest the president, and the more desirous of granting constitutional guarantees, the less he is obeyed by some of his subordinates and circles of support ...⁷⁴

In short, the president was perceived in the manner of a

king: as wise and benevolent, but surrounded by wicked advisers. Yet these advisers treated localities differently, depending on their disruptive capability. For example, in 1872, a conspiracy against the government was prepared in León. But this time, the government engaged in a partial devolution of power. The President appointed one of the key conspirators to the post of the city's Chief of Arms; and allowed him to organize the local officialdom and troops. The former conspirator now controlled León, but he was also part of the national government.

The power-sharing arrangement worked as planned. The new Chief of Arms upheld the President's authority before the Liberal caudillo Jerez and the Conservative caudillo Martínez, both of whom had assumed that the Chief of Arms, their former ally, would serve in their cause against the President.

Though the pact functioned, and the President's hold on the executive office was sustained, the President nevertheless took an additional step. Having reasserted his authority, he literally put on a dramatic display of power devolution. He signed a *carte blanche* and gave it to the caudillo Martínez, authorizing him to present Congress with the executive's resignation from office. Baffled, Martínez left in voluntary exile to El Salvador. As for the other caudillo, Jerez, he temporarily left politics to found a school which the government subsidized.⁷⁵

Against this background of domestic stability (however

tenuous), Nicaragua entered into treaties of friendship with Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras; and on the basis of these treaties maintained a neutral stance when in 1875 those three countries became embroiled once again in war. As Nicaragua rejected all requests for assistance from the contenders, its government claimed for itself the identity and role of "loyal" but "peaceful" ally.⁷⁶

h. Adverse Reaction to Moderation

As the presidential election approached, the various factions of each party and locality set out to define more clearly their respective identities. And it was in this process of clarification that the Nicaraguans, having failed to make deep revisions in their discourse, turned to the traditional manichean conceptual framework. On the side of the Conservatives, for example, notable families sought to isolate the "liberals" in their midst, accusing them of "blasphemy" and "alerting" the "Catholic" to repudiate the "detestable candidacy" of the suspect faction.⁷⁷

The Liberals, for their part, felt compelled to frighten their own constituents into repudiating the Conservative candidate Pedro Joaquín Chamorro. In a broadside entitled "Liberty in a Struggle with Intrigue", the Liberals warned that Chamorro's candidacy "augured" the return of a "monstrosity" -- the "secret archive" -- alluding to the prerogative of executive secrecy which in

1854 the candidate's older brother, Fruto Chamorro, had defended to the point of civil war. "The candidate [P.J. Chamorro]", the Liberals warned, "will unquestionably follow his brother's policy step by step, and his election will therefore be the emblem of repetition -- repetition of the scenes of 1854".⁷⁸

The Liberals also complained that the patria was in the hands of "four wicked men from Granada," and asserted that the outgoing Cuadra administration had "scandalized the world" by "not keeping his promises" and "mocking the law" (referring to the violence of 1872 during the Congressional elections in Masaya, Managua and Granada).⁷⁹

But the Liberals' attack was also directed inwardly, to those among them who might be in favor of the Chamorro candidacy. Appealing to localist sentiment, they called on the citizens of Leon to

Listen to the voice of reason. Do not be dazed by those hungry beggars who, after being fed the poisoned bread of the Granadines, today infest your society ...

And they implicitly condemned the tendency towards a de facto merger with "the other" while claiming allegiance to the Liberal camp.

Be LIBERALS, but in honor and patriotism. Do not be Conservatives. Realize that the infernal farce [put on by the Conservatives] only works for the ruin of

the country -- they who call us impious bandits and other dishonorable qualities which only they deserve ... they who throw in prison [their opponents] and authorize [their few supporters] to commit all sorts of crimes with impunity.⁸⁰

In the traditionally Liberal town of Chichigalpa, where Chamorro had found followers, the Liberals again appealed to localist loyalty.

[Nicaragua], save a few honorable exceptions, has always been led by men without conscience, abnegation, or patriotism. Now, when the light of civilization finally shines in our horizon and the progress of other pueblos stimulate us to follow their example, it is necessary that we emerge from this sepulchral stillness in which we are kept by the exclusivist and retrograde circle of Granada, which, in its insane furor to absorb everything for itself, forgets the imperative duty of attending to the needs of our pueblos ...

Note that the attack turned on a contradiction: the sense of optimism that had begun to develop in Nicaragua under the Conservative regime and the intolerable realization that a ruling "circle" was forming in the country. The idea that certain outsiders might support the circle's candidate merely suggested the suspect character of those outsiders -- Liberals who were supposed to support a Liberal candidate, not the ruling Conservative regime.

We have recently seen an insignificant little paper which under the signature "Some Laborers of Chichigalpa" tried to deceive the naive making them believe that the Chamorro candidacy is a symbol of peace. What sarcasm! This ludicrous flattery comes from the not very pure lips ... of a man who,

having been recently convicted as a contrabandist, went to the authorities to obtain a pardon [in exchange for support of Granada's candidate] ...

We who are honest and have nothing to fear cannot allow this newly-minted Conservative to appropriate our name in order to profane our high destiny ... For us the symbol of peace can never be a Conservative from Oriente [Granada and the Eastern Departments]. Our hopes and progress are in Occidente [León and the Western Departments]. Signed: The True Laborers of Chichigalpa [emphasis added].⁸¹

Nevertheless, in 1875, the Conservative Pedro Joaquín Chamorro was elected president. Imitating his predecessors, he touted the theme of conciliation. Moreover, as each of the previous presidents of the regime, he went a step further than his immediate predecessor in his effort to integrate the Liberals into the Conservative regime. Thus, his inaugural address turned on what was by then a Liberal theme: the unification of Central America.

As a Nicaraguan, and as a Central American by sentiment and conviction, I will support -- with all the power the nation has placed in my hands -- all ideas that introduce improvements in any pueblo of the republic, and unite the Central American family, paying no attention to the origin of those ideas.⁸²

By publicly espousing this Liberal cause, and by actively pursuing the project diplomatically with other countries, the President further divided the Liberal elite. Liberal notables who were not part of the government's power-sharing arrangement and conspired to overthrow it, could be said to

have "deceived" both Chamorro and their fellow Liberals. Indeed, to take up arms against the government was to be disloyal to the unification cause.⁸³

In 1878, the incumbent chose a business associate as the next Conservative candidate. The nominee was favored even by the most traditional Conservatives.⁸⁴ The nominee, however, rejected the honor.

I do not want, and must not accept the high post with which I am honored, and so I decline the candidacy for president of the republic. The high character and principles of the current ruler guarantee his strictest impartiality in the next electoral struggle. Nonetheless, I am linked to him as friend and associate. Respect for his good name and my own are reason enough to keep me firm in my determination [not to accept the candidacy].⁸⁵

This was no mere display of integrity. So adamant was the candidate in his rejection, that the Conservative Party began to look for a replacement. One of the most influential notables, however, insisted that the candidate accept his fate. This is the reasoning he offered.

If I were a member of the congress that must vote on the election, even though I am friend of [the nominee] I would take away every penny of his fortune through fines before allowing his will to prevail over that of the nation. It would be a scandal and a lethal precedent ... What man of honor would accept the post that [the candidate] renounced for no good reason?

The Conservative candidate was thus coerced into accepting the nomination by a notable who in the next election

would renounce the honor himself. His reasons would be clear ones. "I lack the necessary capital," he would contend, referring to the expenses associated with tenure. "I cannot be asked to drown out the voice of my conscience and to expose my honor".⁸⁶

In his 1879 inaugural address, the reluctant president, Joaquín Zavala, guaranteed freedom of the press.

I shall deplore the excessive use of that powerful lever of civilization (the press). The press, among us, has gone against its proper purpose, and has debased rather than ennobled the name of the Republic. But I will take care not to issue any measure that in any way might restrict that precious guarantee.⁸⁷

If the President guaranteed freedom of the press and stood in silence when attacked,⁸⁸ other notables both indulged in the freedom and tolerated no affront. Indeed, the more Conservatives and Liberals cooperated in government, and the more their "views" converged, the more their exchanges became acrimonious in the extreme if they happened to disagree on a particular point. In Granada, editors even turned to physical violence once their insults passed a point of no return.⁸⁹

Against these contradictory trends, by the early 1880's, the Conservative Party -- from its point of dominance -- had begun to write a kind of official history of the two political parties. This history was both a story of merging collective identities and a reaffirmation of the discourse of good and evil. Put another way, its content was conciliatory, its form

was manichean. Indeed, the story line departs from a paradisaical setting, much like the official histories that had been previously written at moments of "victory" by Central Americans of either camp.

In the beginning of our political life all the spirits of rectitude, all enlightened men of good will who sincerely sympathized with the liberal idea -- which is to say, the kind of thinking that tended to transform the old Spanish colonies into a veritable eden in which every citizen would be guaranteed his most cherished rights and would be supported in his legitimate aspirations -- followed enthusiastically the self-declared apostles of that liberal idea.

And as in all stories of paradise lost, a fall from grace soon took place.

But the prestige and triumph which these apostles attained with their seductive propaganda filled them with pride; soon they showed their disorderly appetites when they discarded their mask. Their mask had been patriotism and love of the people. All the sane elements of society that had supported them left to form the Conservative Party, which grew from day to day as more honest people grew disillusioned. In this way, the Conservative Party was formed by men of diverse ideas who nonetheless were linked by a shared sentiment -- love of order, which is the indispensable fountain of liberty and progress.

The fall from grace, in short, had led to the division of society between good and evil, with the good taking refuge in the Conservative camp but carrying with them an array of ideas. And as in a Christian tale, redemption would one day come.

On several peaceful occasions, during which order has seemed consolidated, there emerged the outline of the two political parties. Eventually, these two parties shall govern the country alternatively, and jointly bring it prosperity and greatness.

In the meantime, the struggle between good and evil went on, as the parties, entwined in reality, sought to define themselves as distinct entities.

The germs of these two parties are mixed, mostly in the Conservative Party. Each time they have tried to define themselves, confusion has returned because of the issue of public order, which has been imperiled by defections from the Conservative Party -- defections that are the result of ideas formed in internal circles of isolated pretensions but which give new breath to the spirit of anarchy. Hence a singular phenomenon: In Nicaragua, the Conservative Party is a party of heterogenous ideas because it has received the defectors of the Liberal ranks who feel that their patriotic aspirations have been mocked; and the Liberal party, which has been dead more than once but never buried, is kept on its feet by the foam sprayed its way by the Conservative Party. This phenomenon confirms our thesis: Up to now there has not been, nor will there be for some time to come, true political parties that fight for the victory of their principles.⁹⁰

For as long as those "true" political parties remained undeveloped, our historian concluded, the two camps would be characterized as follows: the anarchist tendency would find expression in the Liberal camp, while men of order and goodwill would find a home in the Conservative party. This view could be expressed as a numerical argument about the distribution of good and evil between the two parties:

Both parties are of the same nature; and in both parties the same men, passions, weaknesses and identical ambitions come into play. The difference has always consisted in the fact that the party which today calls itself Conservative invariably gathers a greater number of patriots who take upon themselves to guard the interests of the majority while in the other camp these patriotic elements are the exception, and are there either because they have been deceived by their own credulity or led astray by their own enthusiasm.⁹¹

Or, this view of the two political parties it could take the form of a rhetorical exhortation to remember the past, a nightmare in which the Liberals either opposed order and authority, or they institutionalized terror, thus alienating the honorable men their Party had first attracted.⁹²

But this official history -- whose hybrid character corresponded to the emerging mainstream of Conservatives and Liberals entwined in power-sharing -- was far from dominant. Indeed, precisely because the two parties were now internally fragmented into liberal and "true" Conservatives, on the one hand, and conservatives and "true" Liberals on the other, the two parties, seeking to define themselves more clearly, were soon embarked on historiographic projects of their own. Particularly active in this project were the "genuine" and "true" factions on each side, which became entangled in ardent polemics having to do with the honor of dead ancestors and the veracity of ancestral accounts.

Thus, as the emergent regime took shape and endured, and as peace became more commonplace, the notables argued bitterly over the "true" history that had ushered into stability. The

President of the Republic stood aloof and virtuous, but the notables' newspapers levelled charges at one another, from "servility" and "fanaticism" to "calumny".

Impassioned and volatile, their disputes revisited events long past: the post-independence wars, the breakup of the Central American Federation, as well as the political assassinations, unholy alliances, and disloyal maneuvers associated with their shared history.⁹³

The "true" Liberals, for example, accused the Conservatives of trying to

darken the venerable memory of the father of the patria General Don Francisco Morazán with filthy broadsides not worthy of reading ... The best reply to broadsides and diatribes is contempt. [The Conservatives] can explain their conduct if they so wish; they who have blood on their foreheads, the blood of the patricide committed in the plaza de San Jose [site of Morazan's execution]. It is natural that they would want to wash [the blood] off, even if to do so they must resort to foul slime. In this as in everything else they obey tradition. The Hebrews, after the torment of the Calvary, accused Christ of impurity, blasphemy, ambition, conspiracy and witchcraft. The Romans, after enjoying the anguish of the first Christians, tried to conceal their crime by accusing [their victims] of conspiracy, assassination, blasphemy, theft, and child-eating. The friars of the Holy Inquisition, after killing thousands of innocents with infernal tortures, accused them of riding brooms and goats to go talk to the devil, to whom they paid homage by kissing his tail.⁹⁴

But these "true" Liberals were also in alliance with the liberal faction of the Conservative Party; in other words, they were "merging" in practice with the opponent they

vilified historically. The tendency to merge was so marked that, even as polemical exchanges between the factions' newspapers reached a high pitch, there was also a shared sense of national "regeneration".

The newspaper of the intellectual society El Ateneo, for example, asserted that even the most pessimistic now harbored hope. El Ateneo itself had been founded to promote the sciences and literature, because its founders envisioned a future in which history would look for

the heroes of humanity not in the confusion of battlegrounds, but among the august cabinets of sages. Its narrative will recount not military campaigns but the marvels of discovery, not bloody revolutions but the peaceful triumphs of intelligence.⁹⁵

Confidently, El Ateneo declared,

The world marches inexorably towards religious, scientific and political unity. Progress means nothing if not the synthesis of all the powers of matter and spirit in the common expression of universal law, encompassing in its generality all the particulars and all the isolated phenomena of Nature and History.⁹⁶

But significantly, the society of El Ateneo "absolutely" forbade all political discussions in its meetings and in its newspaper's articles. The only exception to this prohibition were discussions "on the various forms of government, public law, or the ways that might help lead Central America toward national reconstruction".⁹⁷ Analogous to presidential self-

restraint, the society's self-censure left ample margin for theoretical investigations into the nature of government and its relation to the future of Central American institutions.

Captured neither by the debates fixated on the past nor by those fixated on the future, were the contradictions of the times. In 1881, for example, the Indians of Matagalpa rose in rebellion against the administration of President Zavala. Part of the Indians' wrath came from the fact that they were being forced to work without remuneration in the construction of the telegraphic system between Matagalpa and Managua. But they were also incited to rebellion by the Jesuits, who convinced them that they were constructing a magical monument that would bring them ruin.

The conflict between the Jesuits and the Government, in turn, came from the latter's perception of the President as a nominal Conservative whose sympathies were liberal. The perception was accurate: the President was engaged in an ambitious project of popular education while simultaneously repudiating Catholic dogma. Indeed, it was under his administration, that the Jesuits were finally expelled from the country -- a measure which his predecessors had considered and then rejected for fear of a backlash from the forces of "demagoguery".⁹⁸

The perception of a Conservative president as a Liberal at heart reached new heights in 1882 with the candidacy of Adan Cardenas, whom the "true" Liberals endorsed warmly. Not

too long ago, this faction of the Liberal Party had denounced the historical duplicity of the Conservatives. But now, the "true" Liberals declared that the Conservative Party had "finally opened their eyes to the light, and convinced of their impotence to oppose the torrent of our progress begin to capitulate by accepting Adan Cardenas as future president, a capitulation which gives them honor".⁹⁹

The liberalism of the Conservative candidate was such that he was repudiated by the "true" Conservatives. The Conservative Society of the city of Leon, for example, opposed and protested the Cardenas candidacy. The "true" Liberals of Leon, for their part, went so far as to predict the "death" of the Conservative Party due to its severe internal divisions. Indeed, the "true" Liberals felt as if they had acquired control over the fate of their foes from within. They argued that men, not parties, decided policy in Nicaragua.¹⁰⁰ And undoubtedly, Cardenas, though a nominal Conservative, was a Liberal "worthy of figuring among the radicals of any country". Even certain members of his own Conservative party, who saw him as "an indefatigable worker of the kingdom of light", rejected him.

The "true" Liberals now went so far as to advocate once again a formal merger between the two parties:

all of us who profess liberal principles, regardless of our label [Conservative or Liberal] let us form a single party and adopt a program that will unite us ... Let the [Conservative factions] of laggardly

ideas go ahead and form the nucleus of the true conservative party.¹⁰¹

The sense of triumph among Liberals was such after the election of the Conservative Cárdenas, that they declared:

The edifice of the past has crumbled for ever in Nicaragua and the sons of darkness, pallid and anguished, now flee, covering their ears, trying to drown out the voice of their conscience which shouts indignantly, Cain! What have you done with your brother's blood?!¹⁰²

i. Moderating the Press, Engaging the President

In 1884, a notable who had been born to Nicaraguan parents in Costa Rica, founded the Diario de Nicaragua, the country's first daily. The founder asserted that Nicaragua had come to "enjoy unlimited freedom of the press". But he also commented that the writers were usually "passionate" and journalism was subject to the vicissitudes of politics. A daily, he believed, could serve as a fixed and stable point: its columns would not be "twisted" by "passions"; rather, the daily would be guided by "science, patriotism and rectitude". Indeed, it would represent "rational interests", and by treating a wide range of issues and reforms daily, it would become a kind of "perennial plebiscite". In foreign countries, it would elevate Nicaragua's "reputation" and entice foreigners to emigrate to Nicaragua -- immigration being the country's "future", as in Argentina. Finally, the daily would offer a middle ground between the official press and the press

of the opposition, both of which were perceived as "partial" and "combatants".¹⁰³

The daily's experiment in impartiality, however, soon came up against the reversal process going on at the presidential level. Not too long ago, the principal function of the president had been that of a conciliator. But the incumbent Cardenas was now rejected by his own party and identified with the opposite camp. In other words, the "merging" of the Liberal and Conservative identities had gone past the mid-point. And in a related development, the president, once a symbol of self-restraint, now took active participation in the clash of politics. For example, he expelled the daily's founder from the country after he censured the government. The official Gazette claimed that his expulsion was "constitutional" because he was a "foreigner", and that he was "suspected" by the government.

The exiled editor wrote the President, reminding him that "honorable men do not fear the press", and singling out his administration as unworthy of its predecessors because rather than gather round him "ethical and wise advisors," he had by his side a "black circle" of "inert yes-men". Thus ensconced, the President had "violated" the most "precious" of Nicaraguan freedoms -- "freedom of the press".¹⁰⁴

In this accusation we see encapsulated both the progress made under the Conservative-Liberal regime and the beginning of the reversal of that process. On the one hand, the idea was

advanced that freedom of the press had become a Nicaraguan freedom. On the other hand, the President, surrounded by evil men, had violated this freedom. The violation was in itself serious, but if viewed in historical perspective, it was fatal. For the greatest accomplishment of the previous administrations had been precisely the establishment of such freedom at the expense of presidential pride.

The President's address to Congress in 1885 already reflects the reversal taking place in the executive's role. On the defensive, the President is now the benevolent conciliator who has been paid with the coin of ingratitude.

My first political measure was a clemency deed: I opened the doors of the Republic to the caudillos of the party which, *manu militari*, fought the expulsion of the Jesuits, and by disloyal means, had opposed my election. Now, you and the entire country have witnessed how that party has repaid the conciliatory efforts of my government, and you must feel discouraged, as any honest heart would, to see such noble hopes defrauded ...

Indeed, having gone on the defensive he was forced to go on the offensive:

Insensitive to patriotic love and seemingly unaware of the fatal consequences their conduct would have on the good name and prosperity of the Republic, that party tried to attract disorderly elements and coalesced with a small circle of discontents who call themselves Liberals, in spite of their incompatible principles. Thus constituted in a heterogeneous group, the opposition, without name or prestige that would allow it to present itself before the nation as a party that fights loyally for the triumph of a well-defined program, and with

no other apparent tendency than a proclivity to substitute by means of violence the political order consecrated by law and the popular will, it scandalized the country by continuing its work of disturbance and commotion through calumny and slander ...

Presidential aloofness, so marked in the previous administrations, began to yield to the passionate stance of the virtuous identity.

Severe blows have been dealt to me -- to my point of delicacy [honor] as a man, and to my dignity as president. But being a slave to duty, I have restrained all spontaneous impulse to repress, so natural in anyone who is aware of the injustice and perversity of the attacks, and has plenty of power to stop them. My tolerance of such abuse and my contempt for such libel have been boundless, while the anger of the enemies of order targeted me as its sole victim. They interpreted my moderation as weakness, and by engaging in one conspiracy after another they went so far as to attempt to seize the military garrison of Granada. My tolerance reached its limits ...

The government "discovered" subversive plans, frustrated them, and sent the accomplices in this "criminal project" to trial. But "incendiary" publications against the government continued, and some "enemies of order" even went outside the country to look for allies.¹⁰⁵

These problems notwithstanding, Nicaraguan notables were still less likely to go to war with one another. The regnant process was one which entwined a creeping peace with the merging of collective identities into a mainstream, which in turn led to the emergence on extremes on both sides. This

configuration of a mainstream and extremes is found in many political systems that are not riddled with violence. And in Nicaragua, for as long as the president upheld the rules of the regime -- both formal and informal -- violence could be controlled, even avoided.

As a result, Nicaraguans increasingly perceived politics as having gone through a process of moral "regeneration". Even notables at the extremes of their parties believed this regeneration to be evinced by the new role of the president as conciliator and by the peaceful character of presidential succession. At the same time, however, a sense of existential danger pervaded party politics. The "genuine" Conservatives and the "true" Liberals believed their parties to be in imminent danger of succumbing to the enemy within. And the emerging mainstream -- the enemy within -- sharing a fundamental discourse and worldview with the extremes, had no alternative conceptual framework to combat the notion that further convergence was in fact one more step toward existential catastrophe.

Thus, in 1886, "genuine" Conservatives celebrated the "regeneration" of the popular spirit -- a "transformation" that was "symbolized by the kind of candidates" fighting for the presidency.

[the candidates] are no longer caudillos who imposed themselves by the sword. They are no longer self-appointed bosses who have themselves elected through terror, which the people feel unable to combat. Today, the candidates are citizens of honorable backgrounds.

And yet, the same genuine Conservatives argued that the electoral outcome was not a matter of indifference. For them, the election of a particular candidate -- Chamorro -- was a matter of life and death for the Conservative Party. If Chamorro was not elected, they contended, "the party would dissolve", as "the Party's enemies well understood".¹⁰⁶

For the "genuines", the "progressive" elements within the Party were both dangerous and unworthy of the Conservative identity. The genuines argued that they had fought on the side of good in 1854, 1857, and 1869. And they asked, "Where was the third party? Where were the progressives?" The answer was one that had not been heard for almost three decades: the "progressives" had not fought with the genuines because they were impostors, hiding anti-religious sentiments when in fact they had "jumped for joy" when the Jesuits were expelled.¹⁰⁷

The Liberal Party, too, was in internal turmoil, its leading notables engaged in open polemical exchanges which both excavated hatreds from the distant past and revitalized the discourse of good and evil.¹⁰⁸

And like the Conservatives, the Liberals were also increasingly bitter in their partisan attacks. Claiming that under the Conservatives Nicaragua presented the "shameful spectacle" of being "stagnant" amidst nations in progress, and that "for a people, immobility is a death sentence," the Liberal Party of Leon called on all Liberals to prepare to "win or die" for the cause of political reform and economic

progress.¹⁰⁹

The Liberal Party of Managua went further in 1887, when its ancient leader retired. Two options emerged as alternative solutions to the succession problem: 1) elect a new party chief with ample faculties of leadership; 2) organize a junta of notables. Significantly, those who advocated the former, recommended José Santos Zelaya because of his military competence (in obvious preparation for a violent struggle). Finally, the Liberals of Managua struck a compromise: they created the Junta but named Zelaya as a kind of primus inter pares).¹¹⁰

Against this ominous background, a "progressive" Conservative, Evaristo Carazo, won the election of 1887. By then, the gulf between the "genuine" and the "progressive" factions of the Conservative Party was such that when the latter's candidate won, the former felt they had been "defeated" by a foe.¹¹¹

Conversely, supporters among Conservatives and Liberals touted the new president and his predecessor as "trustworthy" men, and celebrated the peaceful transfer of power from the one to the other. More importantly, they applauded the "impersonal" nature of the outgoing government.¹¹²

In his inaugural address, the incoming president gleaned a central lesson from the past. "Liberties," the president-elect asserted, "are meaningless amidst disorder". Though a "progressive" Conservative with many sympathizers in the

opposite camp, the President now returned to a theme that had been losing prominence with each administration of the regime: the executive's role of disciplinarian and guardian of order.¹¹³

Two years after his inauguration, the president died in office. He died alienated from a significant number of fellow Conservatives -- the "genuines" who, instead of mourning, wore red in celebration and danced jubilantly.

The Beginning of the End: Institutional Reversal

The regime was facing its first succession challenge. Recall that the office of the vice-president had been deliberately eliminated to encourage presidential self-restraint. Now, a successor had to be selected.

The regime's selection method to be applied in case of unforeseen circumstances, like the deliberate elimination of the vice-presidency, had been carefully designed to avoid power struggles among the many notables who both felt fully deserving of preeminence and could afford the expenses associated with tenure.

The procedure was as follows: the two chambers of congress elected five senators, and each name was inscribed in a sealed ballot. The five ballots were then placed in a box from which three of the five ballots were retrieved. These were marked 1, 2 and 3, and these were the three called upon to form the succession pool. A Conservative notable,

describing the procedure in 1882, observed that a North American might "laugh" at this "absurd extravagance", but that in Nicaragua it had "closed the door to civil war".¹⁴

The procedure did indeed work in 1889, thus infusing Conservatives and Liberals alike with a renewed sense of optimism. The selected notable was Roberto Sacasa. The Conservative newspaper El Diario Nicaraguense, for example, opined that "no one before [had] ascended to the presidency under more auspicious circumstances," because the "exaltation to power" of the new president had not entailed the "bitter fights" that "predispose people, blinded by the most violent of passions -- political fervor" -- to commit great absurdities. Nor was it "the result of a transaction that [tied] the president with inconvenient commitments which [deprived] him of the freedom necessary for administrative competence." Nor did it "originate in intrigues".

In this moment of great enthusiasm, the Diario went on to declare that the

origin of the Sacasa administration is most noble ... not beholden to any political personage, locality, circle or party. And has arrived in power after a long series of inconceivable aberrations precipitated the country into political and economic ruin, and almost led us to abandon hope that Nicaragua might recover its natural privileges and good name ... [the president's] first decision corresponded to the great hopes [placed in him]: he has chosen his collaborators from among the best people in the country, individuals who are known for their enlightenment, honorability and character ... El Diario Nicaraguense shall continue to abide by its program ... and will "censure" and "applaud"

the government as it sees fit ... [emphasis added].¹¹⁵

The stress placed by El Diario on the randomness of the new president's selection was quite telling, for it suggested that the administration had in its hands a tabula rasa. And the regime, which had begun to show serious internal strain, now was given, by accident, the gift all Central Americans had wished for so long: a new beginning. Finally, as if these circumstances were not felicitous enough, the new president was renowned for his rectitude. Thus, the successor administration was immediately labeled the "Providential Government", in an allusion to the divine intervention that had presumably brought it to power. Such was the enthusiasm expressed by the "various political circles, as well as the municipal corporations, the clergy, the merchants, the farmers, the colleges, the schools, the entire nation".¹¹⁶

Relying on Sacasa's reputation, many notables turned a blind eye when the President arrived in the capital city to assume power surrounded by fellow Leonese who declared "Long Live Leon" and "Long Live 1854".¹¹⁷ Indeed, El Diario gave the new administration the benefit of the doubt, and only mildly criticized its delay in making appointments to secondary positions in the cabinet because such a delay -- fifteen days -- generated "uncertainty, political intrigue, absurd claims, and attempts to revive the fatal spirit of localism." El Diario, moreover, defended the administration from the

increasingly frequent charge of "localism".¹¹⁸

Increasingly, however, Sacasa gave the impression that he drew his government functionaries mostly from Leon and thus gave the impression of breaking what was by now a tradition of the regime: the appointment to the cabinet of notables from various localities. The new president also affirmed his identity as a son of the city of León (the city of his allegiance); disarmed Conservative Granada; and proceeded to form small loyalist circles in the major cities, thus reducing the executive's dependence on the notables of either party. And though he integrated Liberals into his government, he kept them at distance, as distrustful of them as he was of his own Conservative Party. Nevertheless, the participation of Liberals in the government -- with León gaining prominence and military preponderance -- created anxiety in the Conservative ranks of Granada.

Soon, the Conservatives set out to foment Sacasa's suspicion towards the Liberals, to the point that the President entered into talks with the "progressive" faction of the Conservative Party. These, however, came to naught; and Sacasa continued to rely on his loyalist circles while fomenting Liberal hopes with his public espousal of the cause of Central American Union.¹¹⁹

As the administration distributed employment and business opportunities among those who offered their loyalty, and as the two parties grew mutually suspicious, manichean identity-

formation and historiographical battles gained renewed intensity. Consider the Liberal response to an attack from the Conservative El Diario in 1889.

When we published our manifesto ... in which, with integrity, we exposed to the world the errors of the Conservative Party, we knew beforehand that we would be the target of virulent attacks by ... polemicists who habitually use in combat calumny and diatribe as weapons ...

The Liberals claimed that El Diario had characterized the typical Liberal as "an assassin, as well as a thief, an alarmist, a scoundrel, and a blasphemer", while the Conservative was "honest, decent, immaculate, virile, dignified". Naturally, the Liberals found this distinction "laughable"; and went on to demonstrate that Nicaraguan history since independence had been tainted not by Liberals, as El Diario claimed, but by the Conservatives. Every assassination, every civil war, every invasion, every period of anarchy was attributed to the other camp, concluding thus: "We repeat it, the history [of the Conservatives] is full of perfidy and treachery, thievery, fire, torture, tears and blood".¹²⁰

Soon, however, the Liberals, too, would break with Sacasa, when he refused to submit to Congress the Central American Union Treaty which his own envoy had negotiated, lest the legislative body seize the opportunity to relieve the him of his duties and assign a different senator to complete the

term of the deceased president whom Sacasa had succeeded. Sacasa decided that the Treaty would be submitted to the regular session of Congress, after the elections of 1890 in which he intended to run and win. His candidacy was supported by state employees and the police. For their part, the Liberals and the Conservatives each presented two candidates, then opted to "fuse", as they had done once before, in common opposition to Sacasa.¹²¹

Significantly, the "fusion" took place at a time when the Liberals had already come to the conclusion, in a public manifesto, that they had "erred" in "lending" themselves as "instruments" of the "Conservative" governments.¹²²

The elections were marred by violence at the polls and by the opposition's abstention. Sacasa won the vote. Congress, however, still had to ratify the procedure and declare the victor. At that point, Leon was armed, and Sacasa's followers, through a series of deals and corrupt maneuvers, managed to gain control of various Congressional committees. Only one problem remained: the opposition was the majority in the Senate and had enough members in the House to make the outcome unpredictable. Faced with this last uncertainty, Sacasa opted to bring a Leonese mob to Managua, which invaded the Congress and as the procedures were underway, "spontaneously" demanded the election of Sacasa. The drama of "inexorable collective ire" and "dramaturgical obedience" had returned, soon to be followed by suppression of the press and the expulsion of

opponents accused of "conspiracy".¹²³

In 1891, President Sacasa justified his deeds by claiming that they had been shaped by the belief that "our calamitous political divisions ought to be relegated to oblivion". Referring to the expulsion decree, he added,

I was able to issue this grave and transcendental order only after doing violence to the sentiments in my heart, always inclined toward benevolence, and going against the tendency of my tolerant and self-abnegating character.¹²⁴

His enemies were by now numerous in both parties. The Liberals felt insulted.¹²⁵ And by 1892, the Conservatives saw in the president a mortal foe, and Nicaraguan politics as being in a state of utter deterioration. Nicaragua, they said, had become known as "the Switzerland of Central America", but no more. Dissenters, added the Conservatives, were expelled from the country, leaving only "the servile chorus" of the "salaried press".

For [President Sacasa], [any pro-Sacasa person] who speaks merely two words is a great orator, and if he writes one line, a great writer ... If [president Sacasa] thought that God is not pro-Sacasa, then God he would renounce.

Conservative pamphleteers now distinguished between Sacasa and the Conservative presidents who had preceded him, thus implicitly drawing a line between the past and the present within their party's regime. Indeed, these pamphleteers saw

their regime as defunct, commenting that at the Paris exposition of 1889, Nicaragua exhibited an honors row -- the photographs of seven Conservative presidents: Martínez, Guzmán, Quadra, Carazo, Cárdenas, Zavala, and Chamorro. From the Conservative perspective, these were now betrayed heroes.¹²⁶

But as late as January 1893, President Sacasa trivialized the creeping instability as "little summer clouds"; and he continued to justify his restriction of freedom of the press.

We must confess that [in Nicaragua] not the best use has been made of freedom of the press. Its very passionate and hurtful language has frequently aimed at the government and its employees, intruding upon the realm of private life more than once. Even so, I have willingly tolerated it, as I consider it one of our most valuable guarantees. It was only when it brazenly proclaimed rebellion and advocated the use of crime to obliterate authority that the police, in the name of public security, intervened, and only for the moment.¹²⁷

His opponents saw something else: they saw a villain unmasked by his own intractable vices.

In a short time, he who had seemed humble became arrogant. Once having appeared upright, he now revealed himself to be perverse ... Once he had prostrated himself before the image of the Virgin Mary, but now he turned frantic with ambition ... The Devil -- as temptor -- had seduced him, sending him on the tortuous path that leads to the ruin of nations ... and that ushers, for the covetous, in the hatred of the living generations, the exacration of those yet to come, and history's eternal damnation.¹²⁸

By April of 1893, Conservatives (mostly from Granada) and the

Managua Liberals, led by General Jose Santos Zelaya, were allied and in armed rebellion against the President. The Conservative notable who had initially lauded President Sacasa in El Diario, now remembered a different history with a different beginning. "When Sacasa was elected," said the notable,

we heard in Leon harsh cries of 'Death to Granada'!
... Soon, Sacasa showed little tact in the selection of his collaborators ... [the revolution] of the last two months is not the consequence of a shadowy conspiracy ... the chiefs of this movement were motivated by a high and noble sentiment ... the heroic city of Managua and the historic city of Matagalpa were the first to present themselves on the insurrectionary field ... this was not a violent revolution but an insurrection, the pshychological pinnacle of a peaceful evolution that has been in effect for the last three years
...¹²⁹

The bipartisan revolution against Sacasa triumphed, but the Liberal-Conservative alliance turned to enmity. With nothing in common left to unite them, the allies plunged the country into a civil war, from which the Liberals emerged victorious.¹³⁰ Soon thereafter, in September of 1893, the Constitutional Assembly elected General Zelaya president. His hopes were the same as those that Central Americans had cherished since independence.

The country has recovered its normal state of tranquility. The few germs of disorder that might remain, will gradually disappear. They will disappear in part because of our twin policy:

forgetfulness and reconciliation with regards to the past, and severe but just repression regarding the future. And in part because of the efficacious promotion of material interests and the frank but prudent reform of our constitution...¹³¹

Bypassing the lessons of the previous thirty years, General Zelaya's inaugural address marked the closing of a thematic circle.

After our bloody fights, the principal duty of my government will be the solid establishment of peace, which will bring us: The trust and credit we have lost; administrative reorganization, which will cure the vices that have led us to insolvency; active work in favor of realizing public liberty; and a determined effort on behalf of the reappearance of the Central American patria ... My goals, then, can be expressed in three words, which were the glorious motto of our parents -- Union, Patria, Liberty.¹³²

Soon, Zelaya came to be seen as a "dictator" by some and as "paternal" figure by others. Under his administration, verbal and printed affronts, betrayals, unholy alliances, and revolutions returned to Nicaragua with a vengeance. Worse yet, thirty years of institutional learning were about to fall into oblivion.

1. "Sermón del Padre Vijil", delivered in Granada on October 14, 1855; quoted in Alejandro Reyes Huete, Estampas de Nuestra Historia (Granada, 1956), 51-55.

2. On the Legitimist side, the notables of the camp deliberately thwarted the presidential aspirations of their new military caudillo by placing executive responsibility on the notable who had been selected as substitute for the duration of the war by the now deceased caudillo and president, Fruto Chamorro. On the Democrats' side, the mistrust between their provisional president and their military caudillo played to Walker's advantage. And on both sides, the notables split over the issue of peace negotiations.

Jerónimo Perez, Memoria para la Historia de la Revolución de Nicaragua en 1854 (Second Edition: 1883), 176-177.

3. The Legitimists' military caudillo started negotiations with Walker, who presumably acted on the authority of the Democratic provisional government. The resultant treaty, which included a call for "general forgetfulness" and was celebrated with a Te Deum, proved ineffective. On the one hand, there were Legitimists who refused to abide by it. On the other hand, those who did abide by it soon were offended by Walker's distribution of governmental positions, which favored the Democrats. Secretly, Legitimist notables began plotting against Walker, who did not hesitate to have their military caudillo executed.

Ibid., 219-223; and 230.

4. Between August of 1856 and September of 1856, three important events took place in rapid succession: the Legitimist president sought the military support of Guatemala and El Salvador to wage war against Walker; the Legitimist civilian president was killed; and the Democrats and the Legitimists finally called a truce, then agreed to join forces against the American. Under the terms of this agreement, the Legitimists recognized the Democrats' provisional president as their own.

Esteban Escobar, Biografía del General Don Pedro Joaquín Chamorro, 1818-1890 (Managua: Tipografía La Prensa, 1935), 8-9.

5. Rafael Carrera, "Guatemaltecos", Guatemala, May 5, 1856; reprinted in Gaceta del Salvador, May 15, 1856.

"Proclama del Presidente de la República de Nicaragua, a sus habitantes", León, June 3, 1856.

"Otra del General, William Walker", León, June 4, 1856, Boletín Oficial, no.9, León, June 5, 1856.

6. Perez, op. cit., 123.

7. A major practical problem in need of resolution was the lack of an executive with universal authority in Nicaragua. The country at that time had a only weak provisional president as provided by the 1856 agreement between Legitimists and Democrats.

8. Pedro Joaquín Chamorro, Biografía del Licenciado Jerónimo Perez, (Managua: Tipografía La Prensa, 1939), 14-21.

9. Article entitled "La Prensa", published by the Crónica de Costa Rica and reprinted in Nicaragua's Boletín Oficial, no. 45, León, April 22, 1857.

10. Chamorro, Biografía del Licenciado Jerónimo Perez, 21-23.

11. Boletín Oficial, no. 48, León, May 17, 1857.

12. "Acta Patriótica" (San Salvador: Imprenta A. Lievano, 1857), Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volume IX, no. 1 (April, 1947), 23-26.

13. Chamorro, op. cit., 239-242.

14. Ibid., 22-26.

15. Gregorio Juárez and Rosalío Cortés, "Mensaje del Poder Ejecutivo Provisional de la República de Nicaragua en la Instalación de la Asamblea Constituyente en 1857" (Nicaragua: Imprenta del Gobierno, November 8, 1857).

16. "Discurso Pronunciado por el Excmo. Se. Jeneral (sic) Presidente Don Tomás Martínez en el Acto de su Inauguración", (Managua: Imprenta del Gobierno, November 15, 1857).

17. Escobar, op. cit., 10.

18. "The pamphleteer ... afixes anonymous pamphlets to doors. The pamphleteer takes great care in disguising his handwriting, much like the bandit who wears a mask when he assaults travellers lest his victims recognize him. The pamphleteer exercises unlimited jurisdiction: he disrespects fueros and shows no courtesy. His voracity reaches everyone: the respectable priest, the venerable matron and the innocent young lady, the ancient gentleman and the young man. His field of operations is wide -- temple and theater, promenade and dance, and even the home, that most sacred place where no one should intrude, not even with the laudable purpose of improving the customs practiced therein. He is everywhere, lying in wait to destroy someone else's honor; he hears and observes everything".

Unión de Nicaragua, no.4, Managua, January 26, 1861.

19. Pedro Joaquín Chamorro, op. cit.
20. Ibid., 269-271.
21. Ibid., 225; 257.
22. Anselmo H. Rivas, Los Partidos en Nicaragua (Managua: La Prensa, 1936), 138-139. First published in El Centro-Americano, issues December 3, 1881 to January 14, 1882.
23. Quoted in Ibid., 135. First published in El Centro-Americano, issues December 3, 1881 to January 14, 1882.
24. "Unos Amigos de la Paz", "Al Público" (León: Imprenta de Minerva, August 24, 1862).
25. President Martínez dispatched the Conservative Fernando Chamorro and the Liberal Máximo Jerez to talk to General Barrios of El Salvador and General Carrera of Guatemala about the unification project. Though Martínez was in alliance with Jerez, he feared the latter's friendship with Barrios. So he also agreed with some Salvadoran enemies of Barrios that they, acting as his agents, should approach Carrera, an enemy of Barrios, to propose an alliance between Nicaragua and Guatemala. Carrera later appealed to the Nicaraguan envoy Chamorro on the basis of their shared conservatism. By then Barrios had reminded Chamorro that Guatemala was an enemy of Nicaragua.

Pedro J. Cuadra Ch., La Nacionalidad Centroamericana y la Guerra del 63 (Managua: La Prensa, 1952), 19-29.
26. In a letter to Generals Máximo Jerez and Fernando Chamorro, Barrios asked the two Nicaraguans to persuade the government of Guatemala that he was not preparing to wage war against Guatemala and would do only if forced into one. Barrios disavowed knowledge or involvement in a plot against Carrera, as the latter suspected. Carrera had written Barrios telling him he knew that he had sent "emissaries of disturbance" into Guatemala. Barrios denied this to Jerez and Chamorro. See "Cartas Históricas del Presidente del Salvador Capitán General Gerardo Barrios", San Salvador, August 18, 1862, Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volume XI, no. 1, (April 1951), 26-28.
27. "Cartas Históricas del Presidente del Salvador Capitán General Gerardo Barrios", La Libertad, August 22, 1862, Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volume XI, no. 1, (April 1951), 28-30.
28. "Cartas Históricas", San Salvador, September 10, 1862, in ibid., 33-35.

29. Chamorro, op. cit., 280-297.
30. Escobar, op. cit., 10.
31. Anselmo H. Rivas, La Elección del General Martínez (Managua: La Prensa, 1936), 273-276.
32. Ibid., 11.
33. "Cartas Históricas del Presidente del Salvador Capitán General Gerardo Barrios", San Salvador, November 25, 1862, in op. cit., 37-38.
34. Some of the more intransigent Conservatives like Jose Dolores Estrada had been ardent Liberal. Estrada at first rejected the pact between Martinez and Jerez, and gave up only after he was persuaded by Fernando Chamorro that this was urgently necessary for the sake of unity. Estrada also opposed the re-election of Martinez, and formed a falange to fight it. He ended in exile.
Reyes Huete, op. cit., 75.
35. Chamorro, op. cit., 320.
36. Central American unification, for example, was in Barrios' interest because he could thus bring together several countries to counterbalance the power of Carrera's Guatemala. Carrera, in contrast, did not need any other country to preserve his dominion in Guatemala.
Cuadra Ch., op. cit., 50; 65-66.
In pursuit of his interest, Barrios had already written to General Jose Maria Medina of Honduras. Calling the Honduran his "friend", Barrios explained that loyalty to their friendship made him speak "frankly": he [Barrios] would send "three to four thousand men" to Honduras if he [General Medina] persisted in declaring himself president and "usurping the power of the nation". See "El Presidente de El Salvador, General Gerardo Barrios previene, bajo amenazas, al Gral. José María Medina que no tome posesión del Gobierno de Honduras", San Salvador, January 30, 1862, Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volume XI, no.1 (April 1951), 194-195.
The reference to the aggravating role of "publications" can be found in a narrative reprinted decades later in Pedro Joaquín Chamorro, Máximo Jerez y sus Contemporáneos (Managua: Editorial La Prensa, 1937), 253-254.
37. In a letter dated March 26, 1863, General Barrios wrote to Pedro Zeledón, Foreign Minister of Nicaragua, to try to entice him to leave his post. "My dear old friend," Barrios wrote to the Minister, "I am aware that you have worked with my enemies against my administration ... but I am lenient with those who

err if they have been my friends and have deserved my affection. Take my friendly advice... Come soon [to El Salvador]; the entire state [of Nicaragua] will turn against Martínez when public opinion [against Martínez] receives the back up of the sizeable army that General Jerez has put together ... "

38. Cuadra Ch., op. cit., 18.
39. Initially Barrios prevailed over Carrera, and was thus able to assist Jerez, who was defeated by Martínez. In the meantime, Carrera's forces regrouped and finally prevailed definitively over Barrios, who was replaced by Carrera's Salvadoran ally -- Dueñas.
40. El Telegráfo del Pueblo, April 25, 1863.
41. Carrera informed Martínez that Máximo Jerez had requested asylum in Guatemala. Martínez replied "[Guatemala] does not need such a guest; indeed, after a time, this guest will harm [Guatemala], as he did Nicaragua and even Barrios [of El Salvador]".
See "Carta del General Tomás Martínez, Presidente de Nicaragua al General Rafael Carrera, Presidente de Guatemala", Managua, January 17, 1864, Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volume III, No.2 (December 1939), 160-161.
42. Rivas, Los Partidos en Nicaragua, 148.
43. El Eco Meridional, no. 4, Rivas, September 29, 1864.
44. Tomás Martínez, "Mensaje del Presidente de la República a la Legislatura Ordinaria de 1865" (Managua: Imprenta del Gobierno, 1865).
45. Amigo del Pueblo, no.1, Granada, June 21, 1866.
46. El Republicano, no.1, Granada, September 15, 1866.
47. El Oriental, no.1, Granada, October 1, 1866.
48. Tomás Martínez, "Mensaje de S.E. el Señor Capitán General Presidente don Tomás Martínez, Presentado a la Legislatura de 1867 en el Acto de su Instalación" (Managua: Imprenta del Gobierno, 1867).
49. Fernando Guzmán, "Manifiesto de S.E. el Presidente D. Fernando Guzmán a los Pueblos de la Republica" (Managua: Imprenta del Gobierno, 1867).
50. Reyes Huetes, op. cit., 98-99.

51. P.J. Chamorro, op. cit., 338-339.

52. Tomás Martínez, "El General Martínez a sus compañeros de armas," Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volume VIII, no. 1 (April 1946), 86-89.

53. As the intellectual Enrique Guzmán pointed out, Dueñas ruled in El Salvador, Medina in Honduras, and Cerna in Guatemala. Thus, Carrera's designs remained intact, and now Jerez, the great Liberal was fighting to put Martínez back in power, thus completing the design of his arch-enemy Carrera. See Enrique Guzmán, "Retrato a Pluma de Máximo Jerez," Revista Conservadora, Volume 2, no. 8 (March/April/May 1961), 118.

54. "Carta de Jerez al Presidente Guzmán," León, June 26, 1869; "Manifiesto de Jerez a los Nicaraguenses"; and "Decreto de instalación del Gobierno Provisional", Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volume VIII, no. 1 (April 1946), 69-72.

55. "La Revolución Actual I (sic) su Objeto," in ibid., 86-89.

56. "Al Vicario General", León, November 4, 1869, Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volume IX, no. 3 (1947), 84-85.

57. The potential danger entailed by the friction between the administration and the church was such that the Guzman administration also took the step of publishing their correspondence. This is the letter that President Guzmán wrote on November 13, 1869 to the Vicar General and Governor of the Bishopric,

several clerics are spreading specious lies regarding the removal of those priests who, contrary to their evangelical mission, took an active part in the recent fratricidal war. They try to make believe that I have become an enemy of religion and of the clergy that represents it, and they have circulated the rumor that upon leaving [Leon] my army will sack the churches and private homes. The people, simple and naive, believes such nonsensical rumors, and this in turn plants the seeds of distrust. Today part of my army exited the city. In the morning, one of the doors of the Church of the Laborio was found open; the rumor was soon spreading that the chalice was missing and that the key to the sagrario had been left in its place. If respectable people had not gone to verify the disappearance and seen that it was a false rumor, the people would now have the rumor as positive.

See "Para conocimiento del público se dan a luz," León, 1869, Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volume IX, no.1 (April 1947), 94-95.

58. Letter written on July 18, 1869, quoted in Anselmo H. Rivas, La Situación en 1869 (Managua: La Prensa, 1936).

59. "Decreto Concediendo a los Rebeldes Amnistía General," October 24, 1869, Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volume VIII, no. 1 (April 1946), 42-44; and Rivas, Nicaragua, Su Pasado, Ojeada Retrospectiva, 60.

60. The Minister's account ended by noting the accomplishment in deed what had theretofore been accomplished only in words:

[the government decreed a] complete forgetfulness of the political and belligerent acts comitted by those involved in the revolution. Accordingly, all those compromised returned to the bossom of their families, without being harrassed in any way by the administration or its employees. If some emigrated, it was out of their own volition.

See Anselmo H. Rivas, Reseña de la Revolución de 1869 (Managua: La Prensa, 1936), 207-216. First published as Exposición del Informe del Ministro de la Gobernación y Guerra, Managua, January 19, 1870.

61. The president-elect even pointed out the weakness of his health: "In addition," he told Congress, "you must take into account my frail constitution. As you will see from the attached documents, I suffer from illness which prevent me periodically from engaging in active exercise and more especially in mental work".

"Renuncias a la Presidencia de 3 personajes de Nicaragua, La Renuncia de don Vicente Quadra," Revista Conservadora del Pensamiento Centroamericano, Volume XXVI, no. 127 (April 1971), 26-29.

62. Ibid., 26-29.

63. Vicente Quadra, "Mensaje Dirigido (sic) al Soberano Congreso por el Señor Presidente de la República [Vicente Quadra] en Marzo de 1871," (Managua: Imprenta del Gobierno, March 1871).

64. The War between El Salvador (under Francisco Dueñas) and Honduras (José María Medina) in 1871 put an end to the Dueñas administration, which was succeeded by that of Mariscal Santiago González. This in turn precipitated war in Guatemala, where Vicente Cerna succeeded the administration of Miguel García Granados. Nicaragua hastened to recognize both the new governments of El Salvador and Guatemala. Honduras then

demanded indemnization from El Salvador for the help it had provided in overthrowing Duenas. El Salvador had entered into an offensive and defensive alliance with Guatemala. So now Guatemala took the side of El Salvador. This was the intricate path that ushered in the war of 1871.

In Honduras, General Medina fell. He was succeeded by Celeo Arias, whom Nicaragua hastened to recognize. Arias then fell under military pressure from the Salvadoran-Guatemalan alliance, which felt that Arias was not a popular man and feared that Guatemala and Salvador would have to support him. They wrote him telling him to step down. He refused. El Salvador and Guatemala turned on him militarily and deposed him. Nicaragua hastened to recognize the provisional president (Leiva) who succeeded Arias.

65. Letter, dated October 4, 1871, drafted in Guatemala, Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volume IX, no.3 (1947), 24.

66. The Liberal historian J.D. Gámez actually saw the transfer of power as a process of inheritance, whereby the incumbent invariably "left" the presidency to a trusted associate.

"Promesa Cumplida," José Dolores Gámez, February 10, 1899, reprinted in Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volumes XVI and XVII, nos. 1-4, (1957-1958), 20-30.

67. Fear of demagoguery led Pedro Joaquín Chamorro to advise president Cuadra and the majority of conservative notables around him against the expulsion of the Jesuits. "Demagogues," Chamorro argued, "will raise a beautiful flag that the faithful masses will salute, who will feel that their religious beliefs and humanitarian sentiments have been wounded".

The expulsion of the Jesuits did not take place until the administration of Joaquín Zavala, another Conservative. And then it was carried out with the utmost discretion.

Reyes Huete, op. cit., 108.

68. "Unos Ciudadanos", "Nuestra Opinion" (León: Imprenta del Istmo, June 22, 1872).

69. Los Anales, no. 3, (Masaya: Imprenta del Orden, August 1, 1872).

70. In October of 1872, the town of Masaya complained that

The police governor, very early Sunday morning, indicted several citizens, not for homicide, theft or any other criminal act punishable by law. In the eyes of the Governor, the citizens' true crime consisted in not belonging to the partido

ministerial. Unable to find any substantiated charge, the Governor had to invent the most trivial and ludicrous accusations ... For example, he tried to shame [señor Delgadillo] in front of several persons by imputing to him the misappropriation of the church's alms ... he also sent groups of guards to the voting polls of [several barrios] which prevented members of the opposition from casting their ballot ... The same governor sent a group of guards to Subtiava to perturb the town and to hamper the election ... the head of the guards [José María Solís] assaulted the home of [Leona Fonseca]. The mayor de plaza was about to imprison Solís when the Governor of Police gave the prisoner refuge in his garrison ... the Prefect also disputed the mayor de plaza's competence, so that the process was annulled, and the criminal was freed... The governor also freed a man who had been put in jail for shooting a woman ..

These are the two men chosen by the Governor to oppress the virtuous and honest pueblo of Subtiava ...

[These two oppressors] went to the cabildo, where the board was meeting. The Mayor presided. Officer Solís brought his guards close to the table, which he pounded as he said: 'I'm in charge here'. The other [Zapata, the man who shot the woman] seized the electoral papers on the table. The Mayor and the other citizens managed to recover the papers, and tried to put Zapata in prison. Officer Solís and his guards prevented this, though finally they managed to put the two criminals in jail. The news made the governor frantic. The governor of police managed to have the prefect dispatch the military governor to obtain the freedom of Solís. The prefect concerned himself only with Solís, ignoring Zapata ... The military governor failed ... So the prefect sent the governor of police with orders to go to Subtiava to demand the release of the prisoner, and that if he was not released voluntarily then to resort to force.

The governor of police introduced himself into Subtiava where he came across a patrol of about 15 locals bearing only sticks and machetes. Without the slightest provocation, the governor of police ordered his men to shoot at the patrol, killing some, wounding others, and thus spilling the blood of an innocent multitude. Seeing this horrendous

spectacle, the pueblo rose as one, attacked the cowardly assassins, then forced them to seek salvation in a shameful escape.

Los Anales, no.9, Masaya, November 1, 1872.

71. Los Anales, no. 10, Masaya, November 15, 1872.

72. Ibid.

73. Ibid.

74. Ibid.

75. Reyes Huete, op. cit., 101-103.

76. "El Ministro de Relaciones de Nicaragua, don A.H. Rivas, explica la conducta leal y pacífica de su país en los conflictos de Centro-América," in a Circular, September 5, 1876 (Managua: La Prensa, 1936), 217-232.

77. The "liberals" in the midst of the Conservatives, such as the notable Enrique Guzman and his father (the former president), were said to have "blasphemed against the cult of the Sacred Heart".

This attack against them came in response to their association with the Conservative running for the Party's nomination against P.J. Chamorro. The attack was clear, however, that the problem were the "liberal" Guzmáns, not their candidate. He was seen as an opponent who would be "very worthy of esteem" were it not for his "unacceptable marriage" [to the Guzmans]. The broadside ended on an alarming note: "Alert Catholic people! If you do not want in Nicaragua the liberalism of Guatemala and El Salvador, repudiate the detestable candidacy [of Selva-Guzmán]".

"Unos Católicos", "Una Advertencia" (Diriá: Imprenta del Orden, July 19, 1874).

78. "Los Amigos del Pueblo", "La Libertad en Lucha con la Intriga" (León: Imprenta de J. Hernández, September 8, 1874).

79. "Los Liberales", "Voto del Partido Liberal" (León: Imprenta de Minerva, September 22, 1874).

80. "Unos Patriotas Liberales", "Leoneses!" (León: Imprenta de J. Hernández, October 3, 1874).

81. "Los Verdaderos Labradores de Chichigalpa", "A Los Libres Ciudadanos de Chichigalpa" (León: Imprenta de J. Hernández, September 30, 1874).

82. Alejandro Reyes Huete, op. cit., 105.

83. See "Cartas sobre unión centroamericana cruzadas entre el General Máximo Jerez y el Presidente de Nicaragua don Pedro Joaquín Chamorro", Tegucigalpa, November 12, 1875; and Managua, December 9, 1875, in Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua. Volume III, no.1 (January 1939), 77-81.

84. "At that moment", a notable wrote, "the Conservative Party gave us the magnificent spectacle of its irresistible power by presenting don Joaquín Zavala to the electorate amidst general applause".

Anselmo H. Rivas, Los Partidos de Nicaragua (Managua: La Prensa, 1936), 130. First published in El Centro-Americano, issues December 3, 1881 to January 14, 1882.

85. "La Renuncia de don Joaquín Zavala", at El Pital, on May 1, 1878, Revista Conservadora del Pensamiento Centroamericano, Volume XXVI, no. 127, (April, 1971), 29-30.

86. Ibid., 29-30.

87. Reyes Huete, op. cit., 109.

88. The new president, however, restricted the freedom of the Church to criticize the government in one particular way: no priest or cleric would have the right to characterize any government decree as inimical to religion.

Penal Code of 1879, article 283: "Any ecclesiastic who in a sermon, and edict, a pastoral, or any other official document he might publish, censures any order or decree issued by the Authorities, shall be punished with expatriation in the first degree (three years)".

"El Artículo 283", Revista Conservadora, Volume 2, no.9 (June 1961), 131.

89. Carlos Selva, Un Poco de Historia (Guatemala: Ediciones del Gobierno de Guatemala, Colección Los Clásicos del Istmo, 1948), XXII-XXIII; and XXVI-XXVII.

90. Rivas, Los Partidos en Nicaragua, op. cit.

91. Ibid., 135-136.

92. See Rivas, Los Partidos en Nicaragua, 140-144.

93. "El Centro Americano versus El Termómetro", no. 20, May 12, 1880, Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volume III, no.1 (January 1939), 83-95.

94. El Termómetro (Liberal), no. 8, Rivas, June 18, 1882.

95. El Ateneo, no. 1, León, September 1, 1881, Revista Conservadora del Pensamiento Centroamericano, Volume XXVI, no. 129, (June 1971).
96. El Ateneo, no. 3, León, November 1, 1881, in *ibid.*
97. El Ateneo, no.4, León, December 1, 1881, in *ibid.*
98. Enrique Miranda, "La Guerra Olvidada," Revista Conservadora del Pensamiento Centroamericano, Volume XXIX, no. 144 (September 1972), 75-82.
99. El Termómetro (Liberal), no. 11, Rivas, July 16, 1882.
100. El Termómetro, no.18, September 3, 1882; and no. 20, September 17, 1882.
101. El Termómetro, no. 20, Rivas, September 17, 1882.
102. *Ibid.*, no. 23, Rivas, October 8, 1882.
103. Rigoberto Cabezas, "Fundación de un Diario, 1884," Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volume VIII, no.1 (April 1946), 76-87.
104. "Letter to President Adán Cárdenas, from Rigoberto Cabezas," Guatemala, December 14, 1884, reprinted in Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volume VIII, no.1 (1946), 90-98.
105. "Mensaje Dirigido por el Señor Presidente de la República Dr. D. Adán Cárdenas, al Soberano Congreso en su XIV Período Constitucional y Contestación del Señor Presidente del Congreso a Nombre de este Alto Cuerpo", January 15, 1885 (Managua: Tipografía Nacional, 1885).
106. El Mercado, no. 491, Managua, January 19, 1886; and no. 504 February 4, 1886.
107. *Ibid.*
108. Federico Navarro, "Segunda Carta Abierta a D. Vicente Navas" (León: Imprenta del Istmo, 1886).
109. Federico Navarro, "Quincenal Leonés, Dedicado a servir los intereses del Partido Liberal" (León: Tipografía de J. Hernández, January 1, 1887).
110. José Madriz, "Por Nicaragua" (San José: 1904-1905), Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volumes XXVIII and XXIX, nos. 1-4 (January-December 1964), 47-

49.

111. Carlos Selva, Un Poco de Historia, XLII.

112. El Imparcial, no. 56, Managua, March 4, 1887.

113. "Discurso Inaugural del Señor Presidente de la República Crnel. D. Evaristo Carazo, Leído por él Mismo ante el Congreso al Hacerse Cargo del Poder Supremo, el 10. de Marzo de 1887" (Managua: Tipografía Nacional, 1887).

114. Anselmo H. Rivas, La Candidatura de Zacate (Managua: La Prensa, 1936), 186. First published in El Centro-Americano, July 22, 1882.

115. El Diario Nicaraguense, Granada, August 23, 1889.

116. Carlos Selva, Un Poco de Historia, 5.

117. Selva, op. cit., 6.

118. El Diario Nicaraguense, no. 1526, Granada, August 23, 1889.

119. Carlos Selva, op. cit., 7-10.

120. "Defensa del Manifiesto de los Liberales de Chinandega contra ataques de El Diario Nicaraguense que dirige don Anselmo H. Rivas" (León: Tipografía de J. Hernández, 1889).

121. Selva, op. cit., 11-14.

122. Ibid., 24.

123. Ibid., 14-19; 24-25.

124. "Manifiesto que el Señor Presidente Dr. D. Roberto Sacasa Dirige a los Pueblos de la República" (Managua: Tipografía Nacional, 1891).

125. See Pedro ortiz, "Ultrajes reales y delitos imaginarios, Defensa pública de Pedro Ortiz, Acusado por el Delito de Desacato a la Autoridad" (Nicaragua: Tipografía el Centro-Americano, August, 1891), in Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volume VIII, no.1 (1946), 71-80.

126. "Lo que va de ayer a hoy, o El Pasado y el Presente de la República" (Managua: Tipografía de Dionisio Estrada, 1892).

127. "Mensaje que S. E. el Sr. General Presidente Doctor Don Roberto Sacasa Dirige al Congreso de la República el Día de la Inauguración en el XVIII Período Constitucional" (Managua: Tipografía Nacional, 1893).

128. Selva, op. cit., 9.

129. Anselmo H. Rivas, El 28 de Abril (Managua: La Prensa, 1936), 251-255. First published in El Diario Nicaraguense, July 2, 1893.

130. As the Sacasa government grew increasingly isolated, the Liberales of León met with General Zelaya, a Liberal from Managua, "to discuss their response should a revolution break out". They agreed to support Sacasa in his battle with the Conservatives. "But when the Revolution broke out in Granada in April of 1893, Zelaya went to the side of the Conservatives".

The revolution came to an end with the Treaty of Sabana Grande, whereby Sacasa "withdrew from the presidency". A government Junta replaced him, "two of its members named by Sacasa, and three by the revolutionaries".

The peace lasted forty days. On July 11, the garrison of León rebelled against the junta, which in turn convened a "junta of notables who transformed themselves into an electoral body and named [the Conservative] General Joaquín Zavala President of the Republic. In León, the rebels created their own government junta, of which Zelaya was one of three members. The Treaty of Managua of July 30 put an end to the war that was lost by Zavala and the Granadines".

José Madriz, "Por Nicaragua," San José, 1904-1905, Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, Volumes XXVIII and XXIX, nos. 1-4, (January-December 1964), 41-52.

131. "Mensaje Dirigido por la Junta de Gobierno a la Asamblea Nacional Constituyente (firman José Santos Zelaya, Anastasio Ortiz, Francisco Baca h., and Pedro Balladares) y Contestación del Presidente de Esta Última" (Managua: Tipografía Nacional, 1893)

132. "Manifiesto Inaugural del Presidente de la República de Nicaragua, Gral. D. J. Santos Zelaya" (Managua: Tipografía Nacional, 1893).

CONCLUSION

Historical-Political Puzzles: Toward a Theory of Continuity and Rupture

I. Political Discourse, Identity, Practice, and Institutional Structure

This study of Central American political history showed that culture is an identifiable component of political practice, and as such, a determinant of socio-political institutions and structure. We saw, for example, that in colonial and post-colonial Central America the identity-construction of corporate groups, clans, and localities drew on a shared discourse of good and evil which in turn became dynamically connected to political practice on two counts. First, struggles for status and power turned on competing narratives of self-worth -- narratives which affirmed a dominant worldview while disputing the merits of particular claimants to positions of honor. Second, these competing narratives dictated a code of conduct to competitors, who found ways of bowing to this code while enhancing their degrees of freedom. One of these ways was dramaturgical obedience, a political practice that was effective because it drew on collective symbolic and discursive resources.

Once the connection between political culture and practice became clear, so too did the connection between culture and socio-political institutions and structure. As

this study demonstrated, both the systemic stability of colonial Central America and the post-colonial upheaval and institutional responses to that upheaval derived from the competitive practices of rivals. These practices fomented collective mistrust and rendered colonial society highly contentious without driving it to chaos. Yet those same practices did lead to anarchy and institutionalized violence in the national period.

This said, we were left with four historical puzzles of theoretical import. The first is a colonial system which though contentious and rife with suspicion, not only proved resilient for several centuries but did not suffer the breakdowns that became common in independent Central America. The second puzzle is a Central America that managed to make the difficult transition from colonial to independent status in a relatively peaceful manner, only to fall into an oscillation between anarchy and dictatorial rule. The third puzzle is the fact that the most violent country in Central America, Nicaragua, found a way to break that vicious oscillation for a period of thirty years in the nineteenth century. The final puzzle is the recurrence of violence and dictatorship in that country: why did the experiment fail, and why did the oscillation between dictatorship and violence become once again the dominant pattern?

The implications of these puzzles transcend their Central American boundaries and extend into the contemporary politics

of the region. The origins of collective suspicion put to us a query of universal importance, while the desideratum of trust-building among foes tends to be universally elusive. Less broadly, these puzzles are also germane to Latin American socio-political systems and regimes, for there, too, we have seen repeated institutional breakdown and reconstitution. And there, too, we have seen democratic exceptions that hint at complex political innovation.

To solve these puzzles, this study treated continuity and rupture not as opposites but as entwined aspects of political practice and structure, which in turn required the integration of political culture as both a source of structuration and a transformative force. Without worldview, neither continuity nor rupture is possible. Groups engage in conflict and make sense of their outcomes with reference to an overarching notion of life. In this sense, even unplanned deeds, whether brutal or kind, are a spectacle. The actor who executes them is his own audience: as he perpetrates violence or shows compassion, he sends a message, to himself and others, which he also interprets. That message is written in the ideological lingua franca, the discourse, of his collectivity. Conversely, in their planned efforts either to defend or challenge the status quo, groups deploy representational skills and capabilities which are structural in nature yet contingent on particular circumstances. On the one hand, groups are commonly embedded: they are part of a single system. On the other hand,

groups are individuals vis a vis one another, and their members are both loyal soldiers and potential defectors.

Identity-formation links institutional system, group, and members (both in continuity and rupture). On the one hand, the virtues and vices constitutive of identity are products of the collectivity's ideology and are embedded in its discourse. For this reason, we are recognizable to one another, be it as objects of admiration or scorn. On the other hand, our identity is not a self-sustaining condition. We not only need constantly to craft the narrative that defines our persona, but in our struggles, we must pursue tactical approaches that both preserve our identity and advance our interests. In other words, our tactics are shaped both by normative strictness and normative pragmatism. For this reason, the political practices of any given society are both recurrent (typical) and contingent.

Put another way, the communication of meaning, the enforcement of normative sanctions and the struggle for power -- analytically separated from one another by social science -- are in practice inextricable. Their interplay is discernable in the preservation and contestation of identity (the view we have of ourselves vis a vis others). And their short- and long-term connection to the construction and destruction of political regimes and states is demonstrable. Hence the time frame of this study, which spanned four centuries of colonial and post-colonial Central American political history.

a. Origins and Dynamics: Political Institutions and Culture

As we saw in Chapter 2, the colonial regime founded by Spain in America rested on a mystical view of the state as a political "body" that was in turn part of the Corpus Christi. This was the regnant metaphor of empire; the vision that held emperor and subjects alike in its thrall. However, Chapter 2 also showed that that vision was attended by a particular discourse: a manichean language which, shaped by the long Reconquista, divided the world between good and evil. Christian princes and lords battled the infidel; and princes and lords struggled for supremacy. To strike a balance between the faith of its imaginative vision and the suspicion that came of remembrance, the Crown established a complicated, inquisitorial bureaucracy in the colonies; and encouraged its subjects to write the sovereign with information and complaints.

Central Americans responded to the king's inquisitiveness with competing socio-political narratives which, drafted in the lingua franca of good and evil, structured the construction of archetypical identities: one virtuous, the other evil. However, as rivals deployed these narratives in their struggles for status and power, the narratives proved transformative both in direct and reflexive ways: they had both intended and unintended consequences. To the extent that competing narratives affected the distribution of power by eliciting rewards and punishment from the metropolis, they

were directly effective. To the extent that they forced competitors into the practice of dramaturgical obedience, they were reflexive. It was this reflexivity that led to unintended, systemic changes even as it entrenched the dominant worldview and discourse. As Chapter 3 demonstrated, competing socio-political narratives and the attendant practice of dramaturgical obedience, on the one hand, increased the de facto autonomy of colonial cabildos while preserving their reputation for fidelity to the crown. On the other hand, both the narratives and practices precluded the development of a coherent, legitimating ideology supportive of the cabildos' de facto autonomy. Conversely, the legitimacy of the crown remained unchallenged even as that institution grew increasingly weak in fact.

From the 16th to the 19th centuries, colonial and post-colonial Central Americans developed variants of dramaturgical obedience in the face of changing circumstances. Throughout, the practice simultaneously upheld society's vision and undermined its systemic foundations. Never explicitly challenging the worldview inherent in the discourse of good and evil or the power relations prescribed by that worldview, dramaturgical obedience also shifted de facto power relations. We saw, for example, that the royal sovereign remained the undisputed arbiter of colonial affairs even as one monarch after another was forced to accommodate particular demands from cabildos. Hence the compelling authority of royal decrees over

the colonists and the frequent exemptions granted to colonists by the crown.

In brief, Chapter 3 demonstrated that political practice can transform power relations while preserving the dominant ideology. Thus, fidelity to the king remained constitutive of the virtuous identity, and the crown's legitimacy remained paramount, even as that institution tolerated, and even encouraged, the practice of dramaturgical obedience. Moreover, no explicit link was established between legitimacy and the localities' autonomous power. Rather, an explicit connection was established between legitimacy and appearances, as colonial rivals strove to project the image of diligent, loyal subject while in the process of conquest and colonization.

Indeed, as the conquest and colonization phase came to an end, Central American colonials found alternative ways to construct archetypical identities. As we saw in Chapter 4, they competed for "notability" -- literally, social visibility; and treated notability as evidence of moral worth. Thus, the emblems of status, such as titles and ceremonial roles, became both object of contention and part of the vocabulary which rivals used to "narrate" and display their virtuousness. By the end of the 18th century, Central American identities were emblematic: clans, localities and corporate groups defended their badges, positions and ranks as if they were constitutive of identity itself. And the extant social

structure -- which marginalized social and racial hybrids who could not prove their "worth" -- was itself justified in the discourse of good and evil. The "visible", and most especially the "notables", could be seen and were even "conspicuous" because they were upright. The "no-ones", in contrast, were socially invisible because they were "degenerates".

b. Systemic Consequences

As these struggles proceeded, Central American society came to be characterized by "structural spontaneity". On the one hand, identities and ideology turned increasingly obdurate and social structure remained rigidly hierarchical. On the other hand, competitors were rarely in repose and political quiescence was uncommon. Dramaturgical obedience contributed mightily to this system of contradictions, for it enabled competitors both to avoid structural adaptation and to impugn one another's sincerity. Functional in their eyes, the practice led to long-term dysfunctionality.

Indeed, we saw how the very mechanisms of continuity can engender disruption. Chapter 5 showed that Central Americans developed new variants of dramaturgical obedience during the first two decades of the 19th century to cope with the risks and opportunities that attended the Napoleonic invasion of Spain. Cabildos and notables, for example, were determined not to appear disloyal to the Crown, but they were equally determined to bid for greater autonomy vis a vis peninsular

officials, both within their corresponding localities and in localities of higher rank. Thus, cabildos and notables staged dramatic representations of what I called "inexorable collective ire". In these dramas, notables figured as champions of moral virtue and loyalty, engaged in political battle with a dazed, potentially violent mass.

Though staged, these dramas of inexorable collective ire were ultimately unpredictable. Often, they claimed a significant degree of autonomy, so that creole elites ended up genuinely struggling to vindicate their reputations. Rewards and titles came to the successful, and shame to those who failed because they were "unmasked", and shown to be selfishly ambitious.

Chapter 6 argued that the transition to independence was driven by dramaturgical obedience, and was characterized by a continued failure to develop an ideology supportive of autonomous local politics. Central American independists were first and foremost constitutional monarchists who made their arguments in traditional manichean narratives.

Trapped in their traditional discourse and within the confines of archetypical identities, post-independence Central Americans resorted to the unpredictable theatricality that had been at the core of colonial dramaturgical obedience. But now, absent the royal arbiter, conflicts dragged on without resolution. Former allies, for example, explained their rifts by making reference to the traditional worldview shared by

both, which divided men into two categories: the loyal and honest; the treacherous and deceitful. "Unmasking" impostors, or at a minimum, ridiculing their pretensions at virtue, became once again a central political objective.

Chapter 6 also showed that as the collective mistrust which the colonial regime had held in check began to break loose, it had profound social and institutional ramifications. Political camps held one another in contempt yet constantly forged alliances that later aggravated each camp's own internal tendency toward fragmentation. Both the mutual contempt of camps and their internal alienation flowed from the opacity of dramaturgical obedience, and from variants of the practice.

The symbiosis between continuity and rupture had other, broader manifestations, both in ideology and political practice. Chapter 7 showed that Central Americans adhered to their traditional worldview even as they sought a new metaphor of societal harmony. Ultimately, they exalted the "family" because, like the colonial view of the state as part of the Corpus Christi and the king as temporal pater, the family represented the union of the "moral" and the "natural". Chapter 8 demonstrated how this familial metaphor combined with political identity-formation to yield catastrophic results in the 1820s and 1830s. Political camps contested one another's archetypical identities in broadsides and pamphlets which divided the world between the virtuous champions of the

"national family" and its base foes.

Moreover, even as rivalling elites agreed on such rules of the political game -- when they agreed to elections, for instance -- and even when these procedures might have seemed "transparent" to an outside observer, losers disputed their outcome. Typically, they would accuse the victor of having duped the voters; and they sought redress even as they reaffirmed their belief in electoral democracy. Hence the recurrence of elections and military coups.

Finally, cultural continuity and rupture linked more than ideology and political practice: it connected ideology and practice to institutions. For example, we saw that perfidy was no mere fantasy. Alliances turned ephemeral as families that believed themselves deserving of the privilege to rule fought against one another for dominion of their localities, then banded together under the banner of their locality's superiority to fight against another. Betrayal, in short, became a central theme in broadsides and pamphlets, which in turn were central to political identity-formation and belligerent mobilization.

Chapter 8 further showed how this dynamic destroyed the Central American Federation. The fear that Federal power might serve as the instrument of one's actual or potential rivals, for example, rendered every presidential incumbent the target of attacks that originated not only in the opposite camp but also his own. Simultaneously, localist and familial suspicions

eroded governmental institutions at the level of the individual states, which oscillated between anarchy and the rule of petty tyrants.

The Central American Federation broke up in the late 1830's, but the metaphor of the national family continued to enthrall Central Americans. "Familial unity" remained their aspiration.

However, this aspiration continued to elude them because, given the discourse of good and evil and its attendant political practices, the family was seen as gathering the "decent" and "honest", and excluding the "immoral".

Chapter 9 narrowed the focus of the dissertation and concentrated on Nicaragua, the most turbulent of the Central American countries. The chapter demonstrated how the familial model embroiled elites in an acrimonious debate about the organization of the lines of authority within the national family. By mid-nineteenth century, Nicaragua was divided into two camps. One was led by the Legitimist paterfamilias defending the "moral" nation from the "agents of anarchy". The other was led by a Democrat caudillo who stood for a "fraternal" alternative model in opposition to the Legitimist "despot".

Decoding this dispute showed that Legitimists and Democrats were at base expressions of familial and localist identities which, convinced of their moral worth, set out to obtain control over national symbols of that worth -- most

notably the right to head the national family. In the war that ensued between Democrats and Legitimists, the principal antagonists were the traditional rival cities of Granada and Leon, each with its own notable families and its own caudillo, or political paterfamilias.

Their military and rhetorical battles reached a stalemate, broken only when Democratic Leon brought in the American William Walker and his small army of volunteers and mercenaries to vanquish the Legitimist city of Granada. Ultimately, Walker's own ambitions forced the Nicaraguan camps into a broad, bi-partisan military alliance. Together with other Central Americans, Nicaraguans managed to expel Walker from the isthmus.

But in post-Walker Nicaragua, elite fragmentation remained a serious obstacle to internal peace. Faced with this challenge, and drawing on the experience of the anti-Walker bi-partisan alliance, the camps' caudillos -- Generals Martinez and Jerez -- decided on a bi-partisan dictatorial pact.

The pact proved ephemeral precisely because the two caudillos sought merely to bypass the notables and soldiers of their respective camps, instead of restructuring the dominant worldview and the narrative that flowed from that worldview. Soon Nicaraguan politics ushered into renewed turbulence. And it was this turbulence that led in increments to the partial revision of traditional narrative and thus to an opening for

political innovation. As Chapter 10 showed, notables from both camps substantively redefined the ideal leader in terms of historical learning and conjunctural necessity. They did this on the basis of the traditional narrative of the "family divided" and by drawing on the discourse of good and evil. Simply put, the ideal president would no longer be the paternal disciplinarian. Nor would he be an undisciplined advocate of the fraternal model. Rather, he would serve as a "benevolent" and "peaceful" "conciliator" who could only see a "brother" in his foe.

Thus defined, the president became the central persona in the public spectacle of the emergent regime: his actions became displays of virtuousness and he became a symbol of virtue's power. Successively, presidents surpassed their predecessors in an effort to show themselves worthy of this new presidential identity. For example, they refused to engage in rhetorical battle, thus confronting the entrenched logic of good and evil with a void of silence. And as exemplars of self-abnegation, they distributed power among various localities and families. In short -- like the Spanish sovereign at the head of a bureaucratic state, and like the tribal chief of a stateless society -- presidents allocated and arbitrated but did not rule; they exemplified but did not command.

From 1867 to 1893, Nicaraguan presidents were both exalted in status, and virtually powerless. By de-linking

power and virtue while rewarding virtuousness with preeminence, the regime precluded the need for presidents to engage in opaque practices like dramaturgical obedience. The more the executive abstained from such practices, the more he generated bi-partisan trust and the more he could serve as a point of coalescence for bi-partisan power-sharing. Just as importantly, the less the Liberal camp could repudiate its own leaders' cooperation with Conservative governments.

If the presidential incumbent became a prisoner of his virtuous identity -- and for that very reason could gather around him notables from various localities and from both parties -- he was also protected from vice-presidential usurpation. The regime deliberately eliminated the office of the vice-president, thus freeing the executive from the bitter politics of identity, which were left to the other notables.

Under this symbolic-institutional regulatory system, there emerged a common mainstream in which Liberal and Conservative identities blurred. Conservative administrations came to describe themselves as "liberal" in spirit. But absent a deep revision of worldview and discourse, the mainstream continued to share the conceptual framework of the "extremes" (the "true" Liberals and "genuine" Conservatives).

This failure at deep revision left the "extremes" in possession of a fully articulated manichean worldview and discourse. And it allowed the mainstream to craft historical accounts that were conciliatory in substance but manichean in

form. More specifically, these accounts reported on the merging of the "Conservative" and "Liberal" identities by stressing intra-camp divisions between the virtuous and the wicked while upholding one camp in toto as virtuous and the other as wicked.

Finally, the failure at deep revision rendered the regime fragile. Each electoral contest represented a potential crisis. As the followers of the contenders sought identity-clarification, they resorted to the traditional resources of the manichean culture. And every elected president was crucial to the regime, for only his adherence to the presidential code of conduct could hold together the bi-partisan mainstream.

In 1893, the president broke the rules of executive comportment by making nepotistic and localist appointments, and by seeking the presidency a second time. The executive ceased to function as a generator of bi-partisan trust, and the bi-partisan mainstream turned into a bi-partisan alliance which overthrew the president and truncated the "regime of the thirty years".

II. From Past to Present

The Thirty-Years exception did not provide a basis for continuity in Nicaraguan institution-building. The reasons for this rupture are institutional and cultural, and they are entwined precisely because origins and dynamics cannot be set asunder.

a. Political Culture and Institutional Consequences: The Present

Nicaraguan political elites, like most of their other Central American counterparts, failed to develop a coherent ideology that would have allowed them to institutionalize the primacy of procedure over content. And specifically what procedures -- or more to the point, what institutionalization of political procedure -- would have produced stability independently of the president's personal qualities?

The Thirty Years Regime's innovative advances concentrated excessively on the apex of government, where public spectacle relied exclusively on each president's adherence to its rules, to the neglect of municipalities, which had been so strong in the colonial and early post-colonial period. Furthermore, the regime's cherished notions of "probity" and "self-abnegation" would have found their most natural expression in a strong judiciary -- also present in the colonial regime but weakened later in the course of what became the central political debate of the nineteenth century. This debate turned on the related issues of whether the legislature or the executive should be stronger, and whether localities or the center should prevail in political decisionmaking (Recall that these debates, in turn, were at base disputes among clans and localities over their relative moral worth).

But it was precisely a strong, independent judiciary that

could have arbitrated the disputes between the executive and legislative branches, and between the central authorities and local governments, while settling questions of procedure pertaining to the presidency. The ideological structure which underlay the Thirty Years Regime was partially derived from the historical role of the sovereign as arbiter of disputes, as well as from the de facto autonomy of localities. Ironically, however, this ideological structure did not permit political actors to recognize the crucial potential of a strong judiciary's countervailing power, or the need for vibrant municipal institutions.

This central institutional weakness afflicts Central America to this day everywhere but in Costa Rica. Elsewhere, localities -- which do provide limited but real opportunities for democratic participation -- are starved for funds, which are monopolized by the capital cities. And in Nicaragua, for example, Congress oscillates between rubber-stamping executive decrees and leading unconstitutional revolts against the president.

The development of Costa Rican exceptionalism -- the citizenry's conviction about, and the institutionalization of, their own "democratic character" -- is in itself a complex process of cultural and institutional differentiation from the other "violent" and "disorderly" Central American countries, most particularly Nicaragua. As we saw in this study, this

process began at the time of Costa Rica's conquest, which took place after the conquest phase had already come to an end in the rest of the isthmus. Distant and poor, the new territory had little to offer in the way of rewards to colonists recruited from the better-established province of Nicaragua. But we also saw that the leading conqueror and a small group of followers did remain in Costa Rica, aware already of the differences that separated them from the other provinces. One of these differences, they believed, was the superior moral character of Costa Rica's conqueror, who was willing to sacrifice for God and King where the Nicaraguan colonists were not.

By the turn of the 19th Century, Costa Ricans perceived their province as the "poorest" and most "neglected" in the isthmus, to the point that its governor complained that "the funeral of greatest pomp [in Costa Rica] is still less than the simplest in other parts".¹ This perception only deepened the belief in late-colonial Costa Rica that even though the province was partially under the government of Nicaragua, it was not really part of Central America (known then as the Kingdom of Guatemala). By the second half of the 19th Century, we also saw, Costa Rican elites insisted that a "solid" constitution, public education, and moral unity was the way to avoid the political "catastrophes" that plagued Nicaragua.

This emphasis on education and the law -- the constitutive elements of Costa Rican exceptionalism --

continued to take root in Costa Rica even though its political history, at least until 1948, deviated from that of Nicaragua only in degree. That is to say, it was less violent and unstable; but it still had civil wars, coups, oligarchic democracy, and a Liberal dictatorship. In 1948, however, a revolution took place when the presidential incumbent, with the support of the Communists and the Church, refused to step down at the end of his term. The revolution of 1948 was a turning point that presented two alternative paths: the authoritarian path not taken, or the social democratic alternative. The choice for the latter was in no small way due to the self-perception Costa Ricans had developed over centuries. In their historiography, they depicted themselves as "legalistic" and "educated". And above else, they depicted themselves as the opposite of the Nicaraguans, who in 1948 were under the rule of the Somoza dictatorship. For the next thirty years, Costa Ricans would do their utmost to stand in sharp contrast to their neighbor.

And the contrast is indeed sharp. After all, Nicaraguans' efforts at institutional innovation during the Thirty Years Regime had at their core the virtuous identity of the president as moderate, law-abiding conciliator, while Costa Ricans set out to construct such an identity for the ordinary citizen and for the nation as a whole.

b. Manichean Historiography and its Consequences:
Today's Virtuous Identities and Opaque Practices

The Thirty Years regime, headed by Conservatives from Granada but widely inclusive of Liberals and notables from various localities, repudiated in practice the story of inevitable enmity between camps. But absent an innovative discourse with which to draw lessons from the major triumphs and losses of our lives and history, these may be subordinated in meaning to received descriptions which barely capture a changed reality; or worse, they may be forgotten altogether. Thus, the collapse of the Thirty-Years led to mutual recrimination, one group ascribing ignoble intentions and malevolent deeds to another.

The preeminent Liberal historian writing in Nicaragua in the late 19th and early 20th century contended that the

good historian is never impartial in the strict sense of the word. He puts himself in the place of the society for which he writes, and feels and loves with that society. He is not indifferent to the personae he brings to the stage; he becomes enamored of some while abhorring others to the death. He conveys his affections and hatreds to his reader. In his hands, history becomes more than a teacher of life and an oracle to be consulted. It also becomes a sharpened knife and avenging torch against the wicked. It becomes the glorious crown and recompense for the virtuous [emphasis added].²

In the 1930's, Conservative historians agreed wholly with this point of view. For them, too, historiography was a moral enterprise. They merely disagreed with the Liberal historian's

capacity to discern correctly the "wicked" from the "virtuous".³

Accordingly, during the first three quarters of the 20th century, Nicaraguan "notables" -- from the intellectuals of the Conservative and Liberal parties to their military caudillos -- remained bent on settling past accounts. To this end, they authored political biographies and autobiographies whose central goal was to reveal and to unmask definitively antagonists long dead. These detailed, often convoluted historical accounts, harking back to colonial narratives, set out to refute "slanderous" accusations and to offer "the truth" in their stead.⁴

As we approach the 21st century, the genre is still alive and well. Indeed, even though the plots of contemporary autobiographies are more stylized, and their contextual descriptions are richer, the narratives retain the central intent of the classics: to show the public the "true" character of the antagonists in a national conflict, and thus render explicit the clash between good and evil. F S L N comandantes have written biography and history as a morality play that proceeds in uncluttered stages -- each stage a battle between two archetypical forces; each battle untainted by unholy alliances and internal betrayal.⁵ But so too have democratic notables, who in their narratives depict their clan figures as the authentic champions of the national family.⁶

An important consequence of manichean historiography is

the perpetuation of manichean identity-construction in politics. To this day, Nicaraguans, in narrative and action, tend to construct their identities from a set of constitutive virtues. Thus, every major political movement in Nicaraguan history, including both the FSLN and the government of Mrs. Chamorro, has expected its members to embody loyalty and self-abnegation, the quintessential attributes of the exemplary conqueror and colonist. Conversely, Nicaraguans have continued to see in their rivals the embodiment of "perfidy" and "egoism". Nor has the metaphor of the "national family" changed. Identity-formation in the FSLN, for example, has always departed from the premise that Nicaraguans are "brothers"; while the current Chamorro government exalts the president as a "maternal" national figure.

Against this background, to "prove" to the world one's own goodness and a rival's evil is simultaneously to confirm the authenticity of one's identity and to unmask the impostor. In short, it is to succeed in political competition. Such is the underlying worldview of Nicaraguans.

Such identity-formation and its attendant narrative, in turn, structure in reality and ignore in text the alliances which, behind the facade of their obdurate identities, antagonists are constantly forging and breaking.

Alliances are different from "pacts", which are seen as disgraceful precisely because they brazenly bring together "inherently" inimical identities, and thus affront the

Nicaraguan worldview. The most notorious pact in recent history is the ruling triumvirate which Anastasio Somoza DeBayle, upon completion of his presidential term, assembled in the early 1970s with the cooperation of Fernando Aguero, a charismatic and eloquent Conservative opponent of the regime.⁷

At that point, the economy was prosperous, and precisely because Aguero had proved such a potent orator -- capable of attracting Conservative crowds as large as those gathered by the Somoza branch of the Liberal machine -- the collective identities of the antagonists were highly visible. In a signal miscalculation, Aguero, emboldened by popular support, moved to try to reform the system from within. His followers, however, perceived his participation in the pact as a shameful betrayal.

In contrast to pacts, "alliances" are tacit, and they are forged at moments of plasticity, when political agents with different agendas have not yet publicly defined their identities, or when members of well-defined groups have begun to struggle internally and to reassess from within who is "authentic" and who is an "impostor". In the late 1970's, for example, the FSLN's Ortega brothers forged an alliance with representatives of the aristocracy and the high bourgeoisie on the basis of a shared anti-Somocismo, leaving all other defining attributes vague. In other words, they united simply as "authentically virtuous" Nicaraguans to battle an

immoral regime.

After the FSLN assumed power, its broad alliance began to erode internally at the elite level, but not on the basis of social class. The Chamorro clan and their newspaper La Prensa, for instance, split internally between Sandinistas and non-Sandinistas as individual members of the clan fought to fill the vacuum of preeminence left behind by Pedro Joaquin Sr. The anti-Sandinista Chamorros retained control of La Prensa; the others joined the officialist FSLN media.

Once in the open, the battle between the FSLN and the Chamorros of La Prensa proved conventional on two counts. Firstly, each camp aimed to unmask the other. La Prensa challenged the comandantes' "revolutionary mystique" by pointing out their violations of their own self-abnegating code of conduct -- which is to say the constitutive elements of their virtuous identity. Conversely, FSLN publications set out to debunk the notion of the Chamorro clan as an exemplar of self-sacrifice whose deeds are solely aimed at improving the lot of their Nicaraguan "family". Predictably, both perceived the accusations levelled at them as "slander" and "character assassination"; and more importantly, as confirmation of the other's perversity.

Secondly, the FSLN unleashed violent political mobs on its opponents, including those associated with La Prensa. By deploying plain-clothes groups armed with machetes and stones, the Sandinistas were refining a practice favored by the

Somozas.⁸ But this kind of violent mobilization, we have seen, goes back even further than the Somozas and the FSLN. We saw that in colonial times, and in the transition to independence -- not to mention in the remainder of the nineteenth century -- notables agitated from behind the scenes, encouraging the "crowd" to "demonstrate" their indignation through riots. These were the dramas of "inexorable collective ire" that in the 19th century allowed notables the degrees of freedom denied to them by the central dictate of their virtuous identity: obedience to the crown.

And in the late 20th century, the practice of "inexorable collective ire" was once again crucial to the public burial of Pedro Joaquin Chamorro, as Sandinista organizers (working in clandestinity) seized the opportunity to stage "spontaneous" expressions of popular anger. As the coffin made its way to the cemetery, the "mourners" burned and looted. The Chamorro clan still perceives the funeral upheaval as a genuine expression of popular grief and rage over the martyrization of the family's standardbearer -- "family" defined as the Chamorros and the nation.⁹

c. Identity, Discourse, and Practice:
Impact on Contemporary Political Institutions

The interplay between identity, discourse, and practice is more than the ongoing expression of worldview. It is also the key to recurrent political dynamics. These dynamics, for example, are often driven by the disillusionment of the rank-

and-file, who forge alliances with their former enemies and turn violently on their own leaders. The Sandinista leadership, for example, crafted a code of conduct which demands that each militant display "humility, modesty, honesty, discipline, devotion to duty, and submission to the National Directorate".¹⁰ But the leadership was in turn expected to exemplify these very virtues: a true Sandinista leader was supposed to be a man without "vices".

This austere expectation not only led FSLN leaders to create their own variants of dramaturgical obedience but engendered disillusionment among the rank-and-file, who generally came to see their leaders as "impostors". Though the FSLN was supposed to be a brotherhood (the Salvadoran guerrillas were "cousins"), the Comandantes vied fiercely for titles, rank, and power. The leaders were also deeply mistrustful of one another, and feared comrades who were able to put on displays of verbal prowess for the masses, most particularly Tomas Borge. Moreover, though materialism was presumably a horrendous vice, the Comandantes came to place great value on their ability to distribute "gifts" amongst subordinates and followers. And though caudillismo was supposed to yield to collegial decision-making, the two Ortega brothers, like the two Somoza brothers before them, clearly emerged as joint primus inter pares.¹¹

This seemingly contradictory behavior is best understood in historical and cultural perspective. To begin with, as we

have seen, intra-elite suspicion and jealousy have always been intractable problems among Central American politicians. In an atmosphere of cut-throat competition, elites have looked for "natural" allies among their closest relatives. The Somozas and the Ortegas are merely the best known illustrations of a tradition that dates back to post-colonial days.¹² Recall that the first Chief and Vice-Chief of State in independent Nicaragua were chosen to occupy those high posts partly on the basis of their kinship. The hope was that familial ties would keep them from turning on one another. That time, the formula worked only briefly (the relatives eventually turned on one another and plunged the country into war). Relatedly, as I have shown, intra-elite fear of "dazzling" orators also goes back to the post-colonial decades (this is not surprising if we recall that the notion of "the word" as a source of transformative power was itself central to the Christianization enterprise). Thus, since independence, elites --the FSLN and the current Chamorro government included -- have departed from the premise that the uneducated are "innocent", and can either be led astray or transformed by potent speakers. Most particularly, elites have dreaded eloquence in others because it has often been an attribute of caudillos, and caudillismo in turn is seen as a twofold danger: it alters the balance of power; and is in itself a highly coveted value.

The rank of caudillo is inherently desirable because it

is seen as the most exalted for a public identity. In the context of the FSLN's National Directorate, the Ortega brothers strove mightily to establish themselves as caudillos. Humberto Ortega, for example, astutely chose to go by the title of "General", because of its cultural connotations. And both he and his brother Daniel became proficient "gift-givers", thus establishing the subtle ties that entangle superior and subordinate in a complex web of power, interest, and emotional relations.¹³ Today, the brothers are the FSLN's preeminent figures, which is not to say that their fraternal alliance is free of conflict or that their preeminence is uncontested within the Party.

Intra-camp divisions rooted in the manichean discourse have also afflicted the opposition to the FSLN. In the 1980s, at the height of the animosity between the FSLN and the Resistance Movement (also known as the Contra), the latter was plagued by bitter internal struggles in which the antagonists perceived themselves as "democrats" and the others as "anti-democrats". But more importantly, beneath these labels there were passions and interests -- to borrow from Albert Hirschman -- that have been at play for a very long time in Nicaraguan politics. These passions and interests, as in the case of the FSLN Comandantes, had to do with "power" conceived as the ability to command authority on the basis of honor and status within the bounds of a zero-sum game. And honor and status -- crucial to public identity -- were seen as the rewards

accruing to the virtuous.

Thus, in their drive to prove themselves superior to their fellows in the Resistance Movement, the combatants relied on their military valor and prowess, while the elites resorted to intrigue. Hence the high rate of alliance formation and dissolution among the leaders (to the neglect of their avowed purpose: political representation of the combatants).

The struggle for the status and power that presumably belong to the virtuous divides politicians in peacetime as well. Even at such historic moments as the electoral defeat of the FSLN, the victorious camp -- with Violeta Chamorro as its candidate -- was soon embroiled in bitter internal disputes over recognition. Indeed, once in power, the post-FSLN executive and legislative branches -- each led by members of two families intricately bound in kinship -- transformed their alliance into a feud. Thus, by November of 1991, the alienation between President Chamorro and her former ally, the President of the Congress (brother-in-law of President Chamorro's son-in-law, who in turn serves as de facto president) was almost complete. And, as in every instance of alliance-dissolution since independence, each antagonist saw the other's accusations as "affronts" to their respective identities.¹⁴

A sense of indignity also led to recalcitrance among demobilized members of the FSLN army and former Resistance

combatants. Invoking "brotherhood", these recalcitrants voiced the rancor that many more felt towards the political elites, from the FSLN and the Chamorro Government to the opposition.¹⁵ In 1993, demobilized Sandinistas seized the town of Esteli militarily. In the confused unfolding of events, it became apparent that General Humberto Ortega of the FSLN had surreptitiously struck a deal with the FSLN rebels; but then, he decided to send in the army to put down the rebellion of his former soldiers.¹⁶

Many lives were sacrificed in this display of dramaturgical obedience to President Chamorro by General Ortega. But he made two points. First, his capacity to suppress inexorable collective ire made him indispensable to the Chamorro government. Second, he had ways of punishing those who acted independently -- ways which did not call on him to articulate any justification that might be construed as incongruent with his Sandinista identity, or disloyal to his "brothers".

Soon after this rebellion, recalcitrant combatants of the Resistance movement used peace negotiations as a ruse to lure representatives of the Chamorro government onto their turf, where they took them hostage. The rebels' message was one of bitter discontent with the Chamorro government, which they believed had betrayed them and their cause. Almost immediately, recalcitrant Sandinista soldiers took hostages of their own, including many prominent members of the Chamorro

government who dissented from the President and repudiated her alliance with the FSLN. Ultimately, the dual-hostage crisis was resolved peacefully, through various political deals and at the urging of the political elites and the Church hierarchy.¹⁷

But the opacity of these practices -- General Ortega's dramaturgical obedience and the dual-hostage crisis, which in essence was a display of inexorable collective ire partially promoted by various elites -- has subsequently deepened the mistrust that still fragments Nicaraguans and simultaneously pushes them to forge ephemeral alliances that defy all expectations.

Indeed, mistrust continues to alienate the Guatemalans and the Salvadorans. The Guatemalans are engaged in ongoing negotiations in a common effort to stop the army's systematic terror and the insurgency's protracted war. But the agreement is based on the antagonists' shared recognition of the benefits to be derived from cessation of hostilities. It is not based on a mutual understanding that transcends the reciprocal perceptions that led them to violence.

As for the Salvadorans, their entwined peace and democratization processes ushered in the elections of March 1994. To be sure, these elections represent progress because both the Left and the Right participated. Armed antagonists yesterday, Salvadorans today are playing a peaceful game, having agreed on its rules. But the elections are also a

source of concern. For the Left has expressed its conviction that the electoral process was rife with fraud. And if the past is any guide, the losers may accept the outcome but they will not forget the procedural breach. Moreover, the peaceful game of the elites, gathered in the urban centers, is not the game of the countryside and the villages, where, as in Nicaragua, ordinary civilians and demobilized fighters are caught in violent relations that extend the conflicts of the past into the present.

If such cycles of conflict are to be supplanted by durable democracies, then we must study political violence and autochthonous institutional solutions in their historical and cultural contexts. That is, we must examine the ways in which political visions, utterances, alliances, rules of the game, violations of those rules, methods of mass mobilizations, and historiography interact to preserve and transform the political culture and institutions of a people.

To do any less is to be lured into the realm where images and rhetoric seem to be divorced from practice. Worse yet, it is to accept the erroneous notion that socio-political conflict necessarily emanates from deep ideological and structural contradictions, and that democratic institutions always reflect a resolution of those conflicts. Central Americans routinely seek vindication of their views and interests through violent means because, regardless of class or party affiliation, they share a passionate view of life as

a clash between good and evil. And they find peaceful, and at times democratic ways to vindicate their views and interests when they create institutions that regulate moral clashes. The political history of the region tells us, however, that regulation is not a stable solution, because regulatory systems remain at base embedded in the worldview whose manifestations they seek to control.

Put another way, beneath dictatorship, civil war, and democratic exceptions in the region there lies a structural uniformity: a deeply-rooted, ordered view of the world. Perhaps systemic transformation requires that coming generations throw that order into disarray.

1. Máximo Soto Hall, "Capítulos de un Libro Inédito," Revista de Costa Rica en el Siglo XIX, Volume I, in Letras Patrias, no. 32.
2. Quoted in Pedro Joaquín Chamorro, Máximo Jerez y sus Contemporáneos, Estudio Histórico-crítico (Managua: Editorial La Prensa, 1937), 7.
3. Ibid, 8.
4. Illustrative of the Liberal variant is the biography of the 19th Century Liberal caudillo Máximo Jerez by Sofonías Salvatierra, Maximo Jerez Inmortal, Comentario Polémico (Managua: Tipografía Progreso, 1950). For the Conservative treatment of the same caudillo (and of his foe the Conservative Caudillo Fruto Chamorro), see Pedro Joaquín Chamorro, Máximo Jerez y sus Contemporáneos (Managua: Editorial La Prensa, 1937).
But again, this is a broader Latin American phenomenon. For a fascinating overview of the Argentine variant, see Nicolas Shumway, The Invention of Argentina (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).
5. Illustrative of this biographical-historical account is Tomas Borge's The Patient Impatience (Willimantic: Curbstone Press, 1991).
6. See the typical Jaime Chamorro Cardenal, La Prensa, The Republic of Paper (N.Y.: Freedom House, 1988).
7. The triumvirate was composed by Fernando Aguero, a Conservative, and two Liberals beholden to Somoza: General Roberto Martinez and Alfonso Lobo Cordero. The triumvirate was the formal government at the time of the Managua earthquake -- a national tragedy which Somoza treated as a business opportunity. As member of the triumvirate, Aguero objected vehemently to Somoza's interference in the management and finances of the reconstruction process. Somoza responded by entering into a tacit alliance with the dominant leaders of the Conservative Party in order to remove Aguero from the government. Aguero's last stance was also his first step into anonymity.
8. Chamorro Cardenal, La Prensa, 5; and 20.
9. Chamorro Cardenal, La Prensa.
10. Roger Miranda and William Ratliff, The Civil War in Nicaragua, Inside the Sandinistas (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1993), 11.
11. Miranda and Ratliff, 26-27; 45-47; 24; 39; 55; 19-43.

12. In Cuba, the alliance between Fidel and Raul Castro has enabled the two brothers to weather the internal struggles that have plagued the Cuban elite since 1959.

13. Liberal caudillos have been some of the most accomplished gift-givers, most notably Jose Santos Zelaya (turn of the century) and all of the Somozas.

14. Letter from Alfredo César, President of the Congress to President Violeta Chamorro, Managua, November 8, 1991.

15. The New York Times, July 27, 1993.

16. The New York Times, July 26, 1993.

17. The Washington Post, August 22, 1993.

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