

ARTÍCULOS

THE SANDINISTA REVOLUTION IN THE NETHERLANDS: THE DUTCH SOLIDARITY COMMITTEES AND NICARAGUA (1977-1990).

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Abstract: This article analyses the formation, popularity, and the struggles of the Dutch solidarity movement for Nicaragua in the late 1970s and 1980s. It brings together domestic and transnational approaches to the history of Third World solidarity activism. In doing so, this article argues that a longer history of Dutch leftist activism and fascination with Latin American culture, in combination with the diplomatic efforts of the FSLN to create an international support base, were the main driving forces behind the Nicaragua solidarity movement in the Netherlands. In particular, this article identifies the 1979 Sandinista Revolution and the 1981 election of Ronald Reagan as crucial turning points for the Dutch solidarity movement, as the solidarity committees needed to adapt to the changing military and political situation in the Western hemisphere.

Keywords: Solidarity, Nicaragua, revolution, the Netherlands, transnationalism.

Título: LA REVOLUCIÓN SANDINISTA EN LOS PAÍSES BAJOS: LOS COMITES DE SOLIDARIDAD HOLANDESES Y NICARAGUA (1977-1990).

Resumen: Este artículo analiza la formación, la popularidad y los problemas de movimiento de solidaridad con Nicaragua en los Países Bajos durante los años setenta y ochenta. El artículo intenta integrar enfoques nacionales y transnacionales a la historia del activismo con los países de Tercer Mundo. Haciendo esto se intenta demostrar que la tradición de movilización y la fascinación por la cultura latinoamericana en los Países Bajos, junto a los esfuerzos del FSLN para establecer apoyos internacionales, fueron las causas principales de la popularidad y el éxito de los comités de solidaridad en los Países Bajos. Particularmente, este artículo identifica la Revolución Sandinista de 1979 y la elección de Reagan en 1981 como momentos claves para el movimiento de solidaridad en Holanda, ya que los comités necesitaron adaptarse a la situación militar y política cambiante en el hemisferio occidental.

Palabras clave: Solidaridad, Nicaragua, revolución, Países Bajos, transnacionalismo.

1. Introducción

On 21 February 1978, exactly 44 years after Nicaragua's US-backed National Guard murdered the famous Nicaraguan revolutionary Augusto César Sandino, a

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group of Dutch activists arrived in The Hague. Their plan was to occupy the Nicaraguan embassy to protest against the dictatorial regime of Anastasio Somoza Debayle and simultaneously show their support for the armed struggle of the Sandinista Liberation Front (*Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional*, or FSLN). Originally, the idea for this demonstration came from the Nicaraguan Enrique Schmidt Cuadra, a member of the FSLN who, after participating in the struggle against the Somoza regime in Nicaragua, returned to Europe in 1977 to build an international support base for the Sandinistas. As the activists, accompanied by the Dutch press, arrived in The Hague, it soon turned out that there was no Nicaraguan embassy to be found there, nor in any other part of the Netherlands. Disappointed, the reporters decided to travel to Germany, where activists had planned a similar event¹.

These are the humble beginnings of the Dutch Nicaragua Committee (*Nicaragua Komitee Nederland*, or NKN), a national solidarity organisation that had its first official meeting on 15 October 1978, in Utrecht². This national committee brought together the representatives of local Nicaragua solidarity groups from several Dutch university cities, such as Groningen, Wageningen, Nijmegen, Utrecht, and later Amsterdam³. Additionally, through the efforts of Enrique Schmidt Cuadra, who brought representatives of national committees together on a European level, the local Nicaragua committees became incorporated into a transnational solidarity network, linking Western European, and later US activists, to the Sandinistas in Nicaragua. Initially, the goals of the NKN were simple. The committee believed that solidarity with Nicaragua should consist of (1) efforts to internationally isolate the Somoza dictatorship and (2) supporting the FSLN, both with material and propaganda. After the victory of the Sandinistas in July 1979, the nature of solidarity work for Nicaragua changed drastically. Instead of supporting a guerrilla movement, the NKN suddenly worked for the new left wing Nicaraguan government. After the 1979 revolution, then, the Dutch Nicaragua Committee tried to 'defend' the Nicaraguan revolution against foreign intervention and bad publicity, supported projects of the Nicaraguan government, and informed the Dutch public about the situation and positive developments in 'liberated Nicaragua'⁴.

As this is the first in-depth archival study of Dutch solidarity with Nicaragua, this article contributes to the historiography of transnational activism, exile, and solidarity networks during the Cold War. Over the last decades, distancing themselves from traditional diplomatic history, historians have started to analyse the ideas and practices of transnational solidarity movements and other nongovernmental organisations, such as human rights groups. In the context of Latin America, they have specifically focused on solidarity with Chile and Uruguay in the 1960s and 1970s. Most importantly, these scholars have acknowledged the crucial role of Latin

¹ Author's interview with Klaas Wellinga and Hans Langenberg, 6 August 2014, Utrecht, The Netherlands.

² Records of NKN meeting, 15 October 1979, box no 1, Archief Nicaragua Komitee Nederland, International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, The Netherlands [Hereafter NKN].

³ Annual Report, 1984, box no. 1, Archief Nicaragua Komitee Amsterdam, Stadsarchief, Amsterdam, The Netherlands [hereafter NKA].

⁴ 'Viewpoint of Dutch Nicaragua Committee on Solidarity Work with Nicaragua', June 1980, box no. 17, [NKN]. All archival document titles and quotes from these documents have been translated by the author from Dutch for the purpose of this article.

American exiles in the establishment and functioning of these movements who protested against the dictatorships in the Southern Cone⁵. Furthermore, scholars such as Jessica Stites More, Thomas Wright, and Patrick William Kelly have identified the 1973 Chilean coup as a pivotal moment in the rise of the global human rights movement, as the Chile solidarity movement increasingly relied on human rights language to denounce the crimes of the anti-communist regimes⁶. In doing so, these scholars have taken the first laudable steps towards bridging the historiographical gulf that existed between human rights activism and solidarity movements.

More recently, European historians such as Kim Christiaens and Christian Helm have added to the historiography of solidarity movements during the Cold War by publicising several important works on Western European solidarity activism in the late 1970s and 1980s⁷. In this final decade of the Cold War, solidarity groups in Western Europe became less interested in criticising the US-backed dictatorships in the Southern Cone. Rather, inspired by the 1979 Sandinista Revolution and the civil wars in El Salvador and Guatemala, they started supporting the armed revolutionaries in Central America, and later the revolutionary Sandinista government of Nicaragua. In their articles, the abovementioned authors discuss, amongst others, how and why, during the final decades of the Cold War, connections were forged between activists, politicians, and revolutionaries from Western Europe and Central America. This article, then, builds on and contributes to these efforts by analysing the grassroots mobilisation for Nicaragua in the Netherlands.

It is important to note that, in the case of the Netherlands, some authors have written about the Dutch mobilisation for Chile, and a few even mention the activities Dutch Nicaragua Committee⁸. These scholars place the history of solidarity groups firmly into the context of Dutch idealism and activism during the Cold War. They do not focus on the Western European and transnational networks of which these organisations were a part, both in imagined and real terms. The Dutch historian Jouke Turpijn for example, praises the 'creativity' of the Nicaragua solidarity

⁵ See for example, MARKARIAN, Vania. *Left in Transformation: Uruguayan Exiles and the Latin American Human Rights Networks, 1967-1984*. New York: Routledge, 2005. POWER, Margaret. The US Movement in Solidarity with Chile in the 1970s. *Latin American Perspectives*. Nov. 2009, vol. 36, n. 6, pp. 109-146.

⁶ See for example, KELLY, Patrick William. The 1973 Chilean coup and the origins of transnational human rights activism. *Journal of Global History*. Mar. 2013, vol. 8, n. 1. STITES MORE, Jessica (ed.). *Human Rights and Transnational Solidarity in Cold War Latin America*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2013. WRIGHT, Thomas C. *State Terrorism in Latin America: Chile, Argentina, and International Human Rights*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007.

⁷ See, for example, CHRISTIAENS, Kim. Between diplomacy and solidarity: Western European support networks for Sandinista Nicaragua. *European Review of History: Revue européenne d'histoire*. 2014, vol. 21, n. 4. HANSEN, Jan; HELM, Christian and REICHERZ, Frank (eds.). *Making Sense of the Americas: How Protest Related to America in the 1980s and Beyond*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015. HELM, Christian. Booming solidarity: Sandinista Nicaragua and the West German Solidarity movement in the 1980s. *European Review of History: Revue européenne d'histoire*. 2014, vol. 21, n. 4.

⁸ See, for example, BEERENDS, Hans. *Weg met Pinochet. Een kwart eeuw solidariteit met Chili*. Amsterdam: Instituut voor Publiek en Politiek, 1998. BEERENDS, Hans and BROERE, Marc. *De bewogen beweging, een halve eeuw mondiale solidariteit*. Amsterdam: KIT Publishers, 2004.

movement, yet he fails to mention the fact that many of its projects were a direct response to requests from the Nicaraguan government, as is demonstrated in this article and in the works of other scholars⁹. Kim Christiaens particularly has strongly critiqued this approach in which the pivotal role and the agency of the FSLN is ignored. In his article on Western European solidarity with Nicaragua for example, he analysed 'the impact of Sandinista diplomacy on the Western European mobilisation for Nicaragua' in the late 1970s and 1980s¹⁰. Rather than analysing the domestic context of solidarity activism, then, Christiaens approaches the topic from a transnational perspective.

By tracing the origins and development of the Dutch Nicaragua Committee, this article contributes to the debate on the origins of solidarity movements. Ultimately, it argues that the Dutch Nicaragua Committee should be understood as a result of Sandinista diplomacy on the one hand, and of Dutch leftist activism and identification, both culturally and politically, with Latin America on the other hand. It therefore integrates the two abovementioned approaches to the history of Dutch solidarity movements. Indeed, while it needs to be acknowledged that the FSLN shaped the agenda of the NKN, important questions regarding the nature of the solidarity movement still need to be answered. For example, it has so far been unclear how members of the Dutch Nicaragua Committee have understood and practiced solidarity with Nicaragua on a daily basis. What did solidarity mean to them? What were their goals, how did they try to achieve them, and how successful were they? These are important questions for historians, as they contribute to our understanding of how distant Cold War struggles were experienced and fought over on the ground in Western Europe, turning them into truly transnational and global events.

To answer these questions, this article draws extensively on the archives of the Dutch Nicaragua Committee in the *International Institute of Social History* in Amsterdam. The key primary documents are correspondence, records of meetings and conferences, brochures, and pamphlets. For a local perspective, the archives of Nicaragua committees in Amsterdam and Groningen were studied. Finally, I have conducted interviews with members of the NKN, and analysed newspapers and Dutch parliamentary documents. While parliamentary documents were studied to get an impression of how the situation in Nicaragua was perceived by Dutch politicians, this article primarily deals with non-state actors and movements, as it attempts to integrate these grassroots histories into the global history of the Cold War. In doing so, it highlights the complexity and multipolarity of the Cold War in the late 1970s and 1980s and alters our understanding of this period.

This article adopts a chronological approach. Most importantly, this allows for an analysis of the impact of significant Cold War events on the practices and ideas of the Dutch solidarity movement. In the first section, the origins of Dutch solidarity with Nicaragua, as well as the early practices of the NKN are discussed. In the second part, the article focuses on the practices and campaigns of the Dutch Nicaragua Committee after the 1979 Sandinista victory. The third section revolves around

⁹ TURPIJN, Jouke. *80's Dilemma: Nederland in de jaren tachtig*. Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2011, p. 181.

¹⁰ CHRISTIAENS, Kim. Between diplomacy and solidarity. Op. cit.

another major turning point in the global Cold War, as the election of Ronald Reagan in 1981 shifted the focus of the Nicaragua solidarity movement towards non-intervention. In the final part of this article, the demise of Dutch solidarity with Nicaragua is discussed, which is a difficult task, taken into consideration that, officially, the NKN only officially ceased to exist in the early 2000s. However, this article argues that Dutch solidarity with Nicaragua had essentially lost its legitimacy in the late 1980s, due to the rise of the human rights paradigm, domestic events in Nicaragua, and the end of the Cold War.

2. Origins of solidarity with Nicaragua

As noted above, the unsuccessful attempt to occupy the Nicaraguan embassy in The Hague in 1978 was the first public demonstration of Dutch solidarity with Nicaragua. To fully capture the origins of the solidarity movement, however, we need to discuss the importance of a meeting between Hans Langenberg and Klaas Wellinga, the founders of the Dutch Nicaragua Committee, and Nicaraguan revolutionary Enrique Schmidt Cuadra. Furthermore, the practices of the Dutch Nicaragua Committee before the Sandinista victory, which focused on armed resistance, will be the topic of this section.

Langenberg, Wellinga, and Jannie van den Berg, another central figure in the Dutch Nicaragua Committee, were all members of the *Culture Collective Latin America (Kultuur Kollektief Latijns Amerika, or KKLA)*, an organisation that translated and distributed Latin American literature, poetry, and music in the Netherlands¹¹. In the late 1970s, Langenberg and Wellinga planned to translate and publish work of the Nicaraguan priest Ernesto Cardenal, a liberation theologian and fervent supporter of the FSLN¹². In order to obtain rights to use Cardenal's work they travelled to Wuppertal, where a small publishing house for Latin American literature was based. There, they met Hermann Schulz, a German author and solidarity activist who further encouraged their interest for Nicaragua and introduced them to Enrique Schmidt Cuadra a couple weeks later¹³.

Clearly, fascination with Latin American culture played an important role in the establishment of the Dutch Nicaragua Committee. Wellinga, a lecturer of Latin American Studies at the University of Utrecht, became interested in Latin American literature as a student in the 1960s, when the works of Julio Cortázar and Gabriel García Márquez started to gain international recognition. During the late 1970s and 1980s, Wellinga published several books and articles on Nicaraguan culture and the Sandinista revolution, both in academic journals and in popular left-wing magazines such as the *Groene Amsterdammer*¹⁴. Langenberg, a student of Wellinga in the early 1970s, was more interested in Latin American music. While his initial focus was on bands from the Southern Cone, such as the Uruguayan musicians Numa Moraes and

¹¹ Annual Report, 1984, box no. 1, [ANK]; Interview with Wellinga and Langenberg.

¹² CARDENAL, Ernesto. *Om Nicaragua te Bevrijden*. Amsterdam: KKLA and NKN, 1978.

¹³ Interview with Wellinga and Langenberg.

¹⁴ For example, RANDALL, Margaret; WELLINGA, Klaas and GAIKHORST, Hermien. *Een vrouw in de revolutie*. Utrecht: KKLA and NKN, 1980. WELLINGA, Klaas. *De bergen, de vogels, en Sandino: cultuur in Nicaragua*/ Antwerpen: Wereldvenster, 1983.

José Carbajal, he later shifted his attention to the music of the Nicaraguan brothers Carlos and Luis Enrique Mejía Godoy and their band Los de Palacagüina. Langenberg recorded their concerts in both Amsterdam and Managua and distributed these records in the Netherlands through the Culture Collective Latin America, bringing Nicaraguan music to the Dutch public¹⁵.

In the 1970s and 1980s in the Netherlands, cultural affiliation with Latin American authors and musicians was closely related to solidarity work, left-wing activism, and in some cases identification with the armed struggle of Latin American guerrillas. The music of Carlos and Luis Enrique Mejía Godoy, for instance, was part of the popular Latin American *Nueva Canción* movement. Returning to a more traditional folkloric style, these New Song musicians addressed social tensions in their region and delivered political messages to their audiences, often showing their support for armed revolutionary movements such as the FSLN¹⁶. For example, Carlos and Luis Enrique Mejía Godoy explain in their album *Guitarra Armada* (1979) how to make explosives, handle small arms, and disassemble and reassemble an M1 Carbine, a weapon commonly used by Somoza's National Guard. Wellinga and Langenberg therefore, by distributing and translating the works of these musicians and authors, were simultaneously working to make the Dutch more aware and sympathetic to the struggles in Central America.

Clearly, fascination with Latin America went beyond apolitical appreciation of Latin American culture. The political affiliation of members of the Dutch Nicaragua Committee with socialist movements and guerrilla fighters in Latin America becomes increasingly apparent if we take into consideration that members of the NKN were predominantly recruited from other Latin American solidarity groups, such as the Chile, Uruguay, Peru, and Argentina solidarity committees¹⁷. During the 60s and 70s, these groups had opposed the authoritarian dictatorships of the Southern Cone and supported the resistance of leftist and revolutionary movements by organising demonstrations and calling for boycotts. Both Wellinga and Langenberg for instance, worked for the Dutch Chile Committee before they got actively involved with the struggle of the Sandinistas. Also, most of the members of the Utrecht Nicaragua Committee lived together in a commune in de Van Speijkstraat¹⁸. The inhabitants of the Van Speijkstraat hosted Latin American exiles from the Southern Cone and organised weekly discussions groups, analysing the works of Lenin, Marx, and Fidel Castro, such as his Second Declaration of Havana (1962), which further demonstrates that their particular affiliation with Latin America went hand in hand with ideologies of socialism and anti-imperialism¹⁹.

Furthermore, Nicaragua was especially attractive to those who continued to believe in the value of armed struggle. As Chilean solidarity networks changed their

¹⁵ Popular in the Netherlands was the record of the "Concierto por la Paz", which was held in April 1983, Managua.

¹⁶ FAIRLEY, Jan. La Nueva Canción Latinoamericana. *Bulletin of Latin American Research*. 1984, vol. 3, n. 2.

¹⁷ 'Viewpoint of Dutch Nicaragua Committee on Solidarity Work with Nicaragua', June 1980, box no. 17, [NKN].

¹⁸ Interview with Wellinga and Langenberg.

¹⁹ Education brochure, March 1980, box no. 20, [NKN].

strategies in the late 1970s and increasingly used the language of human rights to denounce the crimes of the Pinochet regime, groups advocating armed struggle became more and more isolated²⁰. In the Netherlands, the Chile solidarity movement was divided regarding the question whether armed struggle or democratic elections would be a solution to the current political climate in Chile²¹. These internal disagreements prevented the movement from working effectively towards a common purpose, which was frustrating for the members. When the FSLN started achieving military victories in Nicaragua, then, many saw this as proof that armed struggle could still be a successful strategy and started working on solidarity with Nicaragua. Klaas Wellinga for example, was the Dutch representative of the far left Chilean guerrilla movement *Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria* (Revolutionary Left Movement, or MIR) before he became a founding member of the NKN²².

To summarize, then, the members of the Dutch Nicaragua Committee in the late 1970s were activists who tended to identify themselves with Latin American literature and music, the armed struggle of leftist movements in the Third World, and with the ideas of Lenin, Marx, and Castro. Most of them were students, which is reflected in the fact that most solidarity committees originated in university cities²³. These are the 'Dutch origins' of the Nicaragua solidarity movement and they demonstrate that Dutch solidarity with Nicaragua did not emerge from a vacuum. Rather, it was built on previous experiences and provided a new momentum for older ideological convictions. Indeed, the movement was part of a culture of idealism and activism that existed in the 1960s, 1970s and early 1980s in the Netherlands, as in the rest of Western Europe²⁴.

However, this is not the full story; as Christiaens correctly pointed out, the establishment of the transnational solidarity movement was also the result of the diplomatic efforts of the FSLN to create an international support base. The mobilisation of international public opinion had its roots in the strategy of the *Terceristas*, the most influential and pragmatic section of the FSLN in the late 1970s²⁵. In Nicaragua, the goal of the *Terceristas* was, as Daniel Ortega described it, to join 'together all the anti-Somoza sectors and mass organisations of the country including sectors of the opposition bourgeoisie'²⁶. This search of the FSLN for a broad support base was not limited to the Nicaraguan population, but was also applied in the rest of the world. In the late 1970s, Nicaraguan exiles and immigrants in the United States, Latin America, and Europe mobilised themselves, sometimes on their own initiative and sometimes directly encouraged by the FSLN, and started to

²⁰ KELLY. The 1973 Chilean coup and the origins of transnational human rights activism. 2013, Op. cit., p. 167-168.

²¹ BEERENDS. *Weg met Pinochet*. 1998. Op. cit., p.9.

²² Interview Wellinga and Langenberg.

²³ Interview with Jannie van den Berg, 25 August 2014.

²⁴ See for example, KLIMKE, Martin and SCHARLOTH, Joachim. *1968 in Europe: A History of Protest and Activism, 1956-1977*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.

²⁵ WESTAD, Arne. *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Time*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007, pp. 339-340.

²⁶ MIRANDA, Pedro; ORTEGA, Daniel, and GORMAN, Stephen. Interview with Daniel Ortega. *Latin American Perspectives*. 1979, vol.1, n. 6, p.116.

build an international network of supporters of the Sandinistas²⁷.

In the Netherlands, Enrique Schmidt Cuadra helped to shift the attention of Wellinga and Langenberg towards Nicaragua, and brought local solidarity committees together in a Western European network²⁸. At the instructions of the FSLN, for example, Wellinga, Langenberg, and Schulz became the coordinators of the European solidarity movement, which effectively turned the Van Speijkstraat in Utrecht into the headquarters of the Western European solidarity movement for Nicaragua²⁹. So, through the efforts of Sandinistas like Schmidt, the Dutch Nicaragua Committee became truly transnational, as contacts were established with prominent FSLN members such as Sergio Ramírez, Raúl Guerra, Tomás Borge and Bayardo Arce Castaño. Some of these Sandinistas would later visit the Netherlands to give speeches at demonstrations, participate in debates, or give lectures. For instance, Tomás Borge, the Nicaraguan Minister of Home Affairs, visited Amsterdam in 1983 to talk about the successes of the revolution³⁰.

Finally, however, we cannot underestimate the impact of contingency on the establishment of Dutch Nicaragua committees in the late 1970s. As Cold War historian Arne Westad puts it, the ‘*Terceristas* got lucky’ in January 1978, when the assassination of Pedro Joaquín Chamorro, a liberal critic of the Somoza regime, led to a broad and rapidly growing opposition movement against the dictatorship³¹. From that moment on, the FSLN started to book military victories, a fact that was not lost on solidarity activists, or on the Dutch media. Generally speaking, the media was sympathetic towards the struggle of the Sandinistas. For instance, already in February 1978, one Dutch newspaper reported that Somoza’s days were ‘numbered’, while another talked about Nicaraguan students with improvised weapons ‘resisting’ the National Guard³². It is unclear if the local Nicaragua committees in the Netherlands would have been founded without the military successes of the Sandinistas and the increased media attention for the armed struggle in Nicaragua. The Dutch Nicaragua Committee itself admitted in 1984 that many local solidarity groups were established in a direct response to the anti-regime demonstrations and violence that ravaged Nicaragua in 1978 and 1979³³.

As noted in the introduction, the purpose of the NKN in the years before the Sandinista victory was to support the FSLN in its struggle against Somoza. In practice, this meant that the local Nicaragua committees tried to collect as much money as possible for the Sandinistas, by organising fundraising activities, such as concerts, documentaries, door-to-door collections, and manifestations. Then, the

²⁷ CLOSE, David; MARTI I PUIG, Salvador and MCCONNELL, Shelley A. (eds.). *The Sandinistas and Nicaragua since 1979*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2011, p.272.

²⁸ For more information on the European dimension of solidarity activism for Nicaragua, see CHRISTIAENS, Kim. *Between diplomacy and solidarity*. Op. cit.

²⁹ ‘Concept Dutch Viewpoint for the 10th European Conference in Brussels’, 23 November 1984, box no. 17, [NKN].

³⁰ Records of NKN meeting, 4 September 1983, box no 1, [NKA].

³¹ WESTAD. *The Global Cold War*. Op. cit., p. 340.

³² Leeuwarder Courant, 15 February 1978; Dagblad van het Noorden, 31 August 1978. Available on <<http://www.delpher.nl>>. (Accessed on 17 July 2013).

³³ Annual Report, 1984, box no. 1, [ANK].

money that was made by the local committees was transferred to the NKN, who would make sure it arrived in Nicaragua³⁴. The committees were relatively successful during this period, and by the end of 1978 the NKN was able to send 39,500 guilders, approximately 15,000 dollars, to the FSLN. A large amount of this money was directly transferred to the Sandinistas, while smaller portions of cash money were given to Enrique Schmidt Cuadra and other Dutch solidarity activists who travelled to Nicaragua³⁵.

While later campaigns of the NKN would be of a more humanitarian character, during this period it was obvious that the solidarity groups took a political stance. On the 13th of October 1978 for example, in cooperation with the other Latin American committees, the Dutch Nicaragua Committee organised a 'Che Guevara manifestation' with the accompanying slogan 'Support the FSLN'³⁶. Preferably, demonstrations were held in front of the US embassy or consulate. At the US embassy in The Hague in June 1979, for instance, protesters called for 'non-intervention' as they burned a 'Somoza doll'³⁷. This demonstrates that the activists were well aware of the dynamics of the Cold War, and knew that the US played a crucial role in this Central American country. Additionally, the members of the solidarity committees knew that money they collected for the FSLN would be used to buy new weapons³⁸. This was not only discussed at NKN meetings and European congresses, but also communicated with members of Dutch political parties, who seemed sympathetic towards the Sandinistas but were not willing to openly voice their support for armed struggle³⁹.

Furthermore, the dynamics of the Cold War were also present in the Dutch parliamentary debate about the situation in Nicaragua, and had an impact on the way in which political parties perceived the NKN. For example, when the NKN asked the conservative-liberal People's Party For Freedom and Democracy (*Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie*, or VVD), one of the governing parties, to support the Sandinistas, they refused, arguing that this would only help the Soviet Union. The NKN downplayed the Sandinista relations with the Soviet Union, ironically stating that 'the VVD is apparently unaware that Nicaragua is not next to Russia'⁴⁰. The Dutch Labour Party (*Partij van de Arbeid*, or PvdA), however, was not afraid to openly align itself with the NKN, and openly critiqued the Somoza dictatorship, amongst others by asking the Dutch government to take a stand on Israeli weapon transfers to Nicaraguan regime⁴¹.

³⁴ For example, on several occasions the committees screened the prizewinning documentary 'Nicaragua, September 1978' by Frank Diamand.

³⁵ Records of NKN Meeting, 16 November 1978, box no 1, [NKN]; Viewpoint of Dutch Nicaragua Committee on Solidarity Work with Nicaragua', June 1980, box no. 17, [NKN].

³⁶ Poster, no. 30051001002994, 1978, [NAA].

³⁷ *Vrije Stem*, 20 June 1979.

³⁸ Interview Wellinga and Langenberg.

³⁹ 'Viewpoint of Dutch Nicaragua Committee on Solidarity Work with Nicaragua', June 1980, box no. 17, [NKN].

⁴⁰ Records of NKN Meeting, 7 January 1979, box no. 1, [NKN].

⁴¹ Appendix Debates, House of Representatives, The Hague, 20 November 1978, document no. 426. Available on <<http://www.statengeneraaldigitaal.nl>>. (Accessed on 3 August 2013); Interview Wellinga and Langenberg.

3. The Sandinista victory

The hesitations of some political parties and humanitarian groups to support the armed struggle of the FSLN would soon become irrelevant, as the situation in Nicaragua changed drastically in July 1979. Sandinista forces first captured León and then the capital Managua, forcing Somoza to flee to the United States, where he was assassinated in 1980. For the first time in more than twenty years, Latin American guerrillas had achieved a revolutionary victory. In the new Nicaraguan coalition government, which dedicated itself to the rebuilding of a country that was ravaged by decades of civil war, the FSLN became the dominant party⁴². For the solidarity movement in the Netherlands, then, this meant that they no longer supported an anti-regime leftist movement, but the most powerful political party in the Nicaraguan government. This section discusses how the Sandinista victory affected the practices and ideas of the Dutch solidarity movement in the early 1980s.

In the first months after the revolution, the Sandinista triumph seemed to have had a positive impact on Dutch solidarity with Nicaragua. Even though the Nicaragua solidarity committees were able to collect a significant amount of money in the years before the 1979 Revolution, this was nothing compared to the approximately 350,000 dollars that the Dutch Nicaragua Committee, in cooperation with the PvdA and the socialist television broadcaster VARA, collected with the purpose to 'rebuild Nicaragua' in the months after the revolution⁴³. What is more, the broad support in the Netherlands for the Sandinistas following July 1979 becomes even more obvious if we take into consideration that in January 1980 all the major Dutch political parties, except for the VVD, supported another nationwide campaign of the NKN, which specifically focused on education and literacy in the Nicaraguan countryside. This highly successful campaign ended with a festive Latin America manifestation in Utrecht with, amongst others, a musical performance from the Godoy brothers. At the highpoint of this manifestation, the Dutch Nicaragua Committee, together with the Minister of Development Cooperation, the Christian-Democrat Jan de Koning, handed Sergio Ramírez, who presided over the National Council of Education in Nicaragua, a check of 250.000 dollars⁴⁴.

The success of these campaigns can, to an extent, be contributed to the romanticised way in which the Nicaragua committees portrayed the Sandinistas, but the Dutch media also contributed. In the late 1970s, Dutch newspapers portrayed the Nicaraguan civil war as a struggle for freedom by an oppressed people, and this contributed to the positive image of the Sandinistas. For example, newspapers documented the Sandinista victory by publishing pictures of FSLN fighters hugging their children 'with tears of happiness' in their eyes and images of laughing Nicaraguans who were 'finally free to read other newspapers than Somoza's *Novedades*'⁴⁵. Furthermore, political parties, non-governmental organisations such as Hivos, Oikos, and Novib, and the Dutch Ministry for Development Cooperation, all

⁴² WESTAD. *The Global Cold War*. Op. cit., p. 341.

⁴³ Records of NKN Meeting, 17 September 1979, box no. 1, [NKN].

⁴⁴ Annual Report, 1984, box no. 1 [ANK]; Interview with Wellinga and Langenberg.

⁴⁵ De Waarheid, 18 August 1979; Leeuwarder Courant, 23 July 1979, Available on <<http://www.delpher.nl>>. (Accessed on 17 July 2013).

proved to be more willing to cooperate with the Dutch Nicaragua Committee once their reservations about armed resistance were rendered obsolete by the fact that the FSLN had already defeated Somoza. The increasingly humanitarian character of the campaigns of the Dutch Nicaragua Committee which, like the new Nicaraguan government, focused on rebuilding the Nicaraguan society, further encouraged NGOs and the Ministry for Development Cooperation to align themselves with the NKN. The latter even agreed to subsidize the Dutch Nicaragua Committee to such an extent that several of its members, such as Wim Jillings and Jannie van den Berg, could earn their living by working full time for the national committee⁴⁶.

In this context, however, it is important to note that the themes of these campaigns were not solely the result of the 'creativity' of the Nicaragua committees. Rather, they were part of truly global campaigns that were undertaken in response to instructions from the Nicaraguan government. Solidarity campaigns in the Netherlands were usually an extension of the domestic policy of the new Sandinista government⁴⁷. For example, the focus on education and literacy in the campaigns of the Dutch Nicaragua Committee was no coincidence, but was chosen in close coordination with the new Nicaraguan government, and can only be understood in the context of the national literacy 'crusade' the Sandinistas waged at home⁴⁸. And whereas the campaign 'Biking for Nicaragua' might seem like a typical Dutch example of solidarity activism, this theme too was part of a global campaign coordinated by the Nicaraguan Ministry of Education⁴⁹. In the United States for example, solidarity activists also campaigned with the slogan 'Bikes, not Bombs'⁵⁰.

The local solidarity committees were of course free to decide on the activities they would organise to raise money for these campaigns. In that sense, committees were indeed creative, as they organised charity runs, film screenings, information evenings, concerts, et cetera. However, as we have seen above, these events were more than spontaneous local outbursts of solidarity. In this sense, the campaigns and activities of the Dutch solidarity committees are an interesting example of how the local, the national, and the global intersected during the Cold War, and of how grassroots movements in Western Europe were connected to national governments and revolutionaries in Latin America. Furthermore, it demonstrates that the success of the solidarity campaigns in the Netherlands were not just the result of the dedication and creativity of the Dutch solidarity committees, but also of the ability of the Sandinistas to internationalise their domestic programme and capitalise on already existing sentiments in the Dutch society.

Despite these successful campaigns, the year following the Sandinista victory was one of the more difficult periods for Dutch Solidarity Committee, as it appeared that the FSLN was rapidly losing interest in the Western European solidarity

⁴⁶ Interview with Wellinga and Langenberg; BEERENDS and BROERE. *De bewogen beweging*. Op. Cit., p. 101.

⁴⁷ Records of NKN Meeting, 26 August 1979, box no. 1, [NKN].

⁴⁸ Letter, Ministerio de Educación to NKN, date unknown, box no. 40, [NKN]; Letter, Luisamanda Castillo, Relaciones Internacionales, Programa de Educación de Adultos, Ministerio de Educación to NKN, 8 February 1984, box no. 40, [NKN].

⁴⁹ Letter, Luisamanda Castillo to Hans Langenberg, 10 May 1982, box no. 20, [NKN].

⁵⁰ Pamphlet of Bikes not Bombs campaign, Washington, date unknown, box no. 40 [NKN].

movement. This became painfully obvious in June 1980, when the representatives of the national solidarity committees of ten Western European countries gathered in Vienna for their biannual conference and, without notifying the committees in advance, no FSLN delegation appeared at this meeting, even though the Sandinista Eric Blandón was traveling through Switzerland when the conference took place. In the conference's final resolution, the national committees voiced their frustration with the FSLN and stressed the continued relevance of their solidarity work, referring to the continued 'imperialist offensive' in Central America. Also, they unanimously rejected an earlier proposal from commandant Bayardo Arce, who had suggested stripping the solidarity committees of their political character, turning them into *casas culturales*⁵¹. Interestingly, at a time when the FSLN seemed ready to give up on the European solidarity movement, the representatives of the national committees continued to believe in the necessity of their work and urged the FSLN to not overlook their value.

Although the Dutch willingness to support the Nicaraguan revolution might not have been dependent on the diplomatic efforts of the FSLN, it soon became clear that the solidarity committees needed the FSLN to be able to carry out their work effectively. As the members of the Dutch solidarity committees noted at the start of the 1980s, it was hard, if not impossible, to practice solidarity if there was no constructive communication with the FSLN. Most importantly, without relevant information about the developments in Nicaragua, the NKN was not capable of creating powerful 'propaganda', such as poster and news bulletins, which could be used to influence the domestic public opinion in favour of the Sandinistas⁵². Worried about the status of the Dutch solidarity movement, Langenberg and Wellinga travelled to Nicaragua to convince Bayardo Arce of the importance of the NKN. However, it seems that the proposals put forward by Wellinga and Langenberg did not create any changes in the Sandinista foreign policy since the Dutch Nicaragua Committee did not receive any more information from the Nicaraguan government, or an official response from Arce, in the months following their visit⁵³.

The lack of communication from the FSLN and the changed situation in Nicaragua gave rise to discussions within the Dutch solidarity movement about the continued relevance and nature of their solidarity work. A critical point of debate was how solidarity with Nicaragua, both in theory and in practice, should be interpreted now that the fight against Somoza was won. Would they continue to provide the Nicaraguan government with financial support, and if so, how could they maintain the political character of their work? At a national conference in January 1981, it was decided that 'political solidarity with the process in Nicaragua' would guide the activities of the Dutch Nicaragua movement. The activists chose the term 'political solidarity' because, in their view, oppression in Central America was based on 'political foundations, namely our capitalistic and imperialistic' system. In practice, this would mean that the campaigns of the NKN would be focused on the needs of the

⁵¹ 'Resolution of European Conference of Nicaragua Solidarity Committees', 15 June 1980, box no. 17, [NKN].

⁵² Viewpoint of Dutch Nicaragua Committee on Solidarity Work with Nicaragua', June 1980, box no. 17, [NKN].

⁵³ Ibidem.

Nicaraguan people, the 'vanguard party' FSLN, and the Nicaraguan government, as well as on creating 'awareness' in the Netherlands. The literacy campaign in 1980 was therefore considered to be the perfect example of political solidarity, since it informed the Dutch about the situation in Nicaragua while simultaneously providing the Sandinista government with financial support⁵⁴.

However, in reality, it was hard to distinguish these 'political' campaigns from humanitarian ones, as they generally focused on literacy, education and medical supplies, and therefore did not carry a specific political message. This humanitarian focus was necessary, the NKN admitted, because the neither the Dutch public, nor the Ministry of Development Cooperation, would be willing to fund their campaigns if these were too political. However, not all of local committees thought this was the right strategy for the solidarity movement. The Eindhoven Nicaragua Committee for example, argued at one national conference that these 'charity' campaigns portray people in the Third World as if they are 'weak, pathetic, helpless, and stupid'⁵⁵. The socialist vision of the Dutch Nicaragua Committee, the activists from Eindhoven argued, does not allow for a predominantly financial approach to solidarity as, in the long run, the people in Nicaragua benefit more from political, than from financial and material support⁵⁶. Nevertheless, these activists were a radical minority group within the broader Nicaragua solidarity movement. This is reflected by the fact that, at a national conference, a large majority of the activists voted that the Dutch Nicaragua Committee should support the building of a 'just society' rather than a 'socialist society' in Nicaragua⁵⁷.

Another difficult question was the relationship of the solidarity movement with the FSLN. While the members of the solidarity committees agreed on the fact that this relationship had deteriorated due to the lack of attention from the FSLN, they were unsure about the best way to move forward from there. Some argued that, if that Sandinistas refused to cooperate, they might as well stop with their solidarity work altogether, while others remained confident that the FSLN would eventually come around. In the end, it was not necessary to make a decision on this topic since the FSLN would radically change its policies towards the Western European solidarity movement in 1981. Interestingly, this shift was not caused by the proposals from Wellinga and Langenberg, but rather by the changing nature of the global Cold War in the early 1980s.

4. Solidarity, Reagan, and anti-intervention

Following Ronald Reagan's election in 1981, the US administration embarked on a more offensive and hard-line approach to the Cold War. The new Republican president was adamant to stop spread of communism in the Western Hemisphere, framing the revolutionary wars in Central America in strict Cold War terms. For

⁵⁴ Records of NKN National Congress, 14 February 1981, box no. 2, [NKN].

⁵⁵ Paper from Eindhoven Nicaragua Committee, September 1984, box no. 17, [NKN].

⁵⁶ Ibidem.

⁵⁷ 7 people voted that the NKN should support a socialist society in Nicaragua, 22 voted against this, 13 abstained. 41 people voted that the NKN should support a just society in Nicaragua, 2 voted against this, no one abstained; Records of NKN Meeting, 15 March 1985, box no. 17 [NKN].

Reagan, the left-wing Sandinista government in Nicaragua was a direct threat to US security. During his presidency, he launched a covert war against the Sandinistas, cut off all aid to the Nicaraguan government, and later combined this with an economic blockade⁵⁸. The CIA, in coordination with the White House, trained and supplied a counterrevolutionary army, which consisted principally of former members of Somoza's National Guard. This army of Contras, as they came to be known, fought a bloody war against the Sandinistas during the entire 1980s. The Contra War was costly and violent civil war for Nicaragua, since Contra forces raided villages, massacred civilians, and sabotaged the Sandinista government where possible⁵⁹. Amongst other things, the FSLN responded to this offensive by trying to get international public opinion on their side, as well as to maintain the financial and political support of Western European governments⁶⁰. The Sandinistas, then, turned once again to the Western European solidarity movement and, as this section demonstrates, this signified another change in the strategy and practices of the solidarity committees in the Netherlands.

From 26 to 31 January 1981, the FSLN organised the first *International Meeting of Solidarity with Nicaragua* in Managua and invited representatives of solidarity committees from more than 30 countries, including the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and West Germany⁶¹. For the delegates, it was an impressive conference, and participants were received with great extravagance by all the *commandantes* of the Sandinista revolution⁶². As one British representative later noted, the only other occasion where the entire National Directorate came together at a festive reception to receive a foreign delegation was when the Cuban leader Fidel Castro visited the country⁶³. Raúl Guerra, the new Sandinista coordinator of the European solidarity movement, apparently 'laughed' when the Dutch representatives confronted him with earlier FSLN proposals to transform the solidarity committees into cultural groups. From now on, Guerra told the participants, solidarity committees would be treated as if they were 'big political parties'⁶⁴. For the European participants, then, it was obvious that the FSLN had changed its mind on the significance of the solidarity movement for the survival of the Sandinista revolution after a period of relative neglect.

During the conference's inaugural address, Bayardo Arce 'expressed the gratitude of the Nicaraguan people' for the contribution the solidarity activists had made 'to help this revolution find its way'⁶⁵. However, he continued, the struggle was far from over, since the revolution was under renewed attack by the US administration, which falsely accused the Sandinista government of 'smuggling

⁵⁸ WESTAD. *The Global Cold War*. Op. cit., p. 344-345.

⁵⁹ KRUIJT, Dirk. *Guerrillas: War and Peace in Central America*. London and New York: Zed Books, 2008, p. 120.

⁶⁰ Ibidem, p. 114.

⁶¹ Report of conference in Managua, 1981, box no. 17, [NKN].

⁶² Author's interview with Klaas Wellinga and Hans Langenberg.

⁶³ Report by British representatives of conference in Managua, 1981, box no. 17, [NKN].

⁶⁴ Report by Dutch representatives of conference in Managua, 1981, box no. 17, [NKN].

⁶⁵ Transcript of speech by Commander Bayardo Arce Castaño, Managua, January 1981, box no. 17, [NKN].

weapons' to revolutionaries in El Salvador⁶⁶. The purpose of this conference then, was to launch a global anti-intervention campaign to condemn 'North American imperialism' in Central America. Most importantly, it was proposed that, in order to counteract the 'lies and falsehoods' of transnational press agencies, the solidarity committees would 'publish widely on the achievements and advances of the Sandinista People's Revolution'⁶⁷. At the Western European level, the FSLN proposed that the Nicaragua movement would establish stronger ties with other Central America groups, in order to create a powerful and broad 'anti-intervention' front, which would organise campaigns both at the European and the national level⁶⁸. After Reagan's elections therefore, the Sandinistas intended once again to use the transnational solidarity movement as a tool for its diplomatic efforts in the Western Europe.

In the Netherlands, the Dutch Nicaragua Committee largely followed the line that was set out for them by the FSLN in Managua. Already on 2 April 1981, the Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala solidarity committees came together and founded a national 'anti-intervention platform'. As the FSLN had suspected, this platform enjoyed broad support in the Netherlands, taking into consideration that more than eighty organisations were willing to openly align themselves with the anti-intervention movement⁶⁹. The support base was diverse, as organisations varied from human rights groups and political parties to solidarity committees, peace groups, labour unions, and church organisations, reflecting that, in the 1980s, the concept of anti-intervention attracted a much broader support base than the idea of armed struggle. By establishing an anti-intervention platform therefore, the Dutch Nicaragua Committee had created new channels through which they could to reach the Dutch public.

To put pressure on the Dutch government to denounce US foreign policy, as well as to make people in the Netherlands more aware of the situation in Central America, the anti-intervention platform organised several demonstrations. In particular, the committees described the demonstrations in Utrecht and Amsterdam, which took place in 1981 and 1982 respectively, as a success. Thousands of people protested, and they received widespread media coverage⁷⁰. At these demonstrations, which preferably took place in front of a US institution, a strong anti-American sentiment was certainly present. For example, in Amsterdam, protesters clashed with the police when the former tried to attack the American consulate. And while the Central America committees officially denounced attacks on US institutions, they also stated to the press that they could certainly understand these acts of 'aggression' from the protesters, seeing that the 'US was openly involved in genocide in Central America, and El Salvador in particular'⁷¹. Propaganda material of the Dutch Nicaragua

⁶⁶ Ibidem.

⁶⁷ Final resolution of international solidarity conference, Managua, 31 January 1981, box no. 17, [NKN].

⁶⁸ Records of European solidarity conference, Paris, April, 1981, box no 72, [NKN].

⁶⁹ Preparation material for national NKN conference, 17 October 1981, box no. 1, [NKN].

⁷⁰ The Anti-intervention platform estimated that around 10.000 people protested in Amsterdam, and 4.000 in Utrecht; Preparation material for NKN conference, 17 October 1981, no. 1 [NKN]; Press statement, 27 February 1982, box no. 53, [NKN].

⁷¹ Press statement, 27 February 1982, box no. 53, [NKN].

Committee expressed a similar sentiment in this period, as slogans like 'CIA: Hands off Nicaragua!' were combined with images of the bald eagle, the symbol of the United States, attacking Central America⁷². This demonstrates that, in the context of the anti-intervention movement, there was more room for the Dutch Nicaragua Committee to express political ideas than in its individual campaigns which, in order to get sufficient financial support, were portrayed to the Dutch public as predominantly humanitarian.

Furthermore, the Nicaragua committees, as was decided in Managua in 1981, dedicated themselves to analysing and shaping Dutch media coverage of the situation in Central America, and Nicaragua in particular. A Nicaragua committee from Amsterdam for example, composed an in-depth report on this topic. In this highly critical report, they scrutinised Dutch media coverage of Nicaragua, and concluded that Dutch newspapers were heavily biased against Nicaragua, as they uncritically copied the US point of view⁷³. The members of the committees responded to these 'false allegations' in the Dutch press by writing letters and submitting articles to newspapers and magazines. In these articles, they attacked US interventionism in Central America, and lauded the achievement of the Sandinista government. Klaas Wellinga for example, wrote several letters to the *NRC*, a prominent Dutch newspaper, in which he denied that the Nicaraguan government was supplying weapons to the guerrillas in El Salvador, and argued that the Dutch media failed to report objectively on the situation in Nicaragua⁷⁴. However, the *NRC* refused to publish these letters, arguing that they were 'too long'⁷⁵. Generally speaking, the attitude of other national newspapers towards the NKN was similar to the *NRC*, as they naturally preferred their own articles to those from the solidarity activists, which they saw as too biased and political. This is reflected in a letter from a foreign affairs editor to two members of the Dutch Nicaragua Committee, in which he thanks them for their engagement, but states forcefully that *Parool*, as a critical newspaper, does not 'indiscriminately' recite the statements of the Sandinistas⁷⁶.

Finally, the NKN attempted to influence Dutch foreign policy by directly targeting Dutch parliamentarians and ministers, as well as American diplomats. The Dutch minister of foreign affairs Hans van den Broek, a Christian Democrat, was an important figure in this context, and the solidarity committees sent him several letters in which they asked the Dutch government to strongly condemn the hostile policy of the US towards Central America⁷⁷. George P. Schultz, the US Secretary of State who visited the Netherlands in 1982, received a similar critical letter, in which the Nicaragua, Guatemala, El Salvador, and the Honduras committees urged him to

⁷² See for example, Poster, 1979, image no. 30051002867346,[NAA]; Poster, 1986, image no. 30051000651239, [NAA]; Poster, 1984, image no. 3005100286736 [NAA].

⁷³ Report Amsterdam Nicaragua Committee, 1981, box no. 2, [ANK].

⁷⁴ See for example, Letter, Klaas Wellinga to NRC, 24 February 1981, box no. 5, [NKN]; Klaas Wellinga to NRC, 9 April 1981, box no 5, [NKN].

⁷⁵ Records NKN meeting, 12 April 1981, box no. 1, [NKN].

⁷⁶ Letter, René ter Steege, *Parool* Editor of Foreign Affairs, to Henk de Vries en Ronald van de Heiden, Amsterdam, 12 March 1981, box no. 5, [NKN].

⁷⁷ Letter, Dutch Nicaragua Committee, Dutch El Salvador Committee, Dutch Guatemala Committee, and Dutch Honduras Committee to Hans van den Broek, Minister of Foreign Affairs, The Hague, 6 December 1982, box no. 5, [NKN].

respect 'the right to self-determination of the people of Nicaragua'⁷⁸. Interestingly, Van den Broek did not fail to engage with the committees, as he replied to most of their letters and even sent them a summary of his conversation with Schultz, in which he wrote that 'it is obvious that the United States and the Netherlands have different opinions about the right policy towards Central America'⁷⁹. Although this can be seen as an indication that the minister agreed, at least to some extent, with the ideas of the NKN, letters like these did not impress the activists, which remained highly critical of their centre right government, arguing that the Dutch government did not want 'to upset Reagan' and therefore failed to carry out an independent foreign policy⁸⁰.

While it is virtually impossible to measure the exact effect of these lobbying efforts on the Dutch foreign policy towards both Nicaragua and the United States, it is clear that the Dutch government was not uncritical of US foreign policy in Central America. For instance, the government stated in parliament that it believed that the US was making a mistake in trying to isolate the Sandinista government⁸¹. On the other hand however, Van den Broek hesitated to address US military intervention in the region, arguing in parliament that there was no actual proof that the US supplied weapons to the Contra forces⁸². In that sense, the NKN failed to convince the Dutch government that the civil war in Nicaragua was, at least to some extent, the result of US intervention. With regards to Nicaragua, Dutch foreign policy was friendly and the Netherlands was one of the biggest donors of developmental aid⁸³. On his visit to Managua in 1983, Van den Broek even went as far to compare the Dutch independence wars (1568-1648) to the struggle of the Sandinistas, stating that the Dutch 'understand historically what a struggle for independence means'⁸⁴. However, as we shall see in the next section, the Dutch government also took an increasingly critical stance towards Nicaragua, as human rights organisations published reports demonstrating that, in Latin America, human rights violations were not only committed by authoritarian anti-communist regimes, but also by the leftist Sandinista government.

5. The end of solidarity with Nicaragua

In the final section of this article, the difficult question of when and how solidarity with Nicaragua ended in the Netherlands is explored. Officially, the Dutch Nicaragua Committee ceased to exist in 2001, which could be an indication that solidarity

⁷⁸ Letter, Dutch Nicaragua Committee, Dutch El Salvador Committee, Dutch Guatemala Committee, Dutch Honduras Committee to George P. Schulz, Secretary of State, The Hague, 6 December 1982, box no. 5, [NKN].

⁷⁹ Letter, Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Anti-intervention Platform, 30 December 1982, box no. 5, [NKN].

⁸⁰ Preparation material for national NKN conference, 2 January 1984, box no. 1, [NKN].

⁸¹ Appendix Debates, House of Representatives, The Hague, 15 November 1985, document no. 398. Available on <<http://www.statengeneraaldigitaal.nl>>. (Accessed on 3 August 2013)

⁸² Ibidem.

⁸³ Most notably, the government continued with development aid to the Sandinista government; Appendix Debates, House of Representatives, The Hague, 10 August 1982, document no. 1469. Available on <<http://www.statengeneraaldigitaal.nl>>. (Accessed on 3 August 2013); TURPIJN. *Dilemma: Nederland in de jaren tachtig*. Op. Cit., p. 180-181.

⁸⁴ Hans van den Broek, as quoted in TURPIJN. *Dilemma: Nederland in de jaren tachtig*. Op. Cit., p. 181.

continued until the end of the 20th century⁸⁵. What is more, many of the twinning links that were established between Dutch and Nicaraguan cities in the 1980s still exist today. On the other hand, it can also be argued that solidarity ended in 1990, when the FSLN lost the Nicaraguan elections, which effectively ended the Sandinista Revolution. However, by that time, the Dutch Nicaragua Committee had lost many of its members, and many local committees had been dissolved⁸⁶. Rather than deciding on one specific end date, this section deals with the more important question of how the Dutch Nicaragua solidarity movement lost its purpose and legitimacy in the course of the 1980s.

Most importantly, the NKN became a casualty of the end of the Cold War, given that in the mid-1980s it became more and more unlikely that the US would actually intervene in Nicaragua⁸⁷. As the threat of US intervention became less prominent, the necessity of the anti-intervention movement simultaneously dissolved. For the Dutch solidarity movement, this meant that the concept of anti-intervention, which had been at the core of many of the campaigns of the NKN, became increasingly irrelevant. If the Nicaraguan revolution was no longer in danger, what was the point of defending it? Additionally, the end of the Cold War intersected with the rise of a global human rights paradigm, which replaced other 'utopias', most notably the competing Cold War ideologies communism and capitalism, but also the language of anti-imperialism and socialism that the Dutch Nicaragua Committee had adopted⁸⁸. Therefore, in the mid-1980s, the concepts and ideas that had been at the core of the Nicaragua solidarity movement lost their momentum, which eroded the legitimacy of the NKN.

Apart from replacing older Cold War ideologies, the human rights movement also impacted the way in which the Sandinistas were perceived abroad. It therefore had an ambiguous relation with the solidarity movement for Nicaragua. On the one hand, the NKN did not hesitate to use the language and the reports of human rights movements to denounce Somoza, or the US-backed authoritarian regimes in Central America and the Southern Cone. For example, in a letter to the US Secretary of State, reports of Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch were cited to demonstrate that the Sandinista government protected human rights, while the governments of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras violated them on a regular basis⁸⁹. On the other hand, if human rights groups accused the Sandinista government of human rights violations, which occurred several times in the 1980s, the NKN worked hard to deny these accusations, or at least to explain them as a logical, albeit regrettable, response to the Contra War and the danger of US

⁸⁵ Dagblad van het Noorden, 19 October 2001. Available on <<http://www.delpher.nl>>. (Accessed on 17 July 2013).

⁸⁶ 'The new course of the NKN', *Alerta*, April 1989, box no. 176 [NKN], Newsletter NKN, 1991, box. No. 176 [NKN].

⁸⁷ WESTAD. *The Global Cold War*. Op. cit., p. 347-348. For more information on the end of the Cold War, see KALINOVSKY, Artemy M. and RADCHENKO, Sergey, eds., *The End of The Cold War in the Third World: New Perspectives on Regional Conflict*, London and New York: Routledge, 2013.

⁸⁸ See for example, MOYN, Samuel. *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History*. London and Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010 and WESTAD. *The Global Cold War*. Op. cit.

⁸⁹ Letter, Dutch Nicaragua Committee, Dutch El Salvador Committee, Dutch Guatemala Committee, Dutch Honduras Committee to George P. Schulz, Secretary of State, The Hague, 6 December 1982, box no. 5, [NKN].

intervention.

A telling example in this context is the response of the NKN to the arrest of human rights activist José Esteban Gonzáles on 19 February, 1981. Gonzáles was the coordinator of the Nicaraguan Permanent Commission of Human Rights, a non-governmental organisation, which was founded in 1977. In 1981, the commission published a report in which political prisoners, illegal executions, and cases of torture under the Sandinista government were discussed. In an apparent response to this report, Enrique Schmidt Cuadra who, after the 1979 Sandinista victory, had returned to Nicaragua to become Police Chief of Managua, ‘accompanied by other soldiers, broke down the door, entered and occupied the offices of the Permanent Commission on Human Rights in Nicaragua’, and arrested Gonzáles⁹⁰.

In the Netherlands, this event was critically discussed in the House of Representatives, as well as in the media, with provocative headlines like ‘Now, the left is doing the torturing’ or ‘Secret executions and disappearances in Nicaragua’⁹¹. The NKN, well aware that human rights were ‘a sensitive’ topic in the Netherlands, responded with a media offensive⁹². In letters to prominent newspapers such as the NRC, the NKN not only compared the ‘political prisoners’ in Nicaragua with the war criminals imprisoned in Europe after the Second World War, he also called Gonzáles a ‘liar’ who had repeatedly tried to stop the Sandinista revolution from happening, and suggested that newspapers, by publishing on human rights violations in Nicaragua, were effectively supporting Reagan’s policy to isolate the Sandinista government⁹³. So, for the Dutch Nicaragua Committee, human rights organisations were not necessarily objectively reporting on the situation in Nicaragua, they could also be political actors who ‘attacked’ the Sandinista Revolution⁹⁴.

However, in the course of the 1980s, it became increasingly difficult for the NKN to ‘defend’ the Nicaraguan revolution against these accusations, as more reports were published about human rights violations of the Sandinista government⁹⁵. These violations, as well as the fact that the Nicaraguan government declared a state of emergency in 1985, negatively impacted the campaigns and the popularity of the NKN. The financial results of the ‘Nicaragua must survive’ campaign for instance, were very disappointing⁹⁶. It was therefore not only the end of the Cold War that eroded the legitimacy of the NKN, but also the domestic situation in Nicaragua itself, which left the Dutch public disillusioned with the achievements of the Sandinista

⁹⁰ Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, *Report on the Situation of Human Rights in the Republic of Nicaragua, 1981*. Available on <<http://www.org>>. (Accessed on 28 July 2013).

⁹¹ Appendix Debates, House of Representatives, The Hague, 18 February 1981, document no. 750. Available on <<http://www.statengeneraal.digitaal.nl>>. (Accessed on 3 August 2013); Records NKN meeting, 12 April 1981, box no. 1, [NKN].

⁹² Records NKN meeting, 12 April 1981, box no. 1, [NKN]; Klaas Wellinga to NRC, 9 April 1981, box no 5, [NKN].

⁹³ Ibidem.

⁹⁴ ‘Viewpoint of Dutch Nicaragua Committee on Solidarity Work with Nicaragua’, June 1980, box no. 17, [NKN]; Interview Wellinga and Langenberg.

⁹⁵ Amnesty International, *Nicaragua: The Human Rights Records*. London, 1986; Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, *Annual Report Nicaragua, 1984-1985*. Available on <<http://www.org>>. (Accessed on 28 July 2013).

⁹⁶ Records of European solidarity conference in Lisbon, October 1984, box no. 18, [NKN].

Revolution.

Finally, it is the fact that the Dutch Nicaragua Committee supported a government, and not a revolutionary or anti-government movement, which sets it apart from other Dutch solidarity organisations in the Cold War. Because of this, the NKN could not adopt the human rights paradigm as effectively as, for instance, the Chilean solidarity movement. Therefore, in a time when the human rights paradigm became the dominant narrative, replacing the older Cold War convictions, the NKN was bound to become an isolated organisation, as it continued to adhere to ideologies of socialism and anti-imperialism. So, while scholars have done a good job in connecting the rise of the global human rights movement to solidarity activism, such an argument cannot be made for the Dutch Nicaragua solidarity movement.

6. Conclusion

This study of Dutch solidarity with Nicaragua has explored how distant Cold War events, such as the armed struggle against Somoza, the Sandinista Revolution, US foreign policy, and the Contra War, influenced the practices, popularity, and ideas of the solidarity movement for Nicaragua in the Netherlands. In doing so, it has demonstrated how in the course of the 1970s and 1980s, the Dutch Nicaragua Committee transformed from an anti-regime solidarity group that supported the armed struggle of Nicaraguan guerrillas into an organisation that defended and cooperated with the FSLN-dominated government. The fascinating role of the Nicaraguan Enrique Schmidt Cuadra is illustrative of this transformation as he, who started out as a revolutionary working to create a broad anti-Somoza support base in Europe, ended up arresting human rights activists as the police chief of the Nicaraguan capital Managua. The actions of Schmidt Cuadra, both as a revolutionary and a police chief, impacted Dutch solidarity with Nicaragua. As a revolutionary, he was instrumental in the founding and early development of the NKN. As a police chief, on the other hand, his actions had a negative impact on the legitimacy and popularity of the Sandinistas in the Netherlands.

Apart from making a contribution to the historiography of solidarity movements, transnational activism and exile, this article also highlighted the complexity and multipolarity of the global Cold War in the 1970s and 1980s. It demonstrated how in the Netherlands, activists, exiles, politicians and the media, by debating, supporting, or denouncing the Sandinista Revolution, participated in the global ideological struggle that was the Cold War. Therefore, this article has demonstrated that, during this period, the Cold War was more than a competition between two superpowers, as non-state actors played crucial roles in the way in which Cold War struggles were fought, experienced, and narrated. Thus, it is important that historians continue with their efforts to integrate the histories of these, and similar, non-state actors into the international history of the global Cold War.

Furthermore, in bringing together the Dutch and Nicaraguan origins of the solidarity movement, this article has integrated national and transnational history. It has demonstrated that, on the one hand, a national perspective is necessary to understand the personal motivation and ideas of the activists who volunteered their

time and resources for the Sandinista cause. On the other hand, it is important to acknowledge that these people were part of a transnational network, which received direct instructions from the FSLN. Therefore, it is essential that scholars from both historiographical traditions acknowledge the strengths and weaknesses of each other's approach, as they both alter significantly to our understanding of this complex historical period.

What is more, while this article has specifically focused on the history of the Nicaragua solidarity movement in the Netherlands, it has to be noted that the NKN, apart from being integrated into a transnational and globally operating network, it was also part of a larger network of solidarity committees and peace groups in the Netherlands. The cooperation of the Dutch Nicaragua Committee with the Guatemala and Salvador committees for instance, is just one of the many examples that demonstrate that historians can further increase their understanding of solidarity activism in the Cold War by treating solidarity committees not as isolated case studies, but as part of global network of activists, exiles, and politicians.

7. Literature

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