

## The U.S. Filibusters in Transnational Newspaper Discourses, 1855-1857

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**ABSTRACT:** The essay focuses on the transnational entanglements between the USA and Nicaragua in the mid-nineteenth century, when U.S. adventurers (so-called ‘filibusters’) started private invasions to the American isthmus. One embodiment of these entanglements was *El Nicaraguense*, a bilingual newspaper published by the invaders and distributed in the USA and Central America. The article analyzes how the paper contributed to the incorporation of Nicaragua into the U.S. colonial realm.

**KEYWORDS:** Nineteenth-century USA, transnational U.S. history, Central American history, filibusters

Ever since Shelley Fisher Fishkin’s 2004 presidential address to the American Studies Association about the ‘transnational turn’ of the discipline, this approach has been part and parcel of American Studies.<sup>1</sup> New (online) publications have mushroomed (among many other examples, *FIAR: The Forum for Inter-American Research* on the German level and the *Journal of Transnational American Studies* in the USA), and new scholarly networks and associations have been formed. The following article aims at contributing to this strand by investigating an instance in which U.S. history became intimately connected with Nicaraguan history—and vice versa: the so-called ‘filibuster invasion’ to Nicaragua in 1855-1857, in which newspapers played a pivotal part. The article argues that newspapers re-formulated existing discursive patterns (often derived from travel accounts) to allow an expansionist U.S. nation to perceive Nicaragua and its people as akin to the already known U.S. West, thus discursively incorporating the American Isthmus into its national realm. The wide circulation of some of these newspapers—and their attempt to cater to Central American audiences, too—locates the news coverage of the filibuster invasion in a transnational realm spanning the USA and several countries on the American Isthmus. The papers not only represented but also created several discursive patterns that contributed to the ideology of

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<sup>1</sup> Contributions which attempt to widen the research and analytical scope of American Studies beyond the territorial boundaries of the USA are manifold. Some of the basic theoretical outlines of these ‘New American Studies’ (as they are also called) can be found in Rowe, while Stoler updates the concept of transnational analyses by strongly focusing on gender-power relations. Hebel and Adams, amongst various others, both point to the importance of a hemispheric approach within the field of American Studies. An already classic critique of exceptionalist approaches, which often turn a blind eye to imperial moments of U.S. history, is Kaplan and Pease’s *Cultures of United States Imperialism*.

Manifest Destiny (which held that it was the law of Providence for the Anglo-Saxon ‘race’ to rule over the whole North American continent)<sup>2</sup> and the fervent expansionism in the United States of America.<sup>3</sup> Newspapers were intimately pivotal artifacts in creating and (sometimes) subverting these patterns, which is why focusing on newspapers that traveled between two nation states—the USA and Nicaragua—makes it possible to take into consideration influences from outside of the U.S. national territory in the making of this ideology.<sup>4</sup>

Newspaper texts had such an enormous influence on the public debate surrounding the filibuster invasion to Nicaragua, predominantly because the country still retained an aura of a *terra incognita*. In spite of the success of such widely circulated travel narratives like John Lloyd Stephens’s *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas and Yucatán* (1841) and Ephraim George Squier’s *Nicaragua: Its People, Scenery, Monuments, Resources, Condition and Proposed Interoceanic Canal* (1851), Nicaragua in the mid-1850s was still depicted as a vast, unknown wilderness which was waiting for virile young men to explore and conquer her.<sup>5</sup> Similar exploration narratives were also a recurring element of U.S. press coverage of Nicaragua in the mid-nineteenth century. The presumed authenticity and first-hand experience of these reports gave newspapers a strong position in the discursive struggle over territorial expansion and Manifest Destiny. At a time when industrial and market revolutions dramatically altered the prospects of young U.S. males for making a living in agriculture or finding a job in traditional craft shops (May, *Underworld* 94–95), such depictions of an Eden-like country,<sup>6</sup> simply waiting to be transformed into a thriving, surplus

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<sup>2</sup> This is a rather boiled-down description of Manifest Destiny, which in fact is comprised of various components. Albert K. Weinberg in his *Manifest Destiny: A Study of Nationalist Expansionism in American History* called them ‘doctrines.’ See Weinberg and as a slightly updated version from the Latin American perspective, Rodríguez Díaz.

<sup>3</sup> Which does not imply that such an expansionism was the only ideology at the time or went uncontested. Yet, it does imply that expansionism had a strong presence in mainstream U.S. society, which can be detected, for example, in the prevalent (textual and other) discourses of the time.

<sup>4</sup> The importance of visual and textual representations in the incorporation of Latin America into the U.S. imagery has been pointed out by Gilbert M. Joseph, Catherine L. LeGrand, and Ricardo D. Salvatore in *Close Encounters* as well as by Ricardo D. Salvatore’s *Imágenes de un Imperio*.

<sup>5</sup> The sexual connotations of such metaphors were not lost on scholars, see especially Greenberg and Whisnant. Also note the more general criticism of sexually charged metaphors in (academic) language directed towards Latin America by Joseph.

<sup>6</sup> Numerous studies have traced the impact of the discovery of the Americas on the language and epistemology of the European explorers, amongst them the classic books by Greenblatt, Hulme, Mignolo and Pagden.

generating machine, provided a strong incentive—together with the belief of Manifest Destiny—to envision their future beyond the national territory.

After briefly depicting the historical background of the filibuster incident, the article will concentrate on one specific newspaper—a bilingual English-Spanish paper published by the invaders themselves in Nicaragua—to exemplify the main strands of the U.S. press discourse with regard to Nicaragua. The article will then argue that it were the social practices of the filibusters, especially their blatant racism, which ultimately constituted a major factor for the Nicaraguans to end their support for the foreigners. This, however, did not end the complex relationship between Nicaragua and the USA, and the paper will conclude by drawing attention to the ensuing imperial dependencies between these two countries—dependencies which can be productively engaged by opening academic debates on the filibusters in a transnational perspective.

### **Southward Ho! The Filibusters and the U.S. Expansionist Drive toward Central America**

Throughout the nineteenth century, the USA continually expanded its territory by ways of westward settler movements, purchases (e.g. the Louisiana Purchase in 1803), or wars (e.g. the U.S.-Mexican War in 1846-1848). The nation changed its territorial limits with such frequency that, as Anne Baker holds, “for much of the nineteenth century no American would have been able to call to mind a clear picture of his or her nation” (1). Although some U.S. intellectuals of the time were highly critical of such an expansionist drive and warned that the young republic could only preserve its democratic ideals and institutions within a territorially limited “*body politic*” (Baker 104), the general strand of the public discourse was in favor of gaining new territories. Especially around the mid-nineteenth century and up until the U.S. Civil War in 1861, this “fever of expansionism” (Acuña Ortega 56)<sup>7</sup> reached its climax with a number of citizens privately attempting to annex new territories to the Union. Without the explicit consent of the federal government, and often in conjunction with disgruntled and exiled Latin American politicians (May, *Underworld* 5), the filibusters concentrated on areas south of the USA and invaded Cuba, Honduras, the northern regions of Mexico, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, and parts of Canada.

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<sup>7</sup> Throughout the text, all quotes from Spanish-language sources were translated by the author.

Especially Nicaragua held great importance for the European colonial powers (primarily France and Great Britain) as well as for the emergent overseas ambitions of the USA: Prior to the building of the Panama Canal, Nicaragua's geography with its interconnected waterways of the San Juan River and the big lakes Cocibolca and Xolotlán made it a feasible candidate for constructing an interoceanic canal, a connection across the Isthmus of the Americas. This would not only have benefited the Europeans by allowing quicker access to Australia and the emergent markets of Japan (which was 'opened up' by Commodore Perry in 1852-1854), but was also in the interest of the United States (May, *Southern Dream* 85; Schoonover 3). In 1848 gold had been found in California, which led to rising demands by fortune-seekers and businessmen to quickly cross the continent from the Eastern seaboard to the West. With the first transcontinental railroad being only finished in 1869, the trek overland was dangerous and burdensome, and a transisthmian crossing would have cut short the time to reach the 'golden land' of California considerably.<sup>8</sup> Control of Nicaragua, or its incorporation into the Union as a new member state, was consequently a vital interest for the USA, and it is therefore not surprising that filibusters repeatedly tried their hand at invading it. The most successful filibuster group was the one under the command of William Walker, which was invited into the country by the Democrats, one of Nicaragua's long-feuding political parties (the other one called itself the Conservative or Legitimist Party). When in 1854 Conservative President Fruto Chamorro had tried to change the constitution to serve an additional term in office, a civil war broke out. When the Democrats were almost defeated, their leader, Francisco Castellón, contracted the aforementioned filibusters to help them. This was nothing unusual, as several Nicaraguan governments had used mercenaries before, often reverting to U.S.-citizens, who were famed for their supposed superior marksmanship and available in great numbers as they crossed the country en route to the Californian gold fields (Acuña Ortega 39).

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<sup>8</sup> In 1849 railroad and steamship tycoon Cornelius Vanderbilt founded the Accessory Transit Company, which made the voyage from New York via Nicaragua to San Francisco. This voyage consisted of four legs: First, one had to arrive via ship at the Caribbean side of Nicaragua, then had to change to a smaller vessel to navigate through the country's San Juan River and adjacent lakes, then take a mule to arrive at Nicaragua's Pacific coast, from where another ocean-going ship furnished transport to San Francisco. This made the trip still a strenuous one, and the building of a canal remained a vital interest for Vanderbilt and other steamship companies.

Walker's filibuster group arrived in 1855 and turned out to be indeed a decisive factor on the battlefield. With their support, the Democratic Party was able to turn the tide and ultimately sign a truce with their opponents, which gave government control to a triumvirate, consisting of one Democrat, one Conservative, and William Walker as the strongman in the background. After some clever political and military maneuvering and help by ongoing distrust between the two political Nicaraguan factions, Walker was able to proclaim himself President of Nicaragua in July 1856 and to start a political program designed to 'Americanize' Nicaragua (including re-introducing slavery) and thus to facilitate annexation by the USA. Such plans finally alarmed the other Isthmian states and, under the leadership of Costa Rica, they formed a military alliance which ultimately drove the filibusters out of Nicaragua in May 1857. Throughout the filibusters' presence in Central America and up until the U.S. Civil War, Walker's group was one of the most widely discussed topics in the U.S. press (see May, *Underworld* 64; Harrison 55), objectifying the discussions surrounding the nation's expansionism. The Central American press—small in numbers and geared towards the tiny literate elite—also reported and commented heavily on the filibusters. Due to their limited resources, though, they often had to resort to U.S. papers for information, or even had to rely on articles stemming from the filibuster's own propaganda paper: *El Nicaraguense*.

### ***El Nicaraguense*: The Filibusters' Newspaper**

The filibusters in Nicaragua clearly realized the potential of favorable press coverage in the USA as they were dependent on the constant influx of new recruits to help their gradually deteriorating position. William Walker himself had been a newspaper editor in New Orleans and set up a bilingual English-Spanish newspaper called *El Nicaraguense* as soon as he could get hold of a printing press in Nicaragua in late 1855. The paper would be published until the penultimate day of the filibusters' presence in Nicaragua, and Walker would dispose considerable manpower to ensure its uninterrupted publication. The paper's bilingualism indicates the bidirectional approach of Walker's propaganda tactics: He wanted to influence the local elites by offering them filibuster-friendly news items in their mother tongue but at the same time was so completely dependent on the USA that he also intended to have a good press 'at home.' As this newspaper was the only English language paper available from Nicaragua and the demand for 'first hand' information from this country was huge, it had a

profound influence on the public discourse in the USA. The paper featured extensive travel accounts by filibusters into the interior of the country,<sup>9</sup> which all reproduced the standard formulae of travel narratives and ended with an urgent call to come to Nicaragua and take possession of its riches.<sup>10</sup> These newspaper travel accounts were widely quoted and paraphrased in U.S. newspapers. A comparison of *El Nicaraguense* with articles published in *The New York Daily Times*, *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, and *Harper's Weekly* has shown that even when not indicated as source, the U.S. papers' information was often copied verbatim from the filibuster paper. Samples from the *New Orleans Picayune* and the San Francisco-based *Daily Alta California* suggest a similar pattern. These papers, based in the port cities of Vanderbilt's transisthmian line, then served as sources for other, more regional newspapers throughout the USA.

Even in Nicaragua and other Central American countries, *El Nicaraguense* was read and commented, although here the general tone was one of amusement about the 'yankees' propaganda efforts. The *Nicaraguense* staff itself—composed entirely of filibusters<sup>11</sup>—had no illusions about their publication: They openly declared it to be “an advertising medium,” “an exponent of the capabilities and resources of the country” (“Press in Nicaragua”),<sup>12</sup> and urged the rank and file of the filibuster army to purchase and forward the paper to friends in the United States (“Mails”). In claims of the editors that “at least fifteen hundred issues of *El Nicaraguense* were sent to the Eastern States by the last express” and “[b]esides these, one thousand copies were forwarded to different parts of the Republic [of Nicaragua] and the neighboring States” (“El Nicaraguense”), the numbers might be way too high; nevertheless,

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<sup>9</sup> These were coordinated by the Director of Colonization, a post created by the filibusters to quickly 'Americanize' Nicaragua. There were at least four expeditions initiated by the filibusters, of which three surveyed the district of Chontales, where gold was assumed to exist.

<sup>10</sup> These reports were seldom printed in the Spanish section of the paper, which altogether featured completely different contents than the English part, and was under the auspices of a Cuban filibuster, capable of writing in Spanish. The U.S. press apparently only used the English section of *El Nicaraguense* for reference.

<sup>11</sup> The English section was first edited by the U.S. Americans Joseph Malè and George Cook, who eventually both died and were replaced by Charles Cutler and John Tabor. The Spanish section had its own editor: José Arguello Estrada, who resigned in May 1856, and whose successor is unknown. It can be presumed that Estrada as well as his replacement formed part of the Cuban section of the filibusters, who had come to Nicaragua under the command of well-known Cuban patriot and filibuster Domingo de Coicuría. They thought that after a successful establishment of Yankee dominion in Central America, Walker would help them free Cuba from Spanish colonial rule.

<sup>12</sup> All quotations from *El Nicaraguense* are from the facsimile edition provided by Bolaños Geyer.

it has to be concluded that the filibuster newspaper was a pivotal actor in the discursive fabrication and perpetuation of the ideology of Manifest Destiny between 1855 and 1857. Other U.S. newspapers could hardly afford foreign correspondents in Nicaragua, and reporters required a special passport, signed by Walker, to travel through the country (“Important). Thus, *El Nicaraguense* could pose as the only authoritative voice from Nicaragua. In the following paragraphs, this essay will analyze which discursive elements were used in the articles of the filibuster paper and how these elements nurtured the ideology of Manifest Destiny.

### **Reading *El Nicaraguense***

As a textual analysis of the *Nicaraguense* shows, the filibusters attempted to incorporate Nicaragua into the U.S. imagery by using discursive patterns (metaphors, similes, comparisons, etc.) already familiar to the common reader from descriptions of the U.S. West. At a time when the closure of the Western frontier (as postulated by Frederick Jackson Turner in 1893) was still some forty years away, the Pacific had nevertheless already been reached. Thanks to the Gold Rush and the massive influx of Forty-Niners, California was increasingly regarded as part of the U.S. nation, which made it possible to apply discursive patterns formerly used for its description to other regions.

The rendering of the Nicaraguans as the ‘new Indians’ was achieved by linking them to their supposed disuse of the land. The implied failure of the Nicaraguans to make their land arable mirrors the justifications used in the displacement of Native Americans on the North American continent. If Nicaragua boasted “mineral and agricultural resources unsurpassed by any country in the world” (“Resources”) and nevertheless still remained “about three hundred years behind the most advanced nations” (“Probabilities”), the neglect of her inhabitants had to be blamed.

Although in Nicaragua the filibusters’ opponents were no native tribes but armies often trained by Europeans and organized according to European and North American customs (Molina Jiménez 60), the filibusters often depicted the violence that occurred in military clashes in words clearly reminiscent of ‘Indian atrocities’ in the U.S. West. When the Allied Central American army invaded Granada and killed several U.S. citizens (including a merchant supposedly not part of the filibuster army), it was not enough for *El Nicaraguense*

to declared this “one of the infamous transactions that must for ever disgrace the character of the people by whom it was committed” (“Insult”). The newspaper also dwelt extensively on the rumor that an “outrage upon [the merchant’s] remains after death” had been perpetrated: The corpse had supposedly been “thrust through” by seven bayonets, leading the editors to declare that “[t]he thought of how these fiends danced about their victim, and, in their hellish glee at having deprived an American citizen of life,” became “so intoxicated with fury as to continue to thrust their bayonets into him,” made them “heart-sick” (“Insult”). This depiction of ‘brutish’ and ‘uncivilized’ violence, the ritual dance around a slain enemy’s corpse intimately links the Central Americans to Native Americans, and the fight of the filibusters to the Westward movement of U.S. settlers. The complex military situation in Nicaragua with its shifting alliances between filibusters and Nicaraguans could thus be made perceivable to U.S. citizens, and the filibusters put into a position of solidarity and sympathy.

Another element which linked the Central Americans to the Native American population was their supposed fate of ‘vanishing’ from the earth in the face of the Anglo-Saxon advance. By linking the Central American population to some pre-Columbian descent (although in 1855 mestizos made up the predominant ethnic group in Nicaragua), the Nicaraguan population was depicted as intrinsically doomed, and the future as belonging to the Anglo-Saxon U.S.-Americans. Usually, these connections between the present-day population and their ‘ancestors’ were established by reflections on old buildings or architectural structures in decay, which supposedly outlined the Nicaraguans’ future. A *Nicaraguense*-article, reporting on an expedition to the region of Chontales, contains a brief description of a ruined city the filibusters encountered in the mountainous region and finishes with the following words:

The picture [the writer of the article] drew for us [the editors], of this forgotten place, buried in the wilderness, brought to our mind Stevens’ [sic! The author in question is John Lloyd Stephens] eloquent descriptions of Copan, Palenque, and Uxmal, the latter of which our friend had himself, visited—cities, built by a people the name of whom, even, has died out of the memory of man. (“Ruined City”)

The entanglement of vanished glory and bygone civilizations with present day Nicaragua is achieved in the article by referring to Stephens’s well-known book on the Aztec regions of Southern Mexico and the Northern Isthmus, which clearly establishes a connection between past power (and civilization) and present decline of the ‘races’ in Central America. These

allusions also allowed the filibusters' rendering themselves as new Spanish *conquistadores*, who would conquer the 'weak' and 'degenerated' people of the Isthmus, like Cortés and his men did with the Aztec empire.

Another article was even more explicit in pointing out the supposed parallelisms between the two 'races,' Native and Central American: Under the very title "Races," an article ran which developed its own racial categorization, dividing humankind into two basic groups of people, the migratory and non-migratory one:

Mankind may be divided into two grand divisions—the migratory and the non-migratory. [...] The weaker or non-migratory race have [sic!] always disappeared before, or bent beneath, the stronger or migratory race. Where are now the Indians of North America? Where are the more civilized tribes who acknowledged the supremacy of the Montezumas? Those of them that have not already entered the eternal hunting grounds with their fathers [sic!], are gliding by us like specters; and so negligent have they been of the talents given them, that they leave not even a footprint by which future chroniclers can trace their history. ("Races")

According to the *Nicaraguense's* discourse, the inability to leave physical and metaphysical traces, to 'inscribe' themselves into either the landscape or the narrative of human progress (see Spur 99) dooms the Central Americans in the same way as the Native Americans were doomed.

The landscape of Nicaragua, although often depicted as alien and archaic, was repeatedly compared directly to the landscape of the North American continent. This mirrored early descriptions of America by the first Spanish and English colonists, who rendered it as an Eden-like paradise of natural abundance. *El Nicaraguense* used this stock arsenal on a large scale: almost every number contained a piece describing "the fertility of [Nicaragua's] soil, the healthful purity and balminess of its air, the varied beauty of its scenery, bountifully supplied with every appropriate necessary and luxury of the table" ("Resources"), boasting an "unrivalled excellence" of fruits and vegetables, "woods abound with game," and lakes and rivers "alive with fish" ("Probabilities"). This luxury was only in need of "a stable, honest and industrious population" ("Appeal"), that would realize the country's potential; a country which "has in Granada a nucleus for a second Philadelphia, in Leon a second Cincinnati, in Realejo a San Francisco, and in San Juan del Norte a mart of the same comparative importance as New York" ("Resources"). Such direct evocations of familiar cities allowed the

U.S. public to incorporate the yet unknown territory of Central America into an imaginary space which would ultimately facilitate their imperial domination over it.

The immanent resources of Nicaragua and the possibilities which would supposedly open up with the influx of industrious *gringos* sometimes led *El Nicaraguense* to pure daydreaming. An article describing the little isles in the lake Cocibolca just off the shore of the city of Granada concluded that “in a short time” these islands would be

destined to be full of houses, stores and commercial ware-rooms, and where vessels of considerable tonnage can move from one depot to another with more ease than ox-carts now used in Granada move from one street to another. [...] Here canals will occupy the place of streets, and light fairy-like pleasure boats will supercede horses. Here, instead of a Wall street, we will have a Rialto; here will be seen and heard señores and señoritas in their gondoles singing love songs in the starlight [...]. (“Future Venice”)

The “fairy-like” scenery—combining marine transportation as expression of modernity, allusions to European civilization as well as the cliché of Latin American easy life—is regarded as a possibility inherent in the Nicaraguan landscape. Yet, the implicit argument went that without the proper race to govern the soil, these prospects would go unrealized, as they had for such a long time.

### **Filibusters, Manifest Destiny, and Race**

Such exalted plans for Nicaragua were recurrent elements not only in U.S.-American discourses but also in Colonial Spanish and, later on, independent Nicaraguan elite circles. The emphasis among the latter two groups was put on the country’s own ‘destino manifiesto,’ meaning the divine purpose of Nicaragua to eventually build an interoceanic canal, which would connect it with the wider world and let its citizens prosper. The construction of a canal was regarded as a panacea for all the problems Nicaragua had encountered since its independence.<sup>13</sup> The following extract from a Nicaraguan newspaper is one of many examples in which this notion is not only rendered as a contemporary desire or necessity but re-projected into history and envisioned as the sole purpose of the country:

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<sup>13</sup> The endurance and impact of this idea, which even crossed the usually deep factional lines between the two main political parties in Nicaragua, is described by Kinloch Tijerino.

Three hundred years ago, a wise minister of the English government, while strolling with his index finger across the map of the recently discovered New World, indicated the isthmus of Nicaragua as the grand door through which Europe should quickly establish its communication with China, Japan and the Indian archipelago. At the end of the last century, a Spanish minister saw in the said isthmus the place in which an interoceanic canal could be opened; and at the beginning of this century, a scientific expedition of the Spanish government undertook the necessary explorations [...]. (“Vanguardia”)

It is noticeable that this quality—the focus on the destiny of the territory—is a marked difference from the U.S. Manifest Destiny, which concentrated on a specific group of people (the Anglo-Saxon ‘race’) that would benefit from it. Although basically the same term in two different languages, the Nicaraguan destino manifiesto had very different implications from the U.S. one. It insinuated that ultimately every citizen of Nicaragua would benefit from the country’s immanent destiny, not only one racial group. In the Nicaraguan imagination, it would be enough for people to simply settle near the canal to receive its huge benefits (Kinloch Tijerino 210). The U.S. Manifest Destiny was more exclusive: The Anglo-Saxon ‘race’ would advance endlessly by eventually displacing or eliminating all other ethnic groups.

The inherent racism of the U.S. ideology of Manifest Destiny, extensively analyzed by Reginald Horsman in his classic *Race and Manifest Destiny* (1981), was accentuated by the nineteenth-century belief that mixed or ‘mongrel races’ such as the Nicaraguan mestizos were inferior even to blacks—as they represented the danger of an amalgamation of the supposedly pure northern Anglo-Saxon blood—and constituted a pivotal point of conflict between the filibusters and their erstwhile Nicaraguan collaborators. Contracted initially by the Nicaraguan Democrats not only in their capacity as mercenaries but explicitly also as future settlers and thus civilizing agents in Nicaragua,<sup>14</sup> the filibusters never thought of sharing the benefits of the land with a ‘race’ they did not deem equal. Their Manifest Destiny was based on a clearly racialized element incompatible with Nicaraguan elite, i.e. mestizo, society. The Nicaraguan elite, educated mostly in European colonial centers like Great Britain or France (and also increasingly in the United States), was familiar with the discourses of progress as a Manifest Destiny but realized its incongruity with their own vision of destino

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<sup>14</sup> The original contract between Castellón and the filibusters stated that after the war had ended every surviving member of the filibuster group would receive “dos caballerías de tierra” (roughly 170 square kilometers) and would gain Nicaraguan citizenship if they pleased (Esgueva Gómez 110).

manifiesto only in the actual daily practices of the filibusters after their arrival in Central America. In these practices, the mestizos experienced the U.S. discourse against the bitter reality of increasing U.S.-Americanization of their country, which was geared towards their disposal as ruling class. When Walker declared himself president, re-introduced slavery, and confiscated the mestizos' farms to re-distribute them to Anglo-Saxons, the intimate correlations between discourses and social practices became obvious even for the U.S.-centered Nicaraguan elite. Yet, nurturing a latent distrust for Great Britain (the other dominant colonial power in the region and main supporter of the anti-filibuster alliance), Nicaraguan elite society only sporadically participated in the actual anti-filibuster struggle, as Gobat (71) has convincingly shown. Kinloch Tijerino (9-10) concurs that the fight against Walker and his men did not serve as a turning point in Nicaraguan identity politics: Even after the filibusters had been driven out, the Nicaraguan elites stuck to their European and U.S.-centric affiliations. An example can be found in an 1858 article in the *Gaceta Oficial de Nicaragua*, the official government paper, which urged its compatriots:

to change their character, their customs, their life: so that [the national character] undergoes, in one word, a complete metamorphosis; to convince ourselves that our antecedents are in a diametrical opposition with this progressive movement, with this luminescent current of the age which sweeps away everything behind to give it new life and sweeter forms. ("Pereza")

To be part of this progressive movement, as the article states, a complete metamorphosis had to take place within the Nicaraguan people, also eventually changing the language spoken by them, as another article, published the year before, had advocated:

To thus enter this grand movement, to be part of this grand idea, to take mutual advantage in the sciences, in the arts and in manufacturing, in one word: to be worthily called civilized, it is necessary that we learn the languages of the most cultivated and advanced nations [...] My spirit, filled with love for progress, orders me to speak to my compatriots and call their attention to the necessity of knowing how to speak French, English and German [...]. ("Remitido")

After all the devastation brought upon the Nicaraguans by the filibusters—the supposed bearers of civilization—the Nicaraguans, without adjusting their ideological framework,<sup>15</sup> still

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<sup>15</sup> Ayerdi shows that newspaper discourses of the 1870s, 1890s and also the twentieth century followed a framework outlined in the 1840s, by focusing on notions of 'progress,' 'civilization,' and the urge to imitate an idealized U.S.-American modernization.

looked outward for achieving progress.

## Conclusion

With the advent of the U.S.-owned banana and coffee companies, which quickly came to dominate power relations in Nicaraguan politics from the 1890s onward, the country's elites deepened their glorification of the USA and its supposed economic superiority even more. Interestingly, the fight against these elites, embodied especially by Augusto Sandino in the 1920s, could also draw upon a collective memory of the filibuster war, although an extremely modified version of an imagined heroic, unified Nicaraguan struggle against the filibusters. Dunkerley, for example, reproduces a Sandino manifesto clearly paralleling the 1850s elites' mingling with Walker with the 1920s situation in Nicaragua when the country was repeatedly occupied by U.S. marines (551), thereby calling for a united front of 'ordinary Nicaraguans' against the foreign-dominated elite, a front which had been actually absent in the anti-filibuster struggle of the mid-nineteenth century. The civil war at the end of the 1970s and beginning of 1980s of the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (commonly referred to as 'Sandinistas') against the U.S.-backed dictatorship of the Somoza family again evoked the anti-filibuster struggle for mobilization.<sup>16</sup>

Even in the 2011 presidential elections, the Sandinista candidate (and incumbent president) Daniel Ortega used Andrés Castro, an anti-filibuster soldier and one of Nicaragua's national heroes, in a timeline on his election posters; a timeline which started with Castro and went from modernist poet Rubén Darío and Augusto Sandino straight to the candidate's picture, thereby constructing a national narrative which was completely oblivious to Nicaragua's pre-filibuster history. Obviously, even in 2011 and with most Nicaraguans unable to contextualize the events of 1855-1857 beyond the mere imagined dichotomy of a united 'us' against the 'yankees,' the filibusters are still highly potent reference points in Nicaragua.

In the USA, on the other hand, the filibusters are largely absent in both academia and the public collective memory. As Robert E. May argues in his book *The Southern Dream of a Caribbean Empire*, with the beginning of the U.S. Civil War the U.S. slave-holding states

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<sup>16</sup> See Bujard et al. for several examples of Sandinista political posters depicting scenes from the anti-filibuster campaign.

withdrew their support, and Walker lost his staunchest allies. Subsequent attempts by the USA to establish a more ‘informal empire’ based on “social imperialism” (Schoonover 3-4) in Central America re-assigned the filibusters—epitomizations of ‘formal imperialism’—to the back benches of a collective memory and historiography that focused entirely on the year 1898 as the imperial watershed of U.S. history. If scholars take up the issue of the filibusters, they invariably opt for a narrow national perspective, ignoring the topic’s transnational dimensions (see the lucid critique by Acuña Ortega). This (whether consciously or not) perpetuates the imperial discourse found in the mid-nineteenth-century U.S. press,<sup>17</sup> denies the Central American actors their agency and thus hinders investigations of, to name just one example, the transnational entanglements and perceptions of U.S. Manifest Destiny. Efforts already undertaken by the Nicaraguan Instituto de Historia de Nicaragua y Centroamérica and the Costa Rican Museo Histórico Cultural Juan Santamaría to investigate the filibusters from a transnational point of view have not garnered much attention in U.S. academia. To incorporate such local analyses (and archive material) into wider international discussions in the American Studies would indeed benefit the transnational turn called for by Fisher Fishkin and others.

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<sup>17</sup> While the articles of the aforementioned newspapers are usually used with critical caution in academic studies, the images often accompanying them—especially in *Frank Leslie's* and *Harper's*—are still reproduced without many scruples (e.g. in May, *Underworld* and Molina Jiménez), although they were often also produced by filibusters.

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