"No me vendo ni me rindo": Nicaraguans Surviving U.S. Interference, Redefining Cultural Identities, and Overcoming Injustice Through Active Resistance

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Overview of Nicaraguans

According to Suárez-Orozco and Yoshikawa (2015), "long backlogs, a byzantine bureaucracy, and increasing rates of denials of legal status are cementing growing numbers of immigrants as transnationally separated mixed-status families" (p. 98). Research on Latinx immigration often focuses on Mexico, Central American countries like El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, as well as Caribbean countries such as Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic which contribute more significantly to the number of immigrants in the United States (Flores, 2017). Thus, Nicaragua is often overlooked in the research. Despite being the largest land-mass country in Central America, Nicaraguans only constitute about 0.7% of the immigrant population to the United States equaling about 422,000 people (Flores, 2017). According to data released by the Pew Research Center, of those 422,000 people, about 58% were born in Nicaragua, 63% are English-speaking, and 74% are citizens of the United States (Flores, 2017). However, only 30% graduated from high school, 19% had earned a 4-year degree or higher, 14% were living in poverty and of those who were naturalized, 18% were uninsured (Flores, 2017).

Currently, there are approximately 75,000 undocumented Nicaraguan immigrants living in the United States, of which less than 3,000 have Temporary Protected Status, meaning that they are susceptible to deportation (Cohn & Passel, 2017). These statistics and academic outcomes are devastating and continue to reflect the challenges many immigrants face when arriving in the United States; the acculturation struggles are significant. Integrating into mainstream culture is an ongoing challenge (Birman & Addae, 2015). Suárez-Orozco and Yoshikawa (2015), suggest "the

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poor working conditions of the undocumented contribute substantially to the lower cognitive skills of children whether these children are citizens or not," and may account for the low rate of immigrants earning university degrees and pursuing higher education (p. 101). Although Nicaraguan immigrants prioritize education, they are often not equipped with the social capital and economic resources to pursue it.

Demographics

According to data reported by CIA World Factbook (2018), Nicaragua's population totals approximately 6,025,951 people comprised of four major ethnic groups: "Mestizo (mixed Amerindian and White) 69%; White 17%; Black 9%; and Amerindian 5%" (Nicaragua, 2018). Spanish is the official language of Nicaragua although English is spoken on the Caribbean coast, and indigenous communities speak Miskito and other mestizo dialects (Nicaragua, 2018). According to census data, over half of the Nicaraguan population identifies as Roman Catholic, about a third identify as Evangelical, and the rest do not specify a religious affiliation (Nicaragua, 2018). Overall, Nicaragua has an 82.8% literacy rate for the entire population, meaning that individuals over 15 are literate (Nicaragua, 2018).

Historical Background

The history of Nicaragua has been heavily influenced by centuries of colonization, corruption, battles to gain independence only to lose it to more powerful forces, and decades of US political involvement (Laurence & Cuesta, 2011). Historical accounts indicate the Spanish initially colonized the land and its peoples in 1524 (Laurence & Cuesta, 2011). From 1633 until the mid-1800s, British forces invaded and settled on Nicaragua's Miskito coast, or East coast, established the colony of Bluefields and ruled its people, traded African slaves and forcibly resettled them to work on plantations picking cotton and farming, and plundered the land's resources (Laurence & Cuesta, 2011). After years of rebellion, Nicaragua managed to gain its independence from Spain in 1821; however, the victory was short-lived as it was immediately absorbed into what was then known as the Mexican empire (Laurence & Cuesta, 2011). After 2 long years of civil unrest, Nicaragua gained its independence from Mexico in 1823, but was then incorporated into the United Provinces of Central America, which comprised several other countries in the region, including Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, and Costa Rica (Laurence & Cuesta, 2011). Simultaneously, the United States strategically adopted the Monroe Doctrine as a counter measure opposing continued European colonization of South and Central America, which resulted in the US occupation of Nicaragua for the next 20 years (Dix, 2011; Encyclopædia Britannica, 2017).

Although Nicaragua regained its independence once again in 1838, the British continued to hold dominion over Bluefields in the Miskito coast, which they reluctantly agreed to surrender after signing the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty with the United States in 1850 (Laurence & Cuesta, 2011). Doing so was a necessary step in what the British believed would result in the development of the Nicaragua Canal connecting the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans, which would have been an incredibly lucrative strategic move. However, several complications including US sponsored attempts to gain political control over Nicaragua delayed plans for the development of the Nicaragua Canal, further frustrating their efforts in the region (Laurence & Cuesta, 2011). For instance, in 1856, a "U.S. adventurer, William Walker, invades Nicaragua, declare himself president, and legalizes slavery" (Dix, 2011, p. 209). These egregious acts caused civil unrest among the people and led to the ouster of Walker (Dix, 2011). The aftermath shed light on the weaknesses of the Liberal Party, portraying them as incapable of defending the people's interests and protecting the country from hostile foreign forces, and paved the way for the Conservative Party to gain political control over Nicaragua for more than 35 years (Kerevel, 2006). Despite their renewed efforts to centralize and mobilize Nicaraguan political resources, the US and British forces continued to pursue their own political and economic interests in the region. Over time, the plan to develop the Nicaragua Canal became increasingly untenable and new efforts were shifted toward the development of the Panama Canal (Laurence & Cuesta, 2011).

As a result, the British occupation of Bluefields and the Miskito coast persisted decades later until the late 1890s. Amidst chaos in the region, General José Santos Zelaya, member of the Liberal party, rose to power and became the president of Nicaragua in 1893 (Laurence & Cuesta, 2011). The following summer, the British government, with US support, initiated the process of ceding Bluefields to the Nicaraguan government. Not surprisingly, "the creole oligarchy and American congressmen who ran Bluefields objected" (p. 539) to losing their autonomy as a colony and a rebellion ensued, resulting in thousands of deaths in the region (Laurence & Cuesta, 2011). With the assistance of British and US military forces, General Zelaya was able to end the revolt, take back the Miskito coast, and restore order (Kerevel, 2006). According to Laurence and Cuesta (2011), "some 200 years [after being sacked by the British], 'the Mosquito Shore' [Miskito Coast] ceased to exist as a separate political entity when a formal convention was signed on 20 November 1894" (p. 538). The Nicaraguan government would continue to contest claims made on its borders for the next 80 years. It is believed that the Miskito Coast was one of the most disputed borders of Nicaragua (Dix, 2011); today, it remains a part of Nicaragua. Figure 1 below illustrates the political divisions of Nicaragua during this period.

Despite regaining control over Bluefields, the Nicaraguan government struggled to incorporate the region and reunite a divided people due to cultural differences. Nicaragua became home to culturally diverse communities of enslaved people originating from several countries, including Nigeria, Panama, Jamaica, and several islands in the Caribbean (Laurence & Cuesta, 2011). Their descendants, known as Afro-Nicaraguans, live primarily in the East Coast and constitute three major ethnic

Fig. 1 Historical map of Nicaragua from early 1900s. Source: (van Gelder, n.d.). http://www.stampworldhistory.com/country-profiles-2/americas/nicaragua/

groups: Creoles or people of mostly Jamaican heritage, the Garifuna or people of Caribbean and Amerindian heritage originating from the Antilles, and Zambos or indigenous people of mixed African, Mayangna (otherwise known as Sumo, however the term Sumo is considered a racial slur), Rama, and Miskito ethnic groups (Laurence & Cuesta, 2011). Laurence and Cuesta (2011) argue:

> Culturally, however, Bluefields remains an English-speaking Protestant creole enclave physically isolated from Nicaragua, and culturally separated by its language, religion, 'race', and historical experience. The Miskito Indians emerged out of the contact and miscegenation which occurred when Amerindians of the Mosquitia region of Honduras and Nicaragua, largely Sumu Indians, encountered British buccaneers and traders and their African Slaves…Before the end of the seventeenth century the mixture of Africans with Amerindians produced a new ethnic group, the Miskito, who were called *Zambos* by the Spanish, meaning half-African and half-Amerindian. (pp. 538–539)

In addition to these differences, the Miskito indigenous group had its own political history which was at the very core of their survival. For 200 years, the Miskito had been encouraged by the British government to maintain order in the region which motivated them to attack neighboring communities of Amerindians and, at times, even "enslave their captives and sell them out to the British" (Laurence & Cuesta, 2011, p. 539). They established their own monarchy, made trade deals in English, and defended themselves against the Spanish (Laurence & Cuesta, 2011). Reintegrating into Nicaraguan rule was devastatingly difficult, and this sentiment persisted through the 1980s when the Miskito Indians opposed the Sandinista revolution (Laurence & Cuesta, 2011).

US Dominion and the Nicaraguan Canal

In the early 1900s, foreign forces continued to dispute over Nicaraguan canal rights. In 1909, the US government and military interfered in Nicaraguan political affairs and helped depose President Jose Santos Zelaya (Kerevel, 2006). Kerevel (2006) argues the United States' continued intrusion, which lasted until 1933, led to:

> …the fall of two consecutive Liberal presidents [José Santos Zelaya and José Madriz], the return of the Conservative Party to power, the establishment of a U.S. protectorate over the country, the stationing of Marines in Nicaragua for over two decades, and political instability culminating in the war led by Augusto César Sandino from 1927 to 1933 (p. 5).

Sandino was then, and continues to be, idolized as a national hero by famers and the working poor for using superior military strategy to combat US interference in Nicaragua (Kinzer, 2007; Sandinista revolution, 2018).

Somoza Dictatorship for 44 Years

Four short years later, Anastasio Somoza García, member of the Military Nationality Liberal Party, was elected president and began a 44-year legacy of the Somoza dictatorship (British Broadcasting Company [BBC], 2017; Kinzer, 2007). The corrupt practices of the three Somozas motivated Carlos Fonseca to establish the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN; Kinzer, 2007). Although not entirely concurrent, the Somoza rule began in 1937 and ended in 1979. Anastasio Somoza García, served two non-consecutive terms from 1937 to 1947 and from 1950 to 1956, when he was assassinated. He was succeeded by his eldest son, Luis Anastasio Somoza Debayle, who ruled until 1963. Their reign ended with Anastasio Somoza Debayle, Anastasio Somoza García's second son, who ruled from 1967 to 1972 and 1974 to 1979. With US economic, social, and political resources, along with marriage alliances supported by the United States, their rule bankrupted the Nicaraguan people for almost four decades (Holloway, 2011).

The third Somoza, Anastasio Somoza Debayle, nicknamed "Tachito," "was the most brutal and corrupt of the three Somozas who tyrannized Nicaragua for nearly half a century" (Kinzer, 2007, p. 194). He was known for saying "I don't want an educated population; I want oxen" (Holloway, 2011, p. 408). The Somoza dictatorship resulted in censorship of the press and deaths of many dissenting voices throughout the country, including Pedro Joaquín Chamorro, a journalist for a major conservative newspaper based in Managua titled *La Prensa*, in 1978 (Kinzer, 2007). Chamorro's murder incited a massive nation-wide uprising and the revival of the Sandinista revolution (Kinzer, 2007). To this day, Nicaraguans remember the celebrations after the 1979 victory of the Somocistas in La Plaza de la Revolución (Central Square) in Managua.

In 1980, Tachito was assassinated by a group of Sandinistas while living in exile in Asunción, Paraguay and the FSLN took control over the government. The U.S. Reagan administration deemed this as a major threat to US political interests of forcibly implementing democracy in the region (Feldmann & Perala, 2004; Kinzer, 2007). As a result, the United States began financially sponsoring *Contras*, right-wing conservative rebel soldiers, to overthrow the FLSN and eliminate communism in Nicaragua and throughout Central America (Kinzer, 2007). The Contras' primary warfare strategy was terrorist attacks leading to thousands of deaths throughout Central America (Feldmann & Perala, 2004; Kinzer, 2007). By January 1985, just 4 years later, Daniel Ortega, affiliated with the FSLN, was elected president and spent the next 5 years reconsolidating branches of government to increase his power and control over Nicaragua (Kinzer, 2007). After the death of Pedro Joaquín Chamorro, his widow, Violeta Barrios de Chamorro, became the publisher of *La Prensa* and used her platform to denounce the corruption of the Somozas and Oretga (Arguello, Parker, Nietschmann, Orozco & Walker, 2016). During this time, Violeta Chamorro gained popularity and political influence for her outspoken disapproval of the Contra war and demands for peace in Nicaragua (Arguello et al., 2016). In 1990, Chamorro defeated Ortega for the presidency nad served until 1997. Chamorro's peace negotiations, stance on disarmament, and strategic downsizing of the military by more than 80% were instrumental in bringing the Contra war to an end (Nicaragua – The Sandinista government, Encyclopædia Britannica, 2017). During her presidency, she forged alliances between opposing political parties and drafted the Unión Nacional Opositor (UNO) [National Opposition Union] alliance, securing the "resignation of General Humberto Ortega, brother of Daniel Ortega and chief of the army during the Sandinista regime" (Nicaragua – The Sandinista government, Encyclopædia Britannica, 2017). She is known for ending the Contra War and bringing peace to the country.

In 1998, Ortega was re-elected president, and it is said, laid the path for some of Nicaragua's most corrupt presidents, including José Arnoldo Alemán Lacayo (often referred to as Arnoldo Alemán) and member of the Constitutionalist Liberal Party, whose abuses of power resulted in his indictment for embezzlement and corruption in 2003 and sentencing of 20 years (BBC News, 2017). Although initially a major victory for Nicaragua, Alemán's sentence was commuted to house arrest and then by 2009 he was released (BBC News, 2017).

Nicaragua Today

The conviction of corrupt government leaders since the mid-2000s has changed the relationship between the government and the people. Current leaders have had to compromise by moderately improving the lives of its citizens through the promotion of social justice reform to reduce overcrowding in prisons, implementation of new transit systems, and with promises to initiate a $50 billion construction project to build a canal connecting the Pacific and Atlantic oceans (BBC News, 2017). Although controversial, Ortega's presidency has led to modest job growth and economic mobility for Nicaragua's poorest cities (Instituto Nacional de Información de Desarrollo (INIDE), 2017a, 2017b).

Nicaraguans remember the terror the Somozas inflicted upon their land and are still heavily influenced by the Sandinista revolution and ideology. They have not forgotten that "Ortega came to power as part of the Sandinista rebels who overthrew the Somoza dynasty in 1979. He fought against the US-backed contras during the 1980s and has remained a key ally to Venezuela" (Chaves, Lugo, & Plaza, 2018). Unfortunately, this Sandinista sentiment has led to blind resignation and acceptance of Ortega's policies and apologies for a long tenure of corruption, akin to that of the Somozas (Chaves et al., 2018). Ortega was re-elected as president in 2006, 2011, and 2016 although "Nicaragua's constitution bars presidents from being re-elected and also bars candidates who are relatives of the sitting president from running" (Chaves et al., 2018). Prior to his last re-election, Ortega successfully pressured legislators to change the constitution eliminating term limits and giving the president absolute power:

> According to an article in Al Jazeera (2014), "Ortega's ruling Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) controls all four branches of government: the executive, judiciary, electoral authority and national assembly and has a majority of seats in the assembly, making final voting on the reform largely a formality." (Chaves et al., 2018; Al Jazeera, 2014)

A country in uproar. President Ortega's disregard for the Nicaraguan constitution, citizen's rights, and abuses of power, have contributed to months of civil unrest and "the largest street protests the country has seen since the civil war ended in 1990" (Feingold, 2018). Ortega proposed new social security reform by overtaxing citizens and reducing benefits and pensions for retired workers, after decades of misappropriating government funds and committing numerous acts of fraud (Chaves et al., 2018; Diao, 2018). Students, educators, journalists, and activists began peacefully protesting Ortega's proposed policies and were met with government sanctioned excessive use of force (Chaves et al., 2018; Feingold, 2018). Ortega issued several speeches to the Nicaraguan people condemning and threatening college students, graduates, educators, and reformists who oppose his and his wife, Vice President and First Lady, Rosario Murillo's rule (Feingold, 2018). On April 22nd, 2018, after continued organized protests throughout Nicaragua and increased death toll, Ortega repealed social security reform, but the country remains in turmoil (Feingold, 2018).

According to interviews documented in a CNN article published by Chaves et al. (2018), "Human Rights Watch received credible accounts that suggest that police officers used excessive force to shut down demonstrations in several places across the country and that pro-government groups attacked peaceful protesters." The United Nations Human Rights Office has issued a statement requiring Daniel Ortega to allow peaceful protestors their right to free speech and assembly although violence against protestors continue (Chaves et al., 2018). Municipal buildings, including the Office of Attorney General and Tax Administration offices, in several cities have been burned down under suspicious circumstances (100% Noticias, 2018B). According to an article published by 100% Noticias (2018B) titled "Turbas del Gobierno Queman Fiscalía y Procuraduría de Masaya" [Government Crowds Burn Down the Office of the Attorney General and Taxation Office of Masaya], locals living in the neighborghood watched as government officials moved boxes filled documents and records into their vehicles days before both buildings were torched (100% Noticias, 2018B). The Ortega administration continue taking part in numerous incidents of destruction of property and theft in order to deprive Nicaraguan citizens of necessary resources to mount a full rebellion.

Additionally, the government has closed several universities to discourage protests. In response to government interference preventing peaceful protest and assembly, several university students have worked together to take back major national universities and have released a statement demanding immediate sanctions against corrupt police and agencies actively suppressing protestors, an end to media censorship and their coverage of the civil unrest taking place, and adherence to Ley de la Autonomía de Instituciones de Educación Superior [Law on the Autonomy of Institutions of Higher Education], which defines institutions of education as sovereign entities and prohibits unlawful occupation by police and other (100% Noticias, 2018A). With limited opportunities to leave their country and escape persecution, civilians continue to actively resist police brutality, challenge media censorship, advocate for their legal rights, and fight for a *Nicaragua Libre* where their families can be safe.

Socioeconomic Hardships Contributing to Immigration to the United States

Nicaragua remains the poorest country in Central American and its citizens face many challenges in order to survive and make ends meet (Gomez, 2013; INIDE, 2017a, 2017b). Historically, Nicaraguans have faced a stifled economy with limited opportunities for job growth, deregulation, and enforcement of employee rights and protections, limited opportunities for middle-aged and older adults to enter the workforce, gender inequality in the hiring and selection process, and a significant gender pay gap (Gomez, 2013). Additionally, like in other Central American countries, parents are responsible for paying school matriculation fees, uniforms, and other education-related costs for public and private schooling, further burdening

low income families (Gomez, 2013). According to reports produced by the Banco Central de Nicaragua (Central Bank of Nicaragua) based on Census data from 2011 and 2013, urban areas had an incidence of poverty rate of 26.3%, whereas rural areas had a rate of 63.3% (Gomez, 2013).

According to the INIDE, extreme poverty and general poverty were defined by monthly income of $334.79 and $568.65, respectively (Gomez, 2013; INIDE, 2008). An assessment of economic well-being of three of the most impoverished neighborhoods in Managua, Nicaragua's capital, revealed that each had from 44.3 to 58.2% of habitants living in extreme poverty and from 18.2 to 26.2% living in general poverty (Gomez, 2013). Families living in extreme poverty do not earn enough money to purchase meat and eggs and instead rely on more affordable sources of protein like cheese, rice, and beans (Gomez, 2013). These families cannot afford to eat 3 meals per day, access to private health care, send their children to school, or purchase books and electronics to facilitate their children's education (Gomez, 2013). Furthermore, their living conditions are also impacted by their lack of resources, resulting in homes that have poor infrastructure with limited enclosed spaces (doors, gates, etc.), dirt floors, higher susceptibility to theft and robbery, and that are made from unsuitable materials (Gomez, 2013).

Despite these economic challenges, the last 10 years have brought about improvements in overcrowded homes evidenced by a decrease from 30.2% at the national level in 2009 to 17.9% in 2016 (INIDE, 2017a, 2017b). According to data reported by INIDE (2017a, 2017b), there have been significant improvements to accessing clean water and hygienic services; however, there are significant disparities between urban and rural settings. Although national statistics indicate approximately 19.2% of people still do not have access to these resources in urban areas, it is only 6.7%, and in rural areas 38.6% of people are living without sufficient access to clean water (INIDE, 2017a, 2017b). In rural communities, about 15.1% of children between the ages of 7 and 14 do not attend school, compared to only 4.7% in urban areas (INIDE, 2008, 2017a, 2017b).

Thus, families are still incredibly burdened by their circumstances and are often forced to relocate to other countries to find employment and earn a living wage (Castro, 2014; Dyer, 2014; Ramírez, n.d.). In the past, all of the aforementioned factors have served as primary motivators for Nicaraguans to migrate to other countries in search of a better life (Dyer, 2014). In the late 1990s and early 2000s, legislative acts like the 1997 Nicaraguan Adjustment and Central American Relief Act or NACARA helped "some 180,000 Nicaraguan migrants to legalize their status in the U.S…. legally emigrate to the U.S. and bring their families" (Dyer, 2014, *para* 21 and 22). However, even with amnesty laws, less Nicaraguans migrate to the United States than other Central Americans (Castro, 2014; Dyer, 2014). Unlike neighboring countries in Central America, Nicaragua's migration patterns are not unilaterally linked with the United States (Castro, 2014; Dyer, 2014). Violent crime, gang violence, and poverty in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras make these countries unlikely destinations for Nicaraguan migration (Castro, 2014; Dyer, 2014). For Nicaraguans, traveling south to Costa Rica and Panama are safer pathways to more promising economic opportunities (Dyer, 2014; Replogle, 2014). These countries have experienced considerable economic growth and employment from international tourism and have a simplified visa process in comparison to the United States.

The Migration Journey and Settlement Patterns
in the United States

As the US government continues to restrict immigration and end protected status for Nicaraguans, they will be faced with additional obstacles to chasing their version of "El Sueño Americano." Traveling to the United States may still be an enticing option for Nicaraguans with immediate or extended families residing there. For those choosing to immigrate to the United States, the journey is complicated. Suárez-Orozco and Yoshikawa (2015) argue the "majority [of Latinx immigrants] arrive through the borders 'uninspected,' though a substantial number are visa overstayers" (p. 97). Depending on how much money they have saved for the trip, many Nicaraguans either fly to the most northern part of Mexico or take a 17-h bus ride into Guatemala, cross the border into Mexico, and then look for coyotes to secure safe entry into the United States either through the southwestern part of California, the southern part of New Mexico or Arizona, or the southeastern part of Texas. Like other Central American immigrants, those who travel to the United States through these methods often experience trauma from physical exhaustion, dehydration, assaults, life-threatening travel conditions, and starvation from the journey (Martínez et al., 2017). Others die trying to cross the border (Cornelius, 2001; Martínez et al., 2017).

Individuals of higher socioeconomic status, greater access to resources, and significant ties to Nicaragua (i.e., stable full-time employment, property), are more likely to be able to enter the United States legally through a temporary visitor's visa or by marrying a US citizen. In these cases, people make considerable efforts to earn a college education and learn English, to facilitate the process of making several trips to the US alone in order to demonstrate to U.S. Immigration and Customs that they are not likely to overstay their visas. Afterwards, they request visas for their spouses, children, and other members of their immediate family and complete multiple trips. Eventually, after several years of renewed extended visas, families begin to liquidate their assets and move to the United States by overstaying their visas. Although this process is extensive and cost-prohibitive, some families are able to immigrate to the United States through this method. Unfortunately, in many cases, they experience a decrease in social status upon staying in the United States as they lose their social capital of employment, legal or citizenship status, economic hardship, and of course, discrimination.

In the United States, Nicaraguan immigrants are known to settle in Florida, California, and Houston, Texas. Outside of Miami, there is a community known as Little Managua, signaling a way to form community away from the homeland. In the years ahead, it will be important to learn how this collective settlement has benefited the well-being of Nicaraguan immigrants and their families, and children born in this country.

Personal Narrative

My father named me Taymy, pronounced Tie-me. I am the youngest of four children and the only one to have been born in the United States. I have Afro-Nicaraguan and Cuban heritage on my mother's and father's sides, respectively. My mother's parents and extended family have a long history of military involvement in Nicaragua and were persecuted in the 1970s and 1980s during the transition from the Somoza dictatorship to the Sandinista regime. Turmoil between local and national governments tore our family apart and resulted in her childhood home being burned down and the loss of many of their belongings. To escape financial hardship, my mother began working as an adolescent, got married very young, and gave birth to my three older siblings by the time she was 19. In 1988, after a failed marriage, the death of my grandmother, and several years of struggling to make ends meet, she believed she had no choice but to immigrate to the United States by herself and bring her children once she had a stable source of income. She dreamed of creating a better future for her children, one where they could pursue an education and have opportunities she did not. Shortly after, she remarried. A year later, in 1989, my mother paid for a coyote to bring my sister and uncle to the United States and in 1990, I was born. Ten years later (2000), my mother was able to bring my middle siblings, both older brother and sister, to the United States through the NACARA, the Nicaraguan Adjustment and Central American Relief Act.

Although my siblings and I do not share the same father, my mother tried to raise us as if we did. She would tell us "*hijos de la misma madre son hermanos de sangre*" (children who are born to the same mother are blood-siblings), but growing up apart made it very difficult for us to treat each other as such. My eldest sister was 7 years old and my other siblings were 14 and 13 years old when they came to the United States. Our narrative is very similar to that of many Central American families. Social, political, and economic circumstances divided us from the start, so much so that we lost years together and were never able to grow back into a cohesive family unit. As the only child fortunate enough to be born in United States, I have often grappled with that privilege and felt without a home, never fully identifying as American and often experiencing racism and stigma due to my Nicaraguan and Cuban heritage and Latinx identity. The disjointed nature of my family structure and the irony of my name have remained with me. I grew up wanting to be connected to my siblings, my family, my home, and my country, whichever that might be.

For this among other reasons, the memory of the journey through Mexico is one that my family holds very closely. My uncle, oldest sister, and several other members of my family immigrated to the United States on this path and sacrificed it all for a better life. My uncle and sister flew to Mexico from Managua, Nicaragua, were taken in a large cargo truck to a drop off point, and then traveled by foot from Northern Mexico through the Rio Grande and into Texas. My sister, now an adult, still has haunting memories of her journey. She remembers traveling with a group of undocumented children and adults and being severely dehydrated after walking for several days without being able to eat or drink. She remembers a hunger she had

never felt before and the feeling sore all over her skin from being bitten and covered with insects. She remembers wanting to give up and begging our uncle to leave her behind in the desert because she could not withstand the aches in her legs and feet from walking. She recalls arriving at a stranger's house somewhere in Texas and being picked up our mother. My sister has only shared her story with me once. I think enduring such a terrifying experience as a child is crippling for many and it is something our society rarely discusses openly. These suppressed memories are a mental burden for many later on in life. To this day, my uncle struggles to share his experience carrying my dehydrated and malnourished sister in his arms across the Rio Grande. It is well-known that many have died trying to make across the border (Black & Millman, 2017; Fernandez, 2017).

Mental Health of Nicaraguans

Although the extant research literature on mental health outcomes of Nicaraguans pre- and post-migration to the United States is limited, data on Latino mental health suggests exposure to political violence, immigration trauma, undocumented status, low income, level of education, length of time living in the United States, and acculturative stress contributes to adverse mental health outcomes (Finch & Vega, 2003; Sanchez, Dillon, Ruffin, & De La Rosa, 2012). Research conducted by Sanchez et al. (2012) indicates that experiencing several risk factors leads to higher levels of acculturative stress among Latino immigrants. According to Fortuna, Porche, and Alegría (2008), epidemiological data collected from the National Latino and Asian American Study (NLAAS) shows immigrants from Nicaragua, Cuba, El Salvador, Mexico, and Columbia have the highest rates of exposure to political violence, "civil war, poverty, and government repression" (p. 8). Fortuna et al. (2008) argue that the Nicaraguan "Civil war directly affected 15% of the population; resulting in internal displacement of 350,000 and an external exodus of 250,000 refugees" (p. 20).

   Given the limitations in the research literature on Nicaraguan mental health, psychological protective factors remain largely unexamined. For Latino immigrants broadly, Sanchez et al. (2012) explain that higher levels of education and socioeconomic status often serve as protective factors against acculturative stress. Previous research has attributed religiosity or religious coping to better mental health outcomes; however recent studies have challenged those findings (Sanchez et al., 2012). According to a study conducted in 2012, Latino immigrants "who used higher levels of pre-immigration external religious coping reported higher levels of post-immigration acculturative stress" (p. 10). Although longitudinal research examining the relationship between self-reported acculturative stress and mental health outcomes has not been conducted, the Sanchez et al. (2012) explain:

   It may be that a dramatic loss of these valuable resources, soon after immigration, could make recent immigrants more vulnerable to experiencing acculturative stress. Hence, those immigrants who have used the church or religious leaders as a means of coping in the past may find themselves at a loss when those resources are no longer readily available to them in their host country (p. 9).

Therefore, it is important to consider the role religious faith plays in migration patterns for Nicaraguans. Connecting to religious communities, churches, and other faith-based resources increase social support and promote resilience among immigrant communities (Garcia, 2005).

Despite the decades of civil unrest in Nicaragua, it is the home of many well-known literary and legal minds, liberation theologists, civil rights activists, athletes, and artists. Chief among them are poet Félix Rubén Garcia Sarmiento (better known as Rubén Darío) founder of modernismo,novelist and poet, Gioconda Belli, journalist, Claribel Alegría, religious scholar, Ernesto Cardenal, politician and lawyer, Nora Astorga, civil rights activist, Bianca Jagger, professional boxer, Ricardo Mayorga, and singer, Luis Enrique Mejia López (better known as Luis Enrique). These figures, among others, are evidence of Nicaraguan resilience and grit.

The Post-migration Era

Recent studies indicate a generational shift in cultural attitudes and departure from traditional acculturative styles (Birman & Addae, 2015). According to survey data collected by the Pew Research Center, the number of Latinx people speaking Spanish at home has increased substantially from 31 million in 2006 to 37 million in 2015 (Krogstad & Lopez, 2017). Nevertheless, the percentage of Latinx people speaking Spanish has decreased 5% in the same timeframe, which suggests strict adherence to host culture might be less enforced by parents (Birman & Addae, 2015; Krogstad & Lopez, 2017). Largely, this decline has been attributed to generational changes in cultural attitudes among the younger Latinx community which de-emphasize the importance of speaking Spanish (Krogstad & Lopez, 2017).

Nicaraguans who immigrated to the United States have had to respond to demands of daily living. They have had to engage in acculturative processes, such as learning English, pursing higher education, negotiating prioritizing host culture over home culture (i.e., cultural expectations of independence in United States over cultural collectivism and interdependence in Nicaraguan), securing competitive employment in fields that they might not have experience in (i.e., given that United States often does not recognize licensure eligible degrees from non-English-speaking universities), and raising multiple generations of children and grandchildren that have been born in the United States. Like most Central American immigrants, Nicaraguans have had to grapple with promoting their own cultural values, language, and traditions across generations that are bombarded with pressure to assimilate into host culture (Suárez-Orozco & Yoshikawa, 2015).

For younger generations still living in Nicaragua, they now have unprecedented access to resources and education. Social justice reform has led to more, albeit limited, opportunities to buy property, establish businesses, and build a future for their families. Although Nicaragua is still a very poor country, change is on the horizon. As for my family, immigrating to the United States gave us the opportunity to earn a higher education. My older brother and myself are first-generation college graduates

and have earned graduate degrees. Several of my cousins speak multiple languages, have traveled around the world, obtained college degrees in engineering, law, political science, and technology. Some have even bought property in Nicaragua, which our families were financially unable to do for generations. Together we have become the first generation of educated professionals in our family. I am the first person in all of my immediate and extended family to pursue a doctoral degree, and it would not have been possible if my mother had not decided to come to this country in pursuit of a better life. Our histories, traditions, experiences, and triumphs make us proud to call ourselves Nicaragüenses.

Closing Thoughts: Maintaining Identity and Integrity During the Next 50 Years

As the political climate becomes increasing hostile for communities of color and immigrants in the United States, both documented and undocumented, Nicaraguans will have to consider whether immigrating to the United States is a worthwhile sacrifice. Documented Nicaraguans already living in the United States will continue to face acculturative stress and pressure to promote their culture in a country that is largely ignorant of their customs and traditions. Those with TPS, may have to leave the country by 2019, it is reported, increasing stress with this threat and uncertainty. According to the psychological literature, acculturation has been examined by how much immigrants adhere to their native culture (i.e., listening to native music, using native language, frequenting ethnic venues, connecting to ethnically similar groups, and preference for media in native language) (Birman & Addae, 2015; Suárez-Orozco & Yoshikawa, 2015). However, immigrants experience substantial pressure to assimilate into American culture, disconnecting them from traditions and practices of their host culture (Birman & Addae, 2015; Suárez-Orozco & Yoshikawa, 2015). Along with subtraction acculturation styles, like assimilation, Nicaraguan immigrants will likely need to consider additive acculturation, wherein they can "adopt aspects of the new culture…[and] maintain their connection with their culture of origin, integrating the two" (Birman & Addae, 2015, p. 125).

> Mes de rosas. Van mis rimas
> en ronda a la vasta selva
> a recoger miel y aromas
> en las flores entreabiertas.
> Amada, ven. El gran bosque
> es nuestro templo; allí ondea
> y flota un santo perfume
> de amor. El pájaro vuela
> de un árbol a otro y saluda
> tu frente rosada y bella
> como un alba; y las encinas
> robustas, altas, soberbias,
> cuando tú pasas agitan

  sus hojas verdes y trémulas,
  y enarcan sus ramas como
  para que pase una reina.
  ¡Oh, amada mía! Es el dulce
  tiempo de la primavera.

Translation:

Now is come the month of roses!
  To the woods my verse has flown
  Gathering fragrance and honey
  From the blossoms newly blown.
  Beloved, come to the forest,
  The woodland shall be our shrine
  Scented with the holy perfume
  Of the laurel and the vine.
  From tree-top to tree-top flitting
  The birds greet you with sweet lay,
  Finding joyance in your beauty
  Fairer than the birth of day;
  And the haughty oaks and hemlocks
  Bend their leafy branches green
  Forming rustling, regal arches
  For the passage of a queen.
  All is perfume, song and radiance;
  Flowers open and birds sing:
  O Beloved, 'tis the season
  Of the Spring!
  —*Primaveral* by Ruben Dario (1867–1916), a Nicaraguan poet known for the inception
of modernism in poetry.

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