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Rosas Sin Pan: The Cultural Strategies of the Sandinista Devolution

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Master of Arts
in Sociology

by

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The thesis of Cristina Awadalla is approved.

Kum-Kum Bhavnani

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Denise Segura, Committee Chair

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ABSTRACT

Rosas Sin Pan: The Cultural Strategies of the Sandinista Devolution

By Cristina Awadalla

The Ortega-Murillos, Nicaragua's presidential couple, have established a distinct political-culture that relies on traditional gender scripts and the collective memory of the 1979 Sandinista revolution. This political culture has conferred legitimacy on the Ortega-Murillos, allowing for the concentration of power within the family. The reliance on the nuclear family and traditional gender scripts has crafted controlling images (Hill Collins 1991) of women that promote a culture of both structural and physical violence against women and girls. To examine the links between the Ortega-Murillo regime's political culture and violence against women (VAW), I turn to state discourses and aesthetics as well as women's analyses. In this thesis, I performed textual analyses on a corpus of approximately two-hundred state discourses, comprised of daily radio speeches and speeches made at public state-sponsored events, eleven archival interviews, and six in-depth interviews I personally conducted with feminists. I also conducted ethnographic field work, documenting public art installations in public spaces across Managua and prevalence of political propaganda in the public sphere across the Pacific region of Nicaragua. These data allow for a gendered critique of the political regression taking place under the Ortega-Murillo regime that has resulted in an erosion of women's rights. Through women's analyses, the reader is presented with a narrative of women's struggle for self-articulation.

Introduction

Reconciliación, a Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (FSLN), or Sandinista National Liberation Front, song, sounded off on the big speakers mixing with crowds chattering, bus horns and the sound of rain hitting the concrete. Strings of pastel colored flags zigzagged overhead. It was July 7th, 2017, I was gathered on a closed boulevard alongside several hundred Nicaragüenses who were there to commemorate El Repliegue, an important battle between the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (FSLN) combatants and Somoza's National Guard in Masaya on June 27th, 1979, less than a month before the revolution would topple the dynastic dictatorship of Anastasio Somoza Debayle. This historic event has become a ritualized public spectacle performed annually. Most in attendance were youth, wearing state-sponsored t-shirts bearing Ortega campaign slogans, the year of the revolution and "gracias a dios," or "thank god," printed in bright pastels. Girls wore red and black lipstick, painting one lip each color, with hearts and the letters FSLN written on their cheeks. Alongside them were former *guerilleros*, or guerilla combatants, donning their olive-green fatigues. People from all over Managua and nearby departments arrived hours before and would ultimately wait several more hours before President Daniel Ortega and his wife, vice president Rosario Murillo would arrive in their large Mercedes vans whilst people walked by foot alongside them from Masaya, about 30 kilometers away. In years past, Ortega rode on horseback alongside these caravaners but has since retreated to his bullet-proof vans guarded by strong men with big guns. These state-sponsored rallies have turned into a *puro bacanal*, a party, with street vendors peddling memorabilia and alcohol. Songs honoring Daniel, in the tunes of cumbias and boleros, blast loudly as

people dance and often get into fights as drunkenness ensues. Ironically, as alcohol is consumed, songs like *El Gallo Ennavajado* simultaneously play stating that the return of Ortega will bring progress as previous governments kept the people pacified through liquor.

The Daniel Ortega of today and his Christian, socialist, and solidary¹ government stand in stark opposition to the ideals constructed out of the revolutionary process his return to power would uphold. Daniel Ortega began to change his image and his relation to the revolution, thereby re-writing history, in 2005. This began while Ortega sat in the National Assembly, where he would choose to make a pact with the Catholic Church, not his first time making unlikely alliances. The formerly fervent atheist made amends with Monsignor Jose Obando y Bravo, a former arch enemy, confessing his sins and asking for repentance. He and his partner of 25 years and mother of 6 children, Rosario Murillo, were wed shortly after in a highly publicized Catholic marriage ritual. He transitioned into a softer patriarch who no longer donned commander fatigues. This image was sharply distinct from his former public persona, *El Gallo Ennavajado*, the razor-armed rooster who fought tooth and nail against imperialist forces for a *patria libre*, or free homeland. This alliance fomented in 2005 when Ortega in the National Assembly and in control of the FSLN, sponsored a bill to ban therapeutic abortion, legal since the 19th century in Nicaragua. The aim was to protect the nuclear family and to reproach “loose women” all in the name of God (Kampwirth 2011). The Catholic Ortega won his 2006 presidential campaign, allowing

¹ Ortega’s 2011 campaign slogan, still used as an official state slogan.

for the institutionalization of this alliance and an anti-feminist outlook that would prove to be violent against women and girls.

Daniel Ortega's presidency was no departure from his neoconservative neoliberal predecessors. Rather it symbolized the entrenchment of policies of privatization mediated by a new regressive political culture melded out of gender regimes, collective memory and Catholic traditionalism. The foundational unit of this political culture and society became the nuclear family. No longer in the business of supplanting religion and the Catholic Church, the Ortega-Murillos accommodated a larger base by appealing to Catholic imagery and discourse. The merging of state and church also resulted in the re-inscription of the traditional family which facilitated the naturalization of violence against women and the consolidation of power within one public family, the Ortega-Murillos. If we consider what Ortega symbolically meant for an older generation, the Sandinista vanguards, we can see how memory is a sign that is embodied and enacted daily through discourses and aesthetics, in both routinized and spectacularized ways. As noted, Ortega's return was sold as an implementation, or second phase, of the revolution. For those who participated in the revolution and found hope in this return, their nostalgia became manipulated and mobilized as a force that symbolically suggests total unity amongst a reconciled national family.

Ortega's second coming was facilitated by a cult of personality established around the Ortega-Murillos. They presented themselves as a family given the divine right from God to rule the country, as the custodians of the revolution. This absolutist expression of power in Nicaragua has manifested itself in the struggle to define a national aesthetic. Billboards with their faces sprung up across the nation, public

spaces became partisan, painted in various bright colors and to a lesser extent, the traditional party colors of red and black. Beginning in 2013, 140 *arboles de la vida*/trees of life, the symbol of this regime, were installed across Managua, each costing \$25,000 and consuming \$1m in electricity annually.² These trees represent an obscene power, as Nicaragua is the second poorest nation in the Americas, after Haiti. Catchy songs written about Ortega and the peace and reconciliation his *buen gobierno*³ would bring to Nicaraguan families fill the airwaves. La Compañera Rosario's daily afternoon addresses echo blessings across many radio stations under their control. State rallies and rigged elections create a spectacle of support to conceal the state's crisis of legitimacy and growing indignation amongst sectors like women and *campesinos*, or peasant farmers.

Because of Nicaragua's revolutionary history, its ideological "flip-flopping," and its current political context, it is a remarkable case to study continuities and changes in gender regimes, their interlocution with authoritarian power, as well as women's activism and their historical counter-narratives. The 1979 revolution was won with the participation of unprecedented numbers of women engaged in struggle. One third of guerilla forces were women, with many occupying leading roles, like Dora Maria Tellez and Monica Baltodano (Kampwirth 2004).

Motherhood has been a point of mobilization in many countries across time (Mooney 2007), including Nicaragua (Bayard de Volo 2001). Mothers often prepared

² Moncada, Roy, and José Adán Silva. "US\$3.3 Millones En Los 'Árboles De La Vida.'" La Prensa, La Prensa, 3 Nov. 2015, www.laprensa.com.ni/2015/11/03/nacionales/1929807-us3-3-millones-en-los-arboles-de-la-vida.

³ "El Buen Gobierno" is one of Ortega's slogans that translates to "the good government."

food for and sheltered Sandinista fighters. Mothers and daughters alike often noted their support of the struggle for its capacity to create alternative material conditions of life (Randall 1981). Mothers became political agents inscribed into the new national collective memory as martyrs for the revolution. (Bayard de Volo 2001). As women expressed gender-specific demands, national discourses of unity and socialism served to silence women and mark their demands as secondary, to be realized with the installation of the revolution. The essentialized unity asserts itself as that which demands complete loyalty and defense over all else, compromising law and the struggle to expand human rights (Segato 2010). Women's role in this new society were and remain highly contested. Today, the conservatism of the Ortega-Murillos is present in its discourses and aesthetics. The myths they have created rely on traditional scripts of gender and the nuclear family. Thus, their political culture is an interesting avenue to see a fusion of nationalism, Catholicism, gender, and leftist rhetoric.

In this thesis, I seek to explore the connections between the Ortega-Murillo regime's political culture and how it touches down on women's lives, directly exposing them to various forms of violence, including physical, ideological, and structural. Some of the guiding questions to my inquiry into the persistence of patriarchy and violence against women and girls are: how has the discursive gendering of power served to legitimate the Ortega-Murillo regime? How are gender and collective memory mobilized to conceal a crisis of legitimacy? What are the mechanisms by which women contest the state's imaginary? To begin to address these questions, I perform textual analyses on approximately two-hundred state discourses to examine the framing

utilized by the Ortega-Murillos to construct their narrative. Framing techniques include the re-centering and 'editing' of collective memory and the reliance on traditional gender scripts and the heteronormative nuclear family. The political familism naturalizes the gender asymmetry in power and privatizes violence against women by relegating it to the home. Further, I conducted six in-depth interviews and analyzed eleven archival interviews with feminist activists. These women represent former *guerilleras*/militants and activists in prominent national women's organizations. Out of the seventeen total interviews, three of my interviewees had not been alive during the revolutionary insurrection. Via these interviews, I found that women have long been speaking out against the increasing authoritarian nature of the Ortega-Murillo regime. I also found that women, young and old, work to recuperate revolutionary participation as a way to construct counter-memories that seeks to challenge the Ortega-Murillo version which has refashioned history in their favor. Unveiling the aesthetic and discursive mechanisms used to appropriate a collective history and its links to gender-based violence problematizes international conceptions of Nicaragua and its own proclamations as a revolutionary-socialist and feminist state. This thesis begins by looking at the experiences of prominent Nicaraguan women activists in dealing with the regime and then moves to examine state discourses and aesthetics as manifestations of the regime's political ideology. The study into discourses and aesthetics is informed by content analysis of discourses, observations and women's analyses of these cultural forms via conducted interviews.

Literature Review

Symbolic Products: Memory, Discourse, and Embodied Power

Halbwachs (1950) noted that collective memory is the knowledge and recollections of at least two members of a social group. Collective memory forges group identity as agentic subjects coalesce their memories (Sivan and Winter 1999).

Highlighting the potential dangers of nostalgia, Kerwin Lee Klein (2000) argues that collective memories as myths have metaphysical and theological overtones that serve as “therapeutic alternative to historical discourse (Lee Klein 45). Memory carries a symbolic function, capable of serving the motives of the teller (Portelli 1991). Thus, we must question how history is being presented and whose memories construct this collective remembrance. To this point, Ross Poole (1999) maintains that memory serves as “a central force through which our identity is constructed” and that these memories are “embedded in institutions and in practices as well as in brain traces” (Poole 65).

Duncan Bell (2003) calls for a more nuanced understanding of collective memory. He argues that, “a number of different though interpenetrating social and cognitive processes are conflated when painted with the broad brushstrokes of ‘collective memory.’ This leads not only to semantic confusion but serves also to conceal an important political phenomenon – the role that collective remembrance can play in challenging what will be termed the ‘governing myth’ of the nation” (Bell 65). Counter-memories have been forged as resistance and as Bell suggests, there exists nuance in what might broadly be considered a collective counter-memory. Resistance coexists with power and power touches down on social groups differently creating a

specific relation to power. The counter-memory created out of a specific relation of power between oppressor and oppressed is a sign composed of ideas and interests, or what Weber would term elective affinities (1905). These memories are discursive constructions. Discourses produce knowledge and meaning and are material in their effect. Discourses can be conceived of as an exertion of power which structure hegemonic knowledge and the social relationships that embody this knowledge at the most interpersonal level (Foucault 1971). Discursive regimes inhabit an episteme, the a priori knowledge of an era that situates knowledge and its discourses. The episteme reflects the condition of possibility of an era (Foucault 1971). An episteme regulates what is legitimate knowledge and practice. The social world and legitimated knowledge thus arise from the episteme. Foucault writes

In every society, the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organized and redistributed by a certain number of procedures whose role is to ward off its powers and dangers, to gain mastery over its chance events, to evade its ponderous, formidable materiality (Foucault 53)

Discourse in its fixed and specific meaning, reduces contingencies in order to eradicate difference in meanings or interpretations of discourse. This creates a monopoly on the mode of symbolic production. This production and process is institutionalized and rendered normalized. Discourses are methods of control because as they fabricate a reality they concurrently create what is right, true, and possible (Foucault 1971).

Gender can be understood as a performance of a discourse (Butler 1988) composed of speech-acts (Searle 1969). Stephen Gill (1995) describes Foucault's notion of discourse as "a set of ideas and practices with particular conditions of existence, which are more or less institutionalized, but which may only be partially

understood by those that they encompass.” Discourses circulate power and this nexus of practices, discourses and apparatuses are what Foucault has termed a power/knowledge regime (Foucault 1980). Discourses routinize power and embed it in the body through the micro-practices it regulates (Fraser 1989). In Tolentino’s essay, *Mattering National Bodies and Sexualities, Corporeal Contest in Marcos and Brocka* (2003), Tolentino argues that power is symbolically embedded in the body. Tolentino examines the physicality of power under the Marcos regime in the Philippines. Marcos and Imelda created the parameters for the hegemonic national bodies that everyone was to emulate. The inability for much of the populace to reiterate these performative bodies created a distinction between the ruling family, the all-powerful, and the powerless whose bodies become sites of material violence. The markers of power that exempt its wielders from violence are inaccessible and distant to the “otherized” bodies. The condition of possibility under a patrimonial episteme delimits women to a preconfigured discursive form. The power of discourse can be examined through “controlling images,” the theoretical tool Patricia Hill Collins provides us. Hill Collins notes that controlling images are created by dominant society through the exaggerating of stereotypes in order to legitimate exploitation. Motherhood becomes a controlling image in the Nicaraguan context. It is a critical mechanism used to maintain power in patrimonial regimes. Gendered images carry symbolic power and played a central role in producing and reproducing idealized notions of gender, the family and citizens for the nation. As Butler notes in *Vulnerability in Resistance*, “discourse on gender seemed to create and circulate certain ideals of gender, generating those ideals. What we sometimes take to be natural essences or

internal truths are ideals, phantasms, or norms that have taken hold of us in a deep and abiding way. So, the ideals produced can be inhabited in one's gesture and actions, even coming to be understood to be essential to who we are" (Butler 17).

Gender and Nationalisms

Women are implicated into nations and national myths in many ways. The ideological dimension of nationalisms is a mechanism of cultural mediation that maintains patriarchy in the state. Nationalisms create social relations that give differential access to the technologies of violence to particular groups, namely men (McClintock 1993). Patriarchy ensures the continual male access to these technologies and the monopolization of power. Masculinity provides for a symbolic code of interest that maintains solidarities among a ruler and male citizenry, even though the latter experience subordination to the former and themselves are subjects to state violence. Under a nationalist doctrine, everyone has their role that functions to the building of the nation. When nationalisms are based off a heteronormative family structure, as is typical, we can see how these roles are masculinist conceptions that serve to politically organize and maintain male power. The family unit is used to legitimize the unequal access to technologies of violence and the monopolization of power by the male head (McClintock 1993). Thus, the social hierarchical relationship found in the family is projected onto the nation. Family unity is often presented as one of the utmost important values of many nationalisms (Nagel 2010, Gaitskell and Unterhalter 1989).

There are many other ways in which gender and patriarchy are implicated into the nation. Nira Yuval-Davis and Floy-Anthias outline five ways women are implicated into nationalism. First, they are positioned as the biological reproducers of the

members of national collectivities. Secondly, women are seen as the reproducers of the boundaries of national groups. Issues of 'female purity' and 'honor killings' come to mind as stemming from this point. Here again do we also see the male preoccupation with women's sexualities as it is a way to ensure the continuation of the 'in' group. Reproductive control becomes a measure of ensuring continuity because, as Sherry Ortner notes, "ideologically it is held that the purity of the women reflects the honor and status of their families; and the ideology is enforced by systematic and often quite severe control of women's social and especially sexual behavior" (Ortner 20). As patrimonial rule is patriarchal household rule decentralized over a nation's territory, this ideology radiates upwards to the state. Third, women due to their positionality as mothers in the home, are seen as active transmitters and producers of the national culture. Women are viewed as the transmitters of societal mores, actively molding 'ideal citizens' for the nation. Fourth, women are implicated as symbolic signifiers of national difference, by this we see how national constructions of womanhood institutionalize the gender asymmetry. Lastly, women are national actors as active participants in national struggles. Motherhood often becomes a conduit for women to enter the public sphere, as mothers utilize this identity to become political actors. Mothers have often been targets of war propaganda across nations. Governments have sponsored educative campaigns to construct what a "good mother" in wartime is, drawing on images of the good mother as the patriotic mother willing to sacrifice her sons and transmits this cult of domesticity onto their daughters to reproduce this national family for the next generation. (Bayardo de Volo 2001, De Grazia 1992, Godey 2011).

The basis of the family and central role of gender in nationalist discourses serves to naturalize the gender-based hierarchies that come to form the basis of state formation. Gender-based hierarchies are written into institutions by way of being informed by cultural models of women's subordination creating institutionalized patriarchy. Femicide is a direct expression of the structural violence of gendered national discourses and it is indicative of structural crises. Our political economic structure creates a social ecology of violence that is dependent on submissive femininity and hypermasculinity (Olivera and Furio 2006).

Women under Globalization

Globalization has ushered in what some scholars have called 'a new phase in the of history of women' (Sassen 2015) as it pertains to the movement of Third World Women and the incorporation of their labor power. This movement is coercive, as many women are forced to leave their impoverished nations to sites of global capital to perform reproductive and service work for the wealth effectively manifesting an international division of reproductive labor (Parreñas 2004). State sanctioned violence against women is nothing new, however, under globalization, women have been put in especially vulnerable conditions, particularly for women in nations that employ them in export processing zones. According to Leslie Salzinger, "the edifice of transnational production was built on the preconstituted cheapness and docility of third-world women workers" (Salzinger 2004, 47). Salzinger's ethnographic work with maquiladora workers in Mexico illuminates how globalization is structurally dependent on the women's productive and reproductive labor. It is their prescribed invisibility, a product of antiquated gender norms, that makes their labor exploitable.

Managers come in with not strictly an idea of a femininity of that nation, but a new transnational femininity that equates women around the world to disciplined productive workers. In the maquiladoras, women are often exposed to toxins, work long hours, suffer from wage theft and sexual harassment, and live on poverty wages. Women, especially those who work in the maquiladoras, are subject to structural violence, both personal and impersonal.

Whether women are employed by new sites of globalized labor or not, they often bear the brunt of neoliberal reforms like Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs). Many authors have pointed to the inherent male biases of structural adjustment and how women often serve as 'shock absorbers' when nations undergo structural adjustment (Poncela and Steigler 1996, Babb 1996). Women often take up a second or third shift, intensifying their labor in response to the transferring of increasing work from the public to the private sector (Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2003). Furthermore, as traditional caretakers of their families and communities, women are often first to notice the environmental degradation associated with neoliberal development. Many note contaminated water and associated soars and respiratory issues. Women who work in the factories and live in the shanty towns nearby are doubly exposed to toxins. These women are at the intersections of environmental racism, misogyny and income inequality. Many of the aforementioned studies show how unequal adjustment policies are to women, in part due to the upholding of collective attitudes about women as mothers and caretakers.

Due to the proliferation of structural violence brought about by globalization, many scholars have pushed for a linguistic shift away from femicide to feminicide

(Fregoso 2006). Feminist scholar Diana Russel first coined the term in 1976, defining femicide as the killing of women by men because of their gender. The epistemological contributions of the term feminicide include uprooting the “classification that privatizes and renders invisible forms of violence against women” (Fregoso and Bejarano 2010, 3). Feminicide hopes to reinsert the violence of institutions that directly and indirectly facilitate violence against women into our conceptions of femicidal violence to reframe our analysis and solutions. Feminicide rates have grown substantially with the expansion of neoliberal structural adjustment (Alarcon-Gonzalez and McKinley 1999, Carcedo and Sagat 2000, Weissman 2009, Fregoso and Bejarano 2010). Moreover, much of this violence is ‘impersonal,’ perpetuated by the bureaucratic apparatus of the state. It is the violence of the slashing of social services that are often a requirement for a country to receive loans or foreign investments under Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs). It is also the gate-keeping under bureaucratic systems that conceal VAW by validating some women’ and girls’ realities (Ellsberg 2000).

Under globalization and the “left turn” of the Pink Tide in Latin America, there has been an increased emphasis on poverty alleviation programs aimed at women (Lomeli 2008). However, these policies have served to increase women’s daily load as these programs further entrench gender norms (Neumann 2013). As Molyneux (2006, 2008) has noted, these policies re-inscribe women’s identities as mothers and do nothing to address the gendered division of labor. These policies have led women to take on a “triple role” (Moser 1993), as they work in precarious sites of formal and

informal labor, perform reproductive labor and partake in unremunerated community work.

Third World Women's Theorizing and Activism

Transnational feminism significantly arose in the 1980s as a response to the onslaught of neoliberalism that denied women's rights and deepened their exploitation (Alexander and Mohanty 1997). In response, women utilized their positionality to subvert violence via mobilizations and feminist activities in a variety of spheres including social movements, civil society, academia and within state institutions (Kabeer 1994, Montenegro, Capdevila and Sarriera 2012). The collective identity forged out of transnational feminism is not one that presupposes an essentialist women's experience. Rather, it is rooted in women's shared critiques of neoliberal policies that enact structural violence (Moghadam 2005).

In 1989, Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term intersectionality to illuminate how interlocking systems of power shape women's positionalities in relation to power and society. Multiple aspects of a woman's identity (race/ethnicity, class, sexuality) establish differential degrees of imbalanced power relations impacting a woman's well-being (Collins 1990, Anzaldúa and Moraga 1983). Transnational feminism seeks to also include colonialism and globalization as factors impacting women's conditions (Bose 2012). This is significant to Nicaraguan women as their experiences of violence, both interpersonal and structural are mapped onto a terrain lauded with decades of U.S. intervention and economic policies implemented at the behest of global bodies like the IMF (Isbester 1999, Kampwirth 2004, Grabe 2017). Transnational and intersectional feminisms are grounded in knowledge produced by women who move

from object to subject, akin to processes of subjectivation introduced by Foucault (2005). In this process, analysis and action develop simultaneously to create social change grounded in women's experiences via processes of *conscientización* (Freire 1970). These orientations largely contest the dominant "rescue narrative" that views women as incapable of altering their conditions without the help of outside expertise (Agustín 2007).

In response to increases in VAW and neoliberalism, women's activism has taken on the roles of a shrinking state. Rosa-Linda Fregoso examines the "aesthetic realm of representation" where feminist artists work to rehumanize victims of femicidal violence. In a sense, they are filling a gap in which the neoliberal state has failed. As artists rehumanizing murdered women, they are doing the state's role of providing dignity, albeit in death, to its citizens who are women. Secondly, Fregoso notes how women activists began collecting their own data on the missing and murdered women, something the state of Mexico had also failed to do which allowed for impunity as they were rendered non-existent without the figures. Cataloging a variety of interventions made by feminist activists, Fregoso argues that, "in reappearing the disappeared and making visible the murdered body, the aesthetic realm works to reclaim women's experience from State terror and the structures that privilege forgetting, erasure, and disavowal of atrocities" (19). Their actions confront the state directly, commanding their collective power to demand action to end violence against women. Fregoso argues that this work also reclaims these activists' humanity as they emerge as "ethical witnesses," The practice of bearing witness expresses a deep commitment to their local and global community in fighting against terror and for justice.

Women's Activism in Nicaragua

Margaret Randall's *Sandino's Daughter's* (1981) provides a grounded feminist perspective on the Sandinista Revolution. A collection of interviews that allows the reader into varied lives of women, providing clues into the motivations of women to engage in the revolutionary process. Randall's book illustrates the different roles women took in the war, as mothers, students and combatants as well as the different class struggles. In Randall's 1994 book, *Sandino's Daughters Revisited*, Randall returns to Nicaragua to interview many of the same women she first interviewed, as well as others. In this follow up, women speak of the contradictions between machismo and revolution that Nicaraguan feminists highlight despite reprisals. Ultimately and ironically, through interviews, Randall shows how the 1990 electoral defeat of the Sandinistas, the end of the revolution, brought about more autonomy and greater freedom of expression for feminists. In her 2001 work, *Mothers of Heroes and Martyrs: Gender Identity Politics in Nicaragua, 1979-1999*, de Volo shows how motherhood was mobilized in the revolutionary period. Through her examination, Volo shows how both Sandinistas and anti-Sandinistas appealed to maternal imagery because motherhood is a "mobilizing identity."

Under globalization, women's activism has assumed many of the roles of the state that have been transferred to women due to neoliberal privatizations. As Bickham-Mendez illustrates in her book, *From Revolution to the Maquiladoras: Gender, Labor, and Globalization in Nicaragua (2005)*, the Maria Elena Cuadra (MEC) organization was established to deal with the gendered effects of increased neoliberal privatizations and structural adjustment that the male-dominated Central Sandinista

de Trabajadores (CST), the dominant national trade union, failed to address. Through participant-observation, Bickham-Mendez illustrates the nature of women's organizing in Nicaragua. Due to the transnational nature of capitalist powers, resistance transnationalized as linkages between feminist groups around the globe became exceedingly important and vital for the flow of resources and solidarity.

Collective memory is a social construction that resides in the individuals of any collectivity, in this case the nation of Nicaragua. The Ortega-Murillos have seized upon this memory for their personal aggrandizement. Collective memory has been manipulated and reflects nationalist myths that center Ortega-Murillos as the great leaders, or custodians of the revolution. As scholars have noted, gender ideologies map onto nationalisms to naturalize authoritarian or hierarchical organization of society. Traditional gender roles and the heteronormative nuclear family structure are needed to establish legitimacy. This results in the state-facilitated ideological and material subordination of women. The literature on transnational and Nicaraguan feminism point to differential life chances for women under neoliberal regimes. For this reason, women have a unique vantage point through their relation to the state that affords them a standpoint informed by histories of struggle against gender and class subordination.

I have attempted to synthesize these often isolated literatures to formulate a framework to incisively inquire into the political culture of the Ortega-Murillos, its impacts on women, and women's analyses of the regime. This has led me to ask several things that guide my study: first, how has political regression in Nicaragua been concealed via ideological developments anchored in the cultish worship of the Ortega-

Murillos and Catholicism; what is the gendered mythos of this regime and what purpose does it serve; how have the Ortega-Murillos hijacked memory to legitimize an insurgent authoritarianism; and lastly, how have women navigated this partisanized public sphere to refract the disenchantment and betrayal of the revolution?

DATA and METHODS

Ethnographic Fieldwork

During the Summer of 2017, I conducted one month of fieldwork during which I visited various parts of the country including northern, central and southwestern regions. Sites of observation occurred in the following departments: Managua (Pacific, Urban), Masaya (Pacific, Semi-Urban), Granada (Pacific, Semi-Urban), Carazo (Pacific, Semi-Urban), Rivas (Southern-Pacific, Semi-Urban), Chontales (Central, Rural), Matagalpa (Northern-Central, Rural), Juigalpa (Northern-Central, Rural) Jinotega (Northern-Central, Rural), Estelí (Northern-Central, Rural). A map of Nicaragua is provided below in Figure 1. Extensive field notes were taken to record daily activities of social life, events, and social and physical landscapes. Field notes were recorded at the time of events or soon after, if recording in the moment was not possible. These observations provide an understanding into the diffusion of this state-crafted constructed reality onto both ideological and physical terrains. I visited all locations discussed in the landscape section. I took detailed notes of public spaces, noting colors, structures, installations, murals, billboards, and the people navigating the space. Fieldwork was also completed in July of 2018 amidst an ongoing period of political upheaval. Given the precariousness of the situation, observations and travel outside of Managua were limited.

Figure 1. Map of Nicaragua



Participants and Procedure

Women who participate in various forms in the women's movement of Nicaragua were chosen for the study for several reasons. Participants come from some of the main and longest-standing women's organizations in Nicaragua. I interviewed women activists and one psychologist, all who work with survivors of violence through accompaniment and by providing legal and psychological council. These women were able to illuminate the experiences of women who are survivors and also victims to femicidal violence at the aggregate level. Further, they provided insight into the context in which women contest the state through expressions of agency. As these 3 out of the 6 women I interviewed were participants in the revolutionary struggle, they

also provided continuity and insight into the nation's collective memory and what it is like for women living under a supposed revolutionary government.

Participants were recruited via email; all emails were publicly available on organizational websites or their Facebook group page. Participants were provided with an informative email detailing the purpose of the study. Three of the six interviews were conducted face-to-face and three via online video communication platforms. Two of the women, Evelyn Flores Mayorga and Mirna Gadea are organizers for two major women's federations based in Managua. A third participant, Maria Jose Obando, is a psychologist for another major women's organization also based in Managua. My fourth participant, Dora Maria Tellez was a commander in the revolution and is a participant in the Movimiento Renovador Sandnista (MRS), a political organization founded by dissidents of the Frente Sandinista de Liberacion Nacional (FSLN). Xochilt Flores, my youngest participant has been active in the women's movement and is a founding member of Las Malcriadas a collective of young women formed in response to the socio-political crisis beginning on April 19th, 2018. Amanda⁴ is a member of Movimiento Autonomo de Mujeres (MAM) another large women's federation, one of the first created after the 1990 elections. All participants reside in Managua, are Mestizas, and come from the middle-class, which accounts for a Capitalina⁵ perspective. Table 1 provides a demographic profile of the study participants.

⁴ Name changed for confidentiality. Other participants were notified they would be addressed with pseudonyms, but all found it imperative they be identified so as to bring visibility to the labor of women activists.

⁵ Capitalina/o/x is a term used to refer to those who live in Managua. As Managua is the capital and only metropolitan city in the country, these women's perspectives typically differ from rural, Black and Indigenous women.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Participants from July 2017 Field Work

| Name | Organization | Profession |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| Evelyn Flores Mayorga | Red de Mujeres Contra la Violencia (RMCV)/Network of Women Against Violence | Planning Analyst for Nicaraguan National Assembly |
| Maria Jose Obando | Maria Elena Cuadra (MEC) | Psychologist |
| Mirna Gadea | Movimiento Feminista de Nicaragua (MFdN)/Feminist Movement of Nicaragua | Retired Primary School Teacher |
| Dora Maria Tellez | Movimiento Renovador Sandinista (MRS)/Sandinista Renovation Movement | Historian, Revolutionary |
| Xochilt Flores | Las Malcriadas/The Brats | Architectural student |
| Amanda | Movimiento Autonomo de Mujeres (MAM)/Autonomous Women's Movement | Teacher |

This study utilized a standardized open-ended interview protocol to structure the interviews.⁶ The questions were sent to participants before the respective interviews. The first four of the participants were asked the same questions in roughly the same order. The next two were asked roughly the same questions alongside some others and in approximately the same order. The variation in order was due to the open-ended format of the questions which allowed for a more natural flow to the interview. Participants often provided information beyond the scope of the questions and out of sequence. Before the interviews, participants were asked to sign a consent

⁶ Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

form to ensure confidentiality. The interviews ranged from 45 minutes to 1 hour and 45 minutes, all of which were audio recorded. Interviews were conducted at participants' convenience in locations of their choosing. The three face-to-face interviews were conducted in offices in each respective organization's space. The other three were conducted via internet video chatting platforms. Interviews were conducted in Spanish and later transcribed verbatim by myself.

I employ qualitative coding as my method of analysis for both interviews and discourses because, "a code in qualitative inquiry is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data" (Saldana 2009). These descriptive codes summarize the primary concerns of the interviewees. Interviews were read individually and coded by hand. Afterwards they were read over together, and codes were collapsed into 4 broader themes. For my discourse analysis I accessed speeches made by Daniel Ortega and Rosario Murillo from 2011-2017 via a government-media site that catalogues their discourses, *La Voz del Sandinismo (The Voice of Sandinism)*. I went to the discourses section on both pages and searched for terms such as: women, violence, mothers, femicide, revolution, Sandinismo and FSLN. I read and coded approximately 200 speeches which resulted with 3 salient themes. All discourses were read in Spanish, their original language, and excerpts included here were translated by myself. A table of codes for interviews (conducted and archival) and a table for codes of discourses with a description of each are provided below.

Table 2: Interview Codes

| Code Name | Description |
|------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Self | When participants referred to themselves or personal histories |
| Activism | Refers to women speaking of their or their organizations activist work |
| Discourses | Code reflects participants highlighting different aspects of official discourses |
| Aesthetics (solely utilized in conducted interviews) | Refers to participants speaking about state aesthetics |

Table 3: Codes for State Discourses

| Code Name | Description |
|---------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Sandinista Saintification | Code refers to speeches that speak of now dead Sandinista leaders and President Ortega in religious overtones |
| Exalted Motherhood | Utilized for speeches made in praise of motherhood |
| Familizing the Regime | Reflects usage of the family trope and “the national family” in speeches |

Through this process I found that studying regime rhetoric and aesthetics are avenues by which we can begin to understand how the Ortega-Murillo regime has crafted a reality of peace and reconciliation, concealing structural violence and political dissent that predominantly afflicts women. The controlling images of women associated with state rhetoric and aesthetics have naturalized violence against women and girls and promotes a culture of impunity. Women activists have long been pointing to the increasing authoritarian tendencies, beginning during the period of the installment of the revolution, showing a consistent reliance on mobilizing motherhood and the trope of the family. The women’s movement has in effect been a “canary in the coalmine,” pointing to the contradictions between the state crafted reality and the

actual material situation. For this reason, women's subjective experiences around organizing against the regime illuminate important narratives often not considered.

Section 1: Women Betrayed: Feminist Voices through Revolution and Devolution

To begin to understand the dynamic Ortega-Murillo political culture via its discourses and their aesthetic politicization of the public sphere, I begin with the subjective experiences of women activists struggling against the regime and working to eradicate violence against women. It was these women who turned my attention to discourses and aesthetics as mechanisms of control when I was trying to understand the conditions of violence women and girls endure. They could not separate this political culture from their shared lived experiences with other women and the future fate of girls. It is via their histories and activist work that one can begin to see how the authoritarian nature of Ortega's rule has been bubbling up to the surface for decades, culminating over the last thirteen years of his and his wife, Rosario Murillo's rule. Capitalizing on traditional gender scripts and Catholic imagery, the Ortega-Murillos have reinvented themselves as the saintly parents of a nation, which has had adverse effects on women. To understand how this regime has been able to confer and regenerate legitimacy for itself, I begin my foray into their political culture by centering women's histories and analyses of the Nicaraguan state.

Nicaragua has a rich history of women's participation in social movements. The 1979 revolution saw an unprecedented number of women fighters than any revolution before it (Kampwirth 2002). The revolution permitted women's entrance to the public sphere as visible opponents to the status quo. However, as many gender scholars have pointed out, the revolution and the FSLN in its project of creating a national identity

produced its own controlling images of women. These either equated the new revolutionary femininity with masculinity (Molyneux 1995) or infused revolutionary rhetoric with traditional gender ideals of motherhood to produce a “combative motherhood,” where reproductive labor was now geared towards affirming state projects (De Volo 2001). During the literacy campaigns, mothers of fallen *guerilleros*/militants had their identity politically mobilized. Youth who made up the literacy brigades needed homes to stay in as they made their way across the country and it was these mothers who were organized by the *Asociación de Mujeres Nicaragüenses Luisa Amanda Espinoza (AMNLAE)*/ Luisa Amanda Espinoza Association of Nicaraguan Women as “mothers of the nation,” to care for the brigades (De Volo 2001). Thus, gender scripts were not thoroughly challenged. Rather motherhood, particularly, single motherhood, was mobilized for the nationalist project, a marker of continuity between the Ortega-Murillo regime and the FSLN. One of the most popularized images from the revolutionary period is of a single mother with a rifle on her back and baby at her breast. Placed into the context of the FSLN slogan, “construyendo la nueva patria, forjamos la nueva mujer,” or “building the fatherland, we forge the new woman,” the new woman was still a single-mother, engaged in combative motherhood (De Volo 2001). This image was widely reproduced, visible throughout the nation in murals, postcards, and official state posters, as well as available for international consumption. As much as this image was reproduced, there were hardly images of men with children (Molyneux 1984). In the new fatherland a new paternity was not constructed. As Kampwirth (2004) notes, men’s roles remained static and womanhood was changed in a manner that extended the revolution. The

iconography of this period points to the limitations of Sandinista feminism and its reliance on traditional gender scripts.

Organizationally, women were also funneled into the state activities. Women's organizations like AMPRONAC or the Association of Women Concerned about National Crisis, which existed before the institution of the FSLN government, became subsumed into the state apparatus and changed its name to AMNLAE, the Luisa Amanda Espinoza Association of Nicaraguan Women, named after Luisa Amanda Espinoza the first woman to die during the revolutionary insurrection (Chinchilla 1990). AMNLAE's ascension into the party apparatus meant it worked to advocate for FSLN policies (Molyneux 1995, Chinchilla 1990). Women who fought for gender-specific policies were often seen as embodying western bourgeois principles and detracting from the most important project, that of the installment of the revolution (Randall 1992, Molyneux 1995, Global Feminisms Project, Sofia Montenegro 2011). It was through these frustrations and experiences that women began to critique the rising authoritarian tendencies within the party, particularly that of Ortega (Belli 2001) early on. In a 2011 interview Sofia Montenegro, former FSLN militant and editor at *La Barricada*, the party newspaper, recalled an argument she had with Daniel Ortega on an International Women's Day—

So, the first big battle was to win the right to have our own organization, girls-only organization. It took a couple of years, but at the end we won. We won, and a group of us who were demanding that we were not the servants of the Revolution, and we had a, we needed a room of our own inside the Revolution, otherwise we couldn't push our interests. So that was the first discussion. The second thing was when we began to, to push what was called the gender perspective, or the feminist perspective, on all other issues. Well, some people accused us of being, particularly me because I was the one who was public, and I was writing things, of making political diversions and promoting bourgeois thinking.

I had a big fight with Daniel Ortega. It was 19...I don't remember, one 8th of March, I remember that. And they forbid me to talk, to write about women's issues [unclear]. But it was basically with him, you know, because, this is the reason some people don't understand why he has taken this position today. He had that position in the '80s, I remember. I was there. And it has only exacerbated with age, you know, because now he has become even worse. He has become a Born-Again Christian

Montenegro would joke about how she and others called Ortega and his *terceristas* faction of the FSLN *duchistas*, referring to followers of Mussolini, perhaps as a way to point to the authoritarian tendencies already emerging in this period.

To the outsider then, it was ironically so that the 1990 electoral defeat of the revolution would create the space to birth an autonomous women's movement (Bickham Mendez 2005). It would also be in this decade, in 1998, that feminists would publicly support Zoilamérica Murillo, daughter of Rosario Murillo and step-daughter of Daniel Ortega, when she first spoke out about the years of sexual abuse she endured from Ortega beginning when she was just eleven years old. This would mark the beginnings of the Ortega-Murillos explicit anti-feminism (Kampwirth 2006). Many women punctuate the trajectory of the women's movement in Nicaragua by this circumstance, noting the public backlash and state repression they have experienced as a result of being vocal opponents, most specifically in their support of Zoilamérica (Global Feminisms Project Interviews 2011).

A second event that also unleashed a wave of suppression against the women's movement was the case of Rosa, an 11-year old girl who was raped and impregnated in 2006 but not allowed a therapeutic abortion, a result of the Ortega-supported abortion ban. Feminist leaders like Juanita Jimenez and 8 other women were subject to defamation and intimidation campaigns for vocally critiquing the Ortega

administration for its anti-abortion policies and working to get the girl to Costa Rica for an abortion. From 2006-2008, beginning with their aid of Rosa, the women's movement was criminalized as part of a general strategy to silence dissent. Women's movements were accused of money laundering and offices were frequently raided (Global Feminisms Project, Juanita Jimenez and Sofia Montenegro Interviews 2011). In 2006, Rosario Murillo wrote a 10-page treatise on how the women's movement was a bourgeois ideology imported to destabilize the revolutionary project. She went as far as calling feminists "contras⁷ in dresses" (La Botz 2016). For Juanita Jimenez this symbolized the entrenchment of authoritarian power against dissident voices. She argues that these attacks were a "payback" because feminists spoke out against Ortega and were in support of Zoilamérica in 1998 (Global Feminisms Project, Juanita Jimenez 2011). Yamileth Mejia who was part of the Network of Women Against Violence and among the nine women targeted by the state also echoed this point in her interview with the Global Feminisms Project stating,

They would accuse us of being accomplices to sexual abuses, when the biggest accomplice was the President's wife! And the criminal was the President, not us. So, because we were in favor of human rights they were making slanderous and defamatory allegations about us, accusing us of being criminals; we weren't the criminals.

Specific women and the women's movement as a whole became subject to intense intimidation that continued through the time of my interviews, as my interviewees highlighted similar experiences. In 2017, Mirna would highlight tactics of suppression women face during mobilizations despite the legality of protests and their recognized protections under the constitution to publicly gather. In our interview she would recall,

⁷ Contrás refers to the counterrevolutionary forces funded by the CIA during the 1980s.

But if you look closely, when we have had mobilizations, there were like three or four mobilizations in a row, the first row of police they put on us were all riot police. And they were women, confronting other women. That is violence. All the languages they use are violence.

For Mirna and other women who have become critical voices of the regime, access to the public sphere is restricted physically but also in terms of the credibility or legitimacy capital women have when expressing their analyses. When I asked Amanda about the public perception of feminists in Nicaragua and its relation to the state, she laughed and said, “well they don’t call us witches for nothing.” She further went on to say,

The feminist movement of Nicaragua has been one of the, and I say this without a doubt, one of the movements that has had *profound* analyses over our reality. Yes, it has warned and given testimony to what could occur. There are historic documents, from 2006, 2005, I recommend you visit some of the *compañeras* from MAM that have detailed those documents where they warned what we would be confronting. But, well, obviously society...we have a very patriarchal, *machista*, misogynist society. So obviously, they did not take us into account. Not only did they not listen to us, they looked at us as if we were crazy, as ones who exaggerate. They excluded us from a lot of things.

Anti-feminism from the state has been rampant, with feminists being decried as the enemy of the family. Across my six interviews and the eleven archival interviews I read, Amanda’s sentiment about state anti-feminism and a misconception of feminism in the public eye was prevalent. The ways in which the regime has dealt with its most vocal opponent prefigures how it came to deal with the largely *campesino* opposition around the projected interoceanic canal beginning in 2013 and the 2018 uprisings.

This tangled history between the women’s movement and the FSLN and later the Orteguista state has shaped women’s organizing in Nicaragua. The women’s movement values its autonomy from the state, with all my participants stressing the

autonomous nature of their organizations. Because they see the Orteguista state directly infringing upon women's rights and having a role in violence via its ideological positionings that are reflected in laws, these women largely work utilizing a *promotora* model. The reason for this model comes from this direct antagonism with the state, as Maria would say, "we cannot rely on the state to teach women of their rights, let alone protect them. That is why we focus on capacitation." Organizations like the MEC, MAM, RMVC utilize this model, where women from the organization train women in maquiladoras, barrios of Managua and other towns to be community leaders.⁸ They work heavily on rights capacitation, whereby women's empowerment comes by their ability to utilize and defend their legal rights. Legal discourse and constitutionality are something that largely came up in the interviews with women.

Juanita Jimenez during an interview with the GFP would say that the construction of citizenship for women has been a strategic plan. She would elaborate as to why saying,

So, you can't defend your rights if you don't appropriate those rights. And you're imprisoned, we'll say by leaders or you're imprisoned by populism, when you aren't sure that—that the right to eat or the right to education aren't handouts, they aren't charity from anyone, but they're fundamental rights and the government has to guarantee those rights. So, then we have made strides toward this.

For Yamileth Mejia, the *promotora* model and rights capacitation goes hand in hand with recovering history.

So, to train women as leaders, they are the leaders. Someone once asked me, "And you are going to teach me to be a leader?" To which I replied, "No, you are already a leader, you will teach me in the process." What we wanted was for other women, who were also leaders in their

⁸ "Women's Movement "Maria Elena Cuadra," Citizen Participation." Movimiento de Mujeres Maria Elena Cuadra. <<https://www.mec.org.ni/?p=1312&lang=en>>.

own communities, to share their knowledge, so that the other women, all the female leaders, can have the possibility, the opportunity to hear about the different theories that other valuable women have built. To learn about how women in other countries had written about feminism, to discover other women, from the French Revolution, I mean the beginning. Many of the participants came to me and said, “How is it possible that so many women participated in the French Revolution and they didn’t even include them in history?” Well, what is happening in this history? Women were also erased from the history of this Sandinista Revolution.

Rights capacitation is largely a liberal discourse of empowerment, influenced by the NGO-ization of the women’s movement that occurred in the 1990s during an era of structural adjustment (Bickham Mendez 2005). However, there is a synergistic process happening on the ground where transnational discourses are infused with Nicaraguan cultural history. Women, like Yamileth, see the exercise of rights as embodying revolutionary principles. In a booklet of the MFdN’s campaigns, namely their 2012 March 8th campaign highlights this. The purpose of this campaign was for feminists to “give their own significance to the word ‘revolution,’ in this way we try to counteract the prejudices and attempts of cooptation by the government towards women’s organizations” (MFdN Publication 2013). Printed are posters of this campaign which read, “feminists make revolution when we defend the rights of all women to live without violence,” “feminists make revolution when we live our bodies with pleasure,” or “feminists make revolution when we defend the right to abortion.” This campaign is not singular, as feminists evoke the revolution as informing their praxis and the importance of fighting against its co-optation by the first couple. This sentiment is present amongst women from the revolutionary period and younger women today. Xochilt considers herself a “daughter of the revolution.” Her father was a combatant and her mother was a *brigadista*, taking part in the literacy campaign. For Xochilt then,

her feminism and learning from women who participated in the revolution have taught her to recuperate this history and as she told me, “the stories of the revolution I have heard, those of Sandino, all of this is what has made me become [part of the] opposition to the government today.” The contradictions between the Ortega-Murillo regime’s discourses and the revolution they supposedly embody also becomes a point of contestation for these women.

The Nicaraguan women’s movement navigates both liberal and revolutionary discourses, history and the present, in developing their analyses and praxes. This in itself often provides for ironies or contradictions. Liberal discourses reflect the influence of transnational NGOs and reliance on external funding. The reliance on external grants stems from a desire for autonomy from the state and also the denial of civil society or NGO status from the Nicaraguan state, which has been a mechanism to stifle the women’s movement. International funding, however, has limited women’s autonomy in its own way. Women also contend with the official history of the Orteguista state and through their capacitation work seek to teach alternative histories that center women’s roles for younger generations to break beyond the patriarchal imaginary of the Ortega-Murillo regime.

Section 2: Re-Historicizing Legitimacy via Discourses

In this section, I seek to examine how the cult of personality around Ortega has come to be and what sustains it. Some questions guiding the study into the discursive power of the Ortega-Murillos are: how is memory enmeshed into discourse? What is the residual (motherhood/family) that Ortega-Murillo have capitalized on? To what aim? How does the Ortega-Murillo regime talk about itself? For this we can examine

state discourses and slogans. Lastly, since gendered discursive forms helped naturalize the consolidation of power within the Ortega-Murillo family, how does the state talk about women? What do women have to say about this construction of their personhood?

There are many reasons why I chose gender and the family as a focal point in discourses. As feminist theorists have pointed, gender and national mythologies are often intertwined, co-constituting each other simultaneously. Gender is a sort of time stamp, with women and the family resembling the antiquated or the traditional, whereas maleness represents modernity and progress (Yuval-Davis and Anthias 1989). The family becomes the unit which reconciles these different projections of the nation, tradition and modernity. Further, patrimonial domination offers us a gendered lens at understanding the relationship between ruler and state. As Weber notes, patrimonial rule is patriarchal rule of the family decentralized across a region (1922). The Ortega-Murillo regime has treated Nicaragua as its personal piggy bank, as the Grand Social Supervisor of the state and its subjects. Further Weber notes that authority to leader is key in both patriarchal and patrimonial structures and that the difference is only one of degree. Just as patrimonialism demands the complete loyalty of society to its leader, to work to maintain the ruler, totalitarianism is a political system that demands the sublimation of society into the state for its promulgation. The familial discourse in Nicaragua is one that helps naturalize this process. The national family trope establishes that every Nicaraguan has a purpose to serve, to work for the homeland. An essentialized, objectified unity establishes one official discourse, one reality that is a hegemonic construction from above.

When examining state discourses, comprised of daily radio speeches and speeches given at public events by Ortega and Murillo from 2011-2018 from *La Voz del Sandinismo* and *El 19 Digital*, two state-owned media companies that archive speeches of the first couple, I found 3 salient themes: Sandinista Saintification, Familizing the Regime, and an Exaltation of Motherhood. These themes are interrelated, and many times appear concurrently. These discourses are disseminated via Rosario Murillo's daily addresses on state owned radio, digitally available on websites such as the two mentioned, and in state rallies. Beginning in 2011, Murillo self-appointed herself as the Coordinator of the Communication and Citizenship Council, which allowed her to control the Citizen Power Councils, a hierarchical party instrument that is used to distribute and manage Ortega's clientelist programs, and to become "*La Vocera del Gobierno*"⁹, essentially Ortega's spokesperson. In this position, Murillo has become the architect of Nicaragua's reality, speaking the narrative she and Ortega have crafted in her daily radio addresses to thousands of Nicaraguans. Entering into people's homes, there is a sublimation between society and the state, there is nowhere the hold of the Ortega-Murillo regime does not reach. Due to this personal, intimate exertion of power, many, both pro and anti- government, speak of Murillo in a sort of mythicized way. *El Pais*, an independent news site wrote of Murillo in 2016,

At mealtime, Managua is an oven of more than 30 degrees [Celsius] with a humidity that suffocates. On the radio there is a soft voice that can sink a person who has just eaten into the lethargy. She speaks as mother of the nation. Everything in her speech is good news. The country that the poetess and first lady Rosario Murillo paints in her addresses is prosperous, deeply Christian, full of peace, in which all the people live in brotherhood and harmony and awaiting, God forbid, a possible

⁹ The Spokeswoman of the Government. Alongside "La Compañera," Murillo is referred to in this way.

catastrophe to that only the government of Commander Daniel Ortega and she can face¹⁰

Murillo's daily addresses situate her within the home. Her format over the last seven years has included beginning her addresses with some variation of "good afternoon compañer@s, good afternoon dear families" and will typically end with "thank God we live in peace, we will communicate again tomorrow if God permits" and "Nicaragua, free and always blessed." Her addresses, when transcribed for websites, also feature the '@' instead of an 'o' or 'a' to gender a noun as is typical in the Spanish language. This symbolic act is one to suggest inclusivity that the state is a feminist state that recognizes women and men equally. As exhibited in the quote from an *El País* article, the state presents itself as a benevolent actor, a government of love, peace, and reconciliation that enables Nicaraguan's to live in peace and prosperity. They also present themselves as custodians of the revolution, bringing a second phase of the revolution. For example, in a 2014 statement, Ortega pronounced,

This battle that we have been waging since 1979, and that we have retaken with greater force from the year 2007, in a measure that the people decided, already free of any Yankee imposition, [they] decided to vote for the Sandinista National Liberation Front. This was decided by the people in the year 2006, and so it was decided again by the people in the month of November of the year 2011.¹¹

Here, Ortega situates his 2006 presidential win and his 2011 re-election as being in line with the same values of the 1979 revolution, a continuation of a revolution stalled so to say. He also utilizes anti-imperialist rhetoric to affirm this continuity as well as

¹⁰ Salinas, Carlos, and Oswaldo Rivas. "Rosario Murillo, Heredera Del Poder En Nicaragua." *El País*, EL País, 7 Nov. 2016, elpais.com/internacional/2016/11/07/america/1478545266_479193.html.

¹¹ Ciudadanía, Consejo de Comunicación y. "Rosario: Tomás Vivirá Con Nosotros En Todas Las Realizaciones De Las Familias Nicaragüenses." *El 19 Digital*, El 19 Digital, 2 May 2012, www.el19digital.com/articulos/ver/titulo:7172-rosario-tomas-vivira-con-nosotros-en-todas-las-realizaciones-de-las-familias-nicaragueenses.

appease this older, vanguard Sandinista base. Ortega has long utilized the history embedded in the populous' collective memory to elevate himself and his project of power. More specifically, we can look at what I am terming Sandinista Saintification.

Sandinista Saintification

Sandinista Saintification, or saint-working, is a process of re-historicizing legitimacy to restore de-legitimation. It is the process by which national heroes from the revolutionary period as well as Sandino, Nicaragua's anti-imperialist fighter, are conjured up to establish links of continuity thus legitimizing Ortega and Murillos rule. The Sandinista Saints, Augusto C. Sandino, Carlos Fonseca, Tomás Borge and to some extent the masses of unnamed martyrs and mothers of martyrs and heroes, have helped shaped Nicaragua's national identity post-revolution. There are many examples of how Ortega and Murillo have utilized what have become Sandinista Saints to establish continuity by appealing to a collective memory.

Take for example, a 2012 daily address Rosario gave a speech to commemorate the passing of FSLN co-founder Tomás Borges. In this address she stated,

Today more than ever, Tomás...better said that today more than ever, like always, [Tomás] continues to walk with Nicaraguans in these embers of light, he continues from his immortal spirit, whole, illuminating from immortality, from eternity, these roads of light. Tomás in front with el Frente [FSLN], that is to say, Tomás in front with Nicaragua¹²

¹² Ciudadanía, Consejo de Comunicación y. "Rosario Anuncia Actividad Por Tránsito a La Inmortalidad De Tomás." El 19 Digital, El 19 Digital, 1 May 2012, www.el19digital.com/articulos/ver/titulo:7171-rosario-anuncia-actividad-por-transito-a-la-inmortalidad-de-tomas.

Here we see the commemoration of Sandinista Saints where she speaks of their immortalization. These addresses come every year on the birth and death of these heroes, ritualizing these dates to maintain these “saints” in the center of public discourse creating a sort of historical-present. More than this, she conflates el Frente, or the FSLN, with Nicaragua in her last statement. This statement suggests that Tomás, although dead, supports Ortega’s *buen gobierno* and continues to bring Nicaragua forward.

Next, on the 76th Anniversary of Carlos Fonseca’s birth in 2012, Murillo, as is typical, hit the airwaves at noon to commemorate Fonseca’s birth. In part of the address she states, “here with Carlos, with Tomás, with Sandino and Santos López, with Daniel, we reaffirm the commitment to consolidate each day the love and unity of all Nicaraguans, of all the families.” To finish her address, she closes with several “que viva,” or long live. Her “que vivas” included Carlos, which given the day was expected. However, she continues to say, “que viva Sandino! Que viva Daniel!” What these two statements from her address effectively do is elevate Ortega to the same level of these key figures. Ortega has now entered the cadre of Sandinista Saints.

In a 2014 address marking the 80th anniversary of Sandino’s death, Rosario hit the airwaves saying,

On Friday, precisely in the afternoon, we will be celebrating...commemorating...when I say celebrate I mean commemorate, in honor, in glory, but above all in recognition of accomplished dreams of General Sandino, our General of Free Men and Women. Your example, your legacy, your vision, are the raw material of the commitment that we develop and deploy every day, to be transformed as human beings; to transcend as spiritual beings, and to

create, among all of us, the Nicaragua that we all want, and we all dream.¹³

Here we see a very bold statement, that General Sandino's goals of a homeland free of U.S. intervention, a state organized around *indigenismo*¹⁴, socialism and anti-imperialism, have been accomplished and that the government of Ortega works in accordance to this vision. There are also spiritual overtones that seem to suggest that in following the state which drives forward Sandino's vision forward the subject embodies this vision and becomes a higher being. The improved individual that follows this vision then propels the homeland forward in a feedback loop fashion.

Aside from the daily addresses, public spectacles like state rallies also serve as a site where discourses are disseminated and widely consumed. In a 2012 state rally to commemorate El Repliegue, a historic tactical revolutionary battle, Ortega would announce the approval of Law 800, which is the law that grants concessions to land to Chinese company HKND to construct an interoceanic canal and other projects. He would justify the canal through the figures of Sandino and Simon de Bolivar stating,

The other great news is that here I have in my hands, Law Number 800, which is entitled "Law of the Legal Regime of the Interoceanic Grand Canal of Nicaragua, and Creation of the Authority of the Interoceanic Grand Canal of Nicaragua." This Law has already been approved by the National Assembly almost unanimously, because a Nicaraguan cannot oppose a project like this one. Sandino put it forward, Sandino said it clearly when he launched that Proclamation of the Supreme Dream of

¹³ "Declaraciones De Rosario, Texto Íntegro (19/2/2014) - LVDS." La Voz Del Sandinismo, La Voz Del Sandinismo, 20 Feb. 2014, www.lavozdelsandinismo.com/nicaragua/2014-02-19/declaraciones-de-rosario-texto-integro-1922014/.

¹⁴ Indigenismo refers to a historically-situated cultural essentialism of pre-Columbian Nicaragua to invoke legacies of indigenous sovereignty and resistance to imperial foes.

Bolivar, calling for Latin American and Caribbean Unity, and for us all to unite in the defense of the sovereignty of our peoples; and that this would happen through the construction of that canal by Nicaragua, which would be owned by Nicaraguans, and by Latin Americans and Caribbeans, at the service of humanity¹⁵

By invoking the names of national heroes like Sandino and invoking internationalism through Bolivar, Ortega produces a line of continuity that spans decades and countries. The interoceanic canal is just another project of *el buen gobierno* that is realizing the dreams of these heroes. Further, in his statement saying, “a Nicaraguan cannot oppose a project like this one,” he is creating a binary around national identity. If a Nicaraguan does not support the project, they are not Nicaraguan. This echoes Murillo’s statement commemorating Tomas Borges’ death when she stated, “Tomás in front with el Frente [FSLN], that is to say, Tomás in front with Nicaragua,” where she equates the FSLN with Nicaragua. Through this type of language, they set the parameters of who is and who is not a Nicaraguan. Authenticity is being constituted and the new appropriate Nicaraguan subject is one who is loyal to Ortega and the history he is supposed to embody and carry out. Further, we see a very different reality painted from the actual situation. The interoceanic canal essentially turns in Nicaragua’s sovereignty to Wang Jing, a Chinese billionaire, who through the 50-year concession, that can be extended for another 50-years, is able to build the canal and other projects like golf resorts, free trade zones, and airports along the 170-mile route. The canal would expropriate lands from thousands of people, including

¹⁵ Ciudadanía, Consejo de Comunicación y. “Presidente Daniel En Repliegue 2012.” El 19 Digital, El 19 Digital, 8 July 2013, www.el19digital.com/articulos/ver/titulo:7235-presidente-daniel-en-repliegue-2012.

Indigenous people like the Rama, violating their autonomy and treaties recognized by the state.

Upon first hearing the state slogan, “Christian, Socialist, Solidary,” I found it rather fascinating. What this points to is a break from traditionally leftist or early Marxian polities supplanting religion. Rather, as is the case in Nicaragua, the political regime is accommodating and harnessing the power of the Catholic church. Discursive power enacted upon Nicaraguans, particularly women, is a necessary site to study to understand the political terrain. Evelyn, the director of the Network of Women Against Violence sees the infusion of religious imagery into regime rhetoric and the state’s characterization of itself as particularly harmful for women. She stated,

So, the truth is that in Nicaragua there was a lot of regression in terms of women's rights and access to justice, for women, we are very concerned because this supposed government is said to be left, right. But of left-ness it has nothing because its acts are more conservative than anything else. I have never seen an executive power, that in its speeches, mentions so many times its religious beliefs. And for us that is a disrespect to the social state of law and to what the political constitution says, that Nicaragua has a secular state. Coincidentally on July 19, the vice president, at this public event, mentioned god almost 26 times.

When speaking with Dora Maria Tellez, she talked about why, what I am now terming Sandinista Saintification, is a critical tool of discursive power for the Ortega-Murillo regime. She stated,

It is a technique to maintain grouped a part of their social base. That is, to maintain a discourse that is supposedly radical, supposedly anti-imperialist, right, but one that has no essence. But this doesn’t matter because there is a part of the social base of Ortegismo that *needs* to permanently hear this discourse. So, this becomes a factor to routinize the social base and this is what sustains Ortegismo, right.

Dora Maria went on to note that the relation within which they place themselves into this history has a political purpose

Well the current story and the story of Ortega is a story that is designed to give the impression that they have been at the center of the history of Nicaragua and are the great benefactors of the Nicaraguan people. In other words, it is a story configured to act as part of the machinery of political advertising, right. And it is deliberate because it is a thing that deliberately obliterates the historical fact, erases the figures, erases the very participation of the people and makes history appear as a story that leads them [Ortega and Murillo] as predestined, right, as a family predestined.

Ortega and Murillo have oddly mixed religion and leftist discourses to appeal to a wider base while maintaining their traditional vanguardist base. They've created their own origin narrative that places them at the incarnation of Nicaragua's modern history.

In a 2017 state rally I attended to commemorate El Repliegue, a revolutionary battle, Ortega and Murillo sat on a stage amongst a few other officials. A sea of people dressed in either Ortega shirts or former olive-green guerilla fatigues awaited to hear Ortega's words. It had been raining for several hours, but I alongside hundreds of Nicaraguans endured the rain to hear Ortega as he slowly made his way in his Mercedes Benz G-Class. The reticent Ortega spoke slowly, long pauses after nearly every word, as so to maybe drag on a short speech. The fervor to hear *El Comandante* speak was palpable. The crowd became frenzied as Ortega made his way through with people passing their babies to him and others standing to take a selfie with him. It was as if the headliner to a rock concert had finally arrived. As the rain hit the concrete Ortega thanked god for the rain, calling it a blessing for campesinos and their harvest. "The campesinos and their harvest are what drive our project," a statement harkening

back to the Sandinista period where increased production was framed as work upholding and promulgating the revolution. Ortega would call upon, with trouble, martyrs of the revolution stating he was directing Nicaragua to fulfil and simultaneously maintain the goals of the revolution, that under his rule, the revolutionary ethos was instilled in the youth. State rallies become a site where discourses are imbued, and power is regenerated and subjected over the population.

Of state rallies and their effect in producing a cult of personality around the Ortega-Murillos, Dora Maria stated,

Orteguismo is a model that puts on high, or tries to highlight, or work on the basis of, none other than to put the Ortega-Murillo family in power. That's why all the propaganda is done around Ortega and his wife. There is nobody else, there is nobody else identified. And if you see a photograph of the public actors you will see that they are the only two people, who are dressed in any kind of [distinguishable] clothing, all the rest are in the same shirt. That is, the message is always that the only two distinguishable are them [Ortega and Murillo], all the rest is an indistinguishable mass that is not worth identifying. This is a part of the publicity apparatus of the Ortega family.

This conversation with Dora Maria revealed parallels between the embodiment of power by the Marcos', the former Philippines ruling family (Tolentino 2003) and that of Nicaragua's. In large state rallies, there is a sea of indistinguishable subjects composing the background with Ortega and Murillo at the forefront on a stage. They are the only two identifiable bodies, the beacons of power, distinct from the populace. Often, these indistinguishable bodies are young women who become political props for the regime, as members of the Juventud Sandinista are put on display on stages at political rallies organized by the state. Mirna of el Movimiento Feminista de Nicaragua noted of this phenomenon

Through, let's see, the use women for political ends and to go to campaigns and young people who go to rotondiar¹⁶, or to fill a platform at the time of a public event, that is not a good message. That is a message that the young women are duped. All this by a language of the Sandinista Front of rights of vindication, of hope of work, of hope of a better life, of hope of health.

Women become symbolic tokens for the regime, used by the state to accumulate and consolidate power within the ruling family and to be used as displays of ostensible support. The support women are made to bestow upon the regime is garnered through clientelist programs. The way in which women are spoken of by this regime will be discussed shortly.

The regime rhetoric of the Ortega-Murillos is aimed at lionizing Ortega by embedding him into the country's revolutionary collective memory. By reaching into the moral reserve of the nation's heroes, a cult of personality is established around Ortega and the FSLN becomes an Ortega-centric party, a vehicle for his personal aggrandizement. Pursuing an alethurgic analysis, it is critical to examine the way Ortega and Murillo position themselves within this version of reality and to better understand how history has been manipulated for the purposes of crafting a cult of personality and accumulating a monopoly on violence. The use of the Sandinista Saints in discourses is a sort of dog whistle meant to bring up a constellation of associations that bless Ortega and Murillo with a sort of Divine Right of Kings to rule over Nicaragua. Dora Maria did go on to say however, that she thinks this generation that has had its imaginary, its history, presold to them by the Ortega-Murillo regime, is now

¹⁶ To have a rally at a roundabout. Across Managua there are big roundabouts where every Wednesday, members of the JS would hold a rally to show public support for the government. Oftentimes, other groups will utilize roundabouts to stage rallies.

just beginning to actively learn its history, to learn other versions, which speaks to the types of memory-recuperation work done by feminist organizations. This has been exhibited in the recent wave of uprisings since April 18th, 2018 when students, among many other sectors of the population, said *ya basta*, or enough, to this usurpation of Nicaragua's collective history for maintaining Ortega's cult of personality and legitimizing the various forms of violence he and his administration have enacted over the people over the last thirteen years. As they hit the streets they have reclaimed popular chants and songs from the revolutionary period and also chant things like, "Ortega y Somoza Son la Misma Cosa," or Ortega and Somoza are the same thing. By binding legitimation to history, politics is given a reverent tie to a revered past, giving this form of deep regime politics a national origin story.

Familizing the Regime

My next salient theme within Ortega and Murillo's discourses is that of the family, or the united national family. To reiterate, Murillo begins her daily speeches addressing families rather than citizens and nearly always concludes with some statement thanking god for blessing Nicaraguan families. In a 2013 address Rosario stated,

To make the Message of Christ a reality, to love, respect, understand each other, one another. And above all, to understand that in diversity there is also unity. Because we are different, but we are Nicaraguan Family. We do not all think the same, we can think differently. But we are a Great Family, and that diversity is wealth, that plurality is wealth, it is the national heritage of our country, where there is talent, there is intelligence, there is sensibility, there is commitment, and above all there is faith.¹⁷

¹⁷ "Texto Íntegro De Las Declaraciones De La Compañera Rosario Murillo (05/12/13) - LVDS." La Voz Del Sandinismo, La Voz Del Sandinismo, 12 Apr. 2014,

Aside from the worrisome religious rhetoric which violates the laic pluralism established in Nicaragua's constitution, we see an interesting mix of attempts at progressivism mixing with nationalism and Christianity. Familizing the regime is an attempt to reconcile disparate, often competing and differing ideologies. These types of discursive devices at once provide a display of diversity and acceptance while establishing a controlling image of a united family where everyone has a respective role to fulfill.

The national family trope suggests reconciliation and peace. In Nicaragua, reconciliation takes a very politicized course. The revolutionary insurrection and the first FSLN period saw the polarization of a nation of then 3 million inhabitants where families were torn across political lines. Violeta Chamorro's Unión Nacional Opositora (UNO), or the National Opposition Union, campaign appealed to so many aside from the coercion from the U.S. that essentially said if UNO did not win, the Contra War would continue, because she promised reconciliation amongst families (Bayardo de Volo 2001). She positioned herself as the mother of the nation who would lambast politics for the sake of uniting families (Kampwirth 1996). Reconciliation is another one of those loaded terms in the Nicaraguan public sphere as it dredges up this past. Reconciliation and peace became central facets of the Ortega discourse as his fiery anti-imperialist rhetoric proved to fail him in 1990 and 2001. During his 2006 presidential campaign he emerged as a man who would establish a revolution of peace and work

www.lavozdelsandinismo.com/nicaragua/2013-12-05/texto-integro-de-las-declaraciones-de-la-companera-rosario-murillo-051213/.

for families. In 2011, Ortega's campaign slogan and then later the official slogan once re-elected became "Christian Socialist and Solidary."

In these discourses, motherhood is exalted but this is purely in rhetoric and not in material terms. Reproductive labor is praised in theory, made heroic, an integral facet of the revolutionary agenda, but as Mirna argued, "to speak of women is not only to rescue the historical memory of those who were combatants in the revolution. It is to re-vindicate also the history of women of the present." The nexus of memory, mother-work, and revolution is often displayed in state discourses. One case comes from a 2014 speech during Rosario's daily addresses a few days before Mother's Day when she stated,

Heroic mothers, fighting mothers, working mothers, mothers who have strengthened peace with that affection that every day they pour onto their children. With those lessons of love that we transfer every day, from the family, from the community, to form new human beings, with new values, or old values, but values...Christian, Socialist, and Solidary values. The work of the mothers, that work full of concern, in the positive sense. That is to say, to take care of our children, to be permanently occupied with their formation, with the transmission of our cultural and religious values. To ensure that we are better human beings every day. To try to grow in consciousness every day. That work, careful and loving, of the Nicaraguan Mothers, committed to the development and performance of the best human beings...Of a Better homeland, because human beings make the homeland! And to the extent that we are better, the homeland will also be better! How much we owe to the Nicaraguan mother, who fights boldly, every day, to raise her family, her children, sometimes accompanied by fathers...sometimes, and to a large extent, alone!¹⁸

These discourses have material consequences affecting thousands of women and girls across the nation. In 2011, an 11-year old Indigenous girl in

¹⁸ "Texto Íntegro De Las Declaraciones De Rosario Murillo (26/05/2014) - LVDS." La Voz Del Sandinismo, La Voz Del Sandinismo, 26 May 2014, www.lavozdelsandinismo.com/nicaragua/2014-05-26/texto-integro-de-las-declaraciones-de-rosario-murillo-26052014/.

the militarized North Atlantic village of Walpa Siksa, was raped resulting in a pregnancy. The pregnancy was high risk but due to the draconian 2006 abortion ban she was not permitted to abort¹⁹. This is a case of compulsory motherhood sanctioned by the state, but not only this, her rape and pregnancy were hailed by none other than Rosario Murillo. When the girl gave birth she stated,

God has heard the prayers of all the Nicaraguan families, that in most, I am sure, they were praying, asking for the life of the girl, asking for the life of the baby, asking for that miracle that today not only illuminates this first day of the month of November, but to all of Nicaragua and the path of Nicaraguan families in defense of life²⁰

The Compañera considered that the government is "giving testimony of our commitment with life, with the family and with the religious culture, the Christian values, with that culture of faith and love of the Nicaraguan majorities."²¹ On a separate occasion she stated,

The Government of Reconciliation and National Unity, at all times, offered all its solidarity in this dramatic case, protecting not only the identity of the minor, to whom the right-wing media tried to turn her into a victim of the media circus, but also the life of the girl and her son, who are a gift from God²²

This case occurred during a re-election period for Daniel Ortega and Rosario exploited the situation for a pro-life campaign. This is a horrific display of discursive

¹⁹ Salinas, Carlos, and Esteban Felix. "Daniel Ortega Utiliza El Embarazo De Una Niña En Su Campaña De Reelección." *El País*, EL País, 2 Nov. 2011, elpais.com/internacional/2011/11/02/actualidad/1320251317_399319.html.

²⁰ "Expresó Rosario Alegría Por El Feliz Desenlace En El Caso De La Niña Embarazada - LVDS." *La Voz Del Sandinismo*, La Voz Del Sandinismo, 1 Nov. 2011, www.lavozdelsandinismo.com/nicaragua/2011-11-01/expreso-rosario-alegria-por-el-feliz-desenlace-en-el-caso-de-la-nina-embarazada/.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² "Niña Embarazada Dio a Luz Un Bebe Saludable - LVDS." *La Voz Del Sandinismo*, La Voz Del Sandinismo, 1 Nov. 2011, www.lavozdelsandinismo.com/nicaragua/2011-11-01/nina-embarazada-dio-a-luz-un-bebe-saludable/.

violence and of the normalization of sexual violence emanating from the highest office of power in the country. Later in 2017, Mother's Day was once again politicized for pro-life purposes. Kathy de Los Angeles Mendez was sexually abused at 14 and ended up pregnant, forced to bear the child. In a government sponsored Mother's Day celebration in a park in Managua, she was celebrated, given some basic products and a document recognizing that she was the youngest mother in Nicaragua. She was declared *la madre panza* or belly mother, and there was a public celebration.²³ State-promoted Mother's Day celebrations occur annually across municipalities and most often have a Madre Panza contest where the women with the biggest belly wins a basket of basic goods.²⁴ The propaganda machine of the Ortega-Murillos takes popular values from different and sometimes overlapping sectors of societies and objectifies them. National heroes, revolutionary ideologies, the family and so too motherhood are all examples of this.

When asked about the Ortega-Murillo regime's slogan, "Christian, Socialist and Solidary," particularly of the collocation of Christian first, Maria Jose linked it to the trope of the national family exhibited across their discourses and said,

this supposes, with the Christian, that we are a united family. We are united families, who do not have problems, as I told you. But we know that that is a lie. We do not know how it is in each, in each home. We know that violence touches from the highest door to the lowest door, right. What happens is that sometimes, in the high doors, we want to live as the appearance, right. So, what they [Ortega and Murillo] want, is to try to lead, as we say, the party in peace, that there are not so many problems, as so many things are published in the media, right. But no, that's a lie.

²³ Salinas, Carlos, and Carlos Herrera. "La Pesadilla De Ser Niña En Nicaragua." *El País*, EL País, 30 July 2017, elpais.com/internacional/2017/07/30/actualidad/1501368613_857543.html.

²⁴ Umaña, Lesbia. "Realizan Concurso De La 'Madre Panza.'" *El 19 Digital*, 30 May 2017, www.el19digital.com/articulos/ver/titulo:57112--realizan-concurso-de-la-madre-panza.

This rhetoric of family unity serves the promulgation of violent acts in the name of maintaining a semblance of peace and a united national family. Ortega's nationalism is masked as a project of unity and reconciliation that, through its gendered discourses renders invisible and privatizes violence against women. I asked Mirna the same question and she grew very bothered, expressing with derision,

This is a secular state. It [the government] cannot give in a premise, in a motto that they crafted to convince the population to be a Christian. Because if I do not want to be a Christian, I'm still a citizen...So, for 'Christian,' it is abominable. Socialist, we are not a socialist society. We are not. That was nailed in in the time of the revolution of which they come and that I come, and come a lot of feminists of this space, who believed in a socialist philosophy, that we believed in Marx, that we believed in Fidel, that we believed...yes. That it had its values, yes it had them, that it had its benefits, each one decides if they like it or not. but the possibility of transcending and changing is also necessary. What can I tell you? If we were socialists, we would be a more sensitive society in the face of gender violence. We would be a state that assumes responsibility, providing resources regulations to really apply the Comprehensive Law Against Violence Against Women [Law 779]. And we would not be justifying acts of violence that allow men to continue committing these acts of violence against women. When the state is an accomplice to that, it ceases to be a state or a socialist society....A solidary state, we go on because we already talked about Christianity, socialism, and now solidarity. Solidarity is good, if it is good. Solidarity is an attitude of everyday life, not only when you do it once in a while in a time of disaster, this doesn't resolve anything, and the state is obliged to resolve a natural disaster. It is what women's organizations do with all women when they come to ask for help for access to health, for a report of violence, for a legal accessory because they want to take away their land, that is, their home. This is solidarity, because we are not paid for it. And it's not that we have a corporate agency that is funding us to solve anything. That is why many times we do not accompany women because there are no economic resources, but we have moral resources. Then, the state cannot speak of solidarity in an act that is incumbent upon it as a state. It is not an act [of solidarity], it is an obligation...They have manipulated more the religious conscience of the people. They have used the terms and religious figures more than this Cardinal. So, this society, this Christian country, socialist, solidary, it is a slogan that convinces. That the words are right, they have a necessary meaning, but they do not apply in practice, but they convince. Because, they are terms that are so

beautiful in their contents. They stick in the hearts of people, above all in people who do not want to criticize these messages.

For Mirna, state discourses and imagery present one reality that is different than the lived experience of Nicaraguans, particularly women, that is fraught with both interpersonal and structural violence sanctioned by the state and masked through discourse. Moving forward with these women's perceptions of state discourses, Dora Maria stated the following when asked about the trope of the family and images of women the state puts forth discursively,

The worst thing about the imaginary of the Ortega-Murillo family is the complicity in cases of sexual abuse, right, and the patriarchy that dominates over the family with authoritarianism as the model. I think that is completely nefarious. And on the other hand, the fact that, if a family is legitimately in power, at the national level, that also legitimizes the caudillismo of families in the locality.

Also speaking to the impacts of having a couple as the heads of state, Evelyn argues,

Well, we have a, a couple in the executive power, that tells us a lot about what they are promoting, right? A couple that has many things, well, I say that, that has many pacts and agreements between them, right, and as a couple they are ruling in Nicaragua, sustained by a political party of 30% of the population...I'm going to also add, I do not agree with the way of a family of father-family [rule] where the father is the central figure, right, and where the family has to put up with everything, independently if there is sexual violence, if there is economic violence.

As Mirna, Dora Maria, and Evelyn note, the reinsertion of the nuclear family has served to naturalize and perpetuate violence against women through flowery rhetoric of peace, Christianity, love and solidarity. Utilized to pacify the people, these discourses also foment antiquated gender norms, establishing a controlling image of womanhood as motherhood.

Exaltation of Motherhood

To begin, we can see this discourse as an example outlined by Yuval-Davis and Floy-Anthias (1989) in which women are implicated into nationalisms as transmitters of societal mores. We see how mothers are positioned as instilling the Christian, Socialist and Solidary in their children which makes a better homeland. To some degree this can be turned around, if a country is not doing well it is because it's citizens are not embodying the national ideals, and this is a failure of their mothers. Further, the language takes on the undertones of revolutionary motherhood that was invoked in the first FSLN period where women are *luchadoras*, or fighters, doing their sacrificial mother-work for the homeland, establishing a sense of continuity between this period and the present. For Mirna, these discourses delimit the condition of possibility for women strictly to being mothers. Of the maternal imagery and discourses she told me,

To force women, with the discourse that women were born to be mothers, because that is the design and because it is God's will, because you have to have the sons and daughters that God sends. But they do not send me an account to assure the future of that child. Those are the speeches that have to be analyzed and dismantled from this state and this party.

As motherhood is exalted, women have been positioned as the greatest benefactors of this government and its populism which really amounts to clientelism or bribed support. Motherhood is objectified through gendered clientelism. As noted, women, as mothers, are held up as the greatest benefactors of this regime yet this is not the reality in which women find themselves. Of this dissonance between discourse and reality, Mirna said,

Why do people believe [these discourses]? Because they have needs. They have needs. And where there is no work, where there is no employment, where there is no health, Sandinista women are the ones to

receive benefits. Benefits. And they cannot criticize, because if they do they lose their benefits.

On several occasions, clientelistic programs are talked about in ways that invoke this trope of exalted motherhood and national heroes. For example, on the 117th anniversary of the birth of Sandino, Ortega stated,

more than 60 thousand women have received the Food Productive Bonus... women liberating themselves from the chains of misery, poverty and oppression! That is the best tribute we can give Sandino on the day of his birth. And to tell Sandino, with this town, with all this town of Niquinohomo, with all the people of Nicaragua ... to tell Sandino, that today his dreams are coming true, and that therefore, we are fulfilling him. We can say it with pride: We are fulfilling you, General Sandino! We are fulfilling you, and we will continue to fulfill you, because here are your people full of faith, full of Hope, walking along this Christian, socialist and solidarity route, where Nicaragua will continue to come out of poverty, of extreme poverty, of misery.

Gendered clientelism reinforces controlling images of motherhood that reify the gender asymmetry as natural that give way to many forms of gendered violence. Mirna saw clientelistic policies like Hambre Cero which provides women with a pig and chicken as fomenting them into the private sphere, relegated to unremunerated reproductive labor.

That you tell me that you are going to give me a pig and a chicken, I will thank you, but if there are not clear rules in terms of empowerment of women it can happen that I ate it today and it was today's food, but hunger for tomorrow. Or it can happen that men use these resources so that they can *buisnear*, *buisnear* is to sell, market, negotiate and finally the woman is still poor, continues with the same clothes, still does not go to the doctor, continues making the food using private work and private space to guarantee the protection and care of the family, except for hers. Well nothing has changed in the situation of women, what this is doing to her via these programs is delegating to women a responsibility for care, reaffirming the guarantee, that which guarantees the care of the family, the care of the house, the care of the values, in quotation marks, of the good behavior

In all their discourses, the Ortega-Murillos take popular values and objectify them, turning them into something perverse that cultivates the cult of personality around them. In Nicaragua, clientelism is masked as revolutionary populism attributed or attached to the Ortega-Murillos who coerce loyalty and adulation through bribery, fear, manipulation and repression.

Section 3: Coloring the Orteguista Public Sphere

In the Summer of 2017 while driving on Carretera Norte, or the North Highway, in Managua my eyes remained fixated on the landscape. Blue skies marred by diesel fumes created an intoxicating sheen across the city. Billboards of Ortega and Murillo appeared every couple of yards on the highway. Multi-colored Arboles de la Vida also lined the highway with private security officers guarding them at their base. There was graffiti around on some building walls, but one in particular caught my eye. Someone had spray painted “No a CAFTA”, No to CAFTA, the 2006 Central American Free Trade Agreement modeled after NAFTA. It was one of the only political graffiti markings in the city that I had seen. Days later, while travelling on the same highway, I kept my eyes peeled for the marking. As I approached it this time there had been an alteration to it. Someone had come and scrawled “Viva Daniel!” or long live Daniel! on top of the sprayed statement. In a highly polarized nation, this political fanaticism represented the silencing of dissent, an erasure to uphold supposed unity and loyalty to supreme leader Daniel.

In this section, I will highlight prominent structures, propaganda, and landscapes that illustrate the totalizing nature of the Sandinista Front under Ortega and Murillo’s leadership. The landscape has been remade in totalitarian fashion. By totalitarian aesthetic I mean one that is disciplined—there is one artistic style, even down to minuscule details like the font, across the nation—and made in the image of its divine supreme leaders, the Ortega-Murillos. Landscape is an important site to analyze power as a materialization of political ideologies. In Nicaragua, the struggle to define the national aesthetic has been an important dimension of Nicaraguan politics. Conflicts over aesthetics bring society and political culture into the focus. Aesthetics

can represent the overly simplification and materialization of an ideology. Aesthetics thus represent the link between visibility and power.

The Nicaraguan landscape has always been a site of contestation. Because memory is so embedded into the landscape, fights over which memory is the accurate amount to battles over the spatial organization of Managua, primarily, and the rest of the nation. On July 19th, 1979 upon the ousting of Somoza Debayle, Nicaraguans tore down the equestrian statue of the Anastasio Somoza Garcia, the first of the three Somozas. This signaled a new phase of reconstructing the public sphere. From 1979 to 1990, 300 murals were painted across Nicaragua to commemorate the collective struggle and define the revolutionary citizen for Nicaraguans to emulate (Kunzle 1995). Barrios, streets, parks and plazas were all renamed to reflect national and international heroes. After the 1990 electoral defeat of the FSLN, the landscape was again remade. In an attempt to erase the revolution from the collective memory, then mayor of Managua and later neoliberal successor of Violeta Chamorro, Arnoldo Aleman would order the destruction of these murals. Monumental statues of Jesus Christ and Virgin Mary were installed in two of the main rotundas in the capital. The Carlos Fonseca plaza was renamed Juan Pablo the Second, and the Plaza of the Revolution was once again named Plaza of the Republic (Vannini 2013). These public installations of religious figures were in line with the religious overtones of the new neoconservative government reflected in Chamorro's consistent appearance in all-white clothing and school textbooks that taught of Christian family values and abstinence-only sex education, to name a few.

The ideological ruptures created by succeeding parties—from the Somozas to the FSLN to the Neoliberals—have been accompanied by aesthetical ruptures that seek to revise the collective memory and imaginary. Despite the centrality of reconciliation in discourses by these different governments, reconciliation never really happens, it is just masked over with rhetoric and aesthetics of unity and peace. Thus, Murillo’s “pink revolution” is in line with this historical trajectory. Keeping with the theme of discursive constructs, monuments, public art, and political billboards are a visual language in which one can examine representations of the state and women in relation to the state. Margarita Vannini has stated, “on each occasion, they [the governments] also transformed political discourses and official efforts to seek the legitimacy of each political project, through the construction of new identities based on memory, in the figure of caudillos, in the example of the martyrs of the revolution and of the anti-imperialist fighters, and in collective subjects (Vannini 74). Battles over landscape represent physical manifestations of confrontations over memory and ideology between succeeding governments.

Driving across Nicaragua today is a delight for the eyes. Its landscape is mystical, majestic, and manipulated. As long as Ortega has been in power, Murillo has had some influence over Nicaragua’s public sphere. Since Ortega’s return Murillo has installed public arts displayed across the country in forms of posters and structures, like monuments. The country is Murillo’s canvas. She has tasked herself with the duty to remake the country through partisan eclectic structures, simultaneously changing the FSLN party aesthetics. One of her first acts was changing the FSLN party colors. No longer the prominent red and black, fuchsia has become the party’s official color. The

change in party aesthetics also symbolized ideological transformations. As noted earlier, Ortega re-emerged in a gentler fashion, no longer depending on Marxist-Leninist rhetoric as he had now turned to Catholicism and discourses of peace and reconciliation. The fuchsia also brought about a feminization to a knowingly *machista* organization. A purely symbolic gesture, this was supposed to signal to the people of Nicaragua that gender equality is being advanced, that women are so valued in the society that the city reflects this through its kitschy pink pop art. Fuchsia began to take over the walls of government buildings and websites, the portraits of Carlos Fonseca and Sandino on the National Palace turned pink as Ortega and Murillo spoke of the 50/50 plan of equal gender representation in the National Assembly and state media. As Evelyn would critique however, under Ortega's clientelism, political power comes through fealty to the Ortega-Murillos. She argued women deputies in the assembly act in accordance to Ortega's FSLN bloc rather than in the interests of women.

In Nicaragua, rhetoric and aesthetics meet to create a false reality of peace and reconciliation as well as continuity and permanence. Historical leaders are memorialized and brought back into the public sphere through monuments. Collective thought in the present is shaped by the memory of the past that is jogged up through such monuments penetrating the social psyche as people move about in their most quotidian acts. The design of public spaces is not just a site for eyes or a space we move around in. It carries a social function of exclusion. In our interview, Xochilt described how she got into activism via the discomfort she felt walking in the streets, as a woman and as a dissident. Xochilt, who is also an artist, expressed her resistance via reclaiming

the streets with her stencil art. Art was a conduit for expression and reclamation.

Describing her experiences, she stated,

starting with myself wanting to take away that fear of the streets for, and also knowing that I was capable, or because the streets belong to me, not the harasser, or the political propaganda, or advertising.

Figure 2. Billboard of First Couple, Rosario Murillo and Daniel Ortega, with their favorite fuchsia and typical campaign slogans, Managua. Courtesy, Michael K Lavers.



Murillo's esoteric paradise may seem innocuous but it functions is to craft a reality and revise history. The manipulation and control of space alters how one socially moves through a geographic space as it enacts crafted social dynamics. The partisan-izing of public space by the Ortega-Murillos is an act of privatization. The public sphere becomes accessible for those recognized as subjects by the definitions of the Ortega-Murillos.

Just as Ortega and Murillo have crafted a narrative that centers them, that renders them god-sent, monuments and other landscape alterations foment this

narrative into the collective memory and (present) thought. By materializing their discourses through public art, their narrative is codified physically as the accurate account of history. Public art becomes propaganda when its aim is to influence collective thought. The establishment of public art that features some of Nicaragua's heroes, including Ortega and Murillo, serves to immortalize the figures. As one navigates through Nicaragua the immortalization of national and international figures penetrates the subject. Monuments and other public art crystallize moments in time and capture a culture by centering its collective memory, enacting a historical-present. Their pervasiveness across the country, with a higher density in Managua, serves to influence the future by way of the past. The manipulation of a landscape through monuments, public art installations, and coloring created in a partisan reflection dominate the public sphere and impose the first couple's interpretation of reality onto the national and international community.

I begin my analysis of the manipulation of collective memory via aesthetics by considering art installations and key public works such as the Salvador Allende port constructed in 2008 alongside Lake Xolotlán. The entrance gates feature a billboard with a portrait of Allende on a quintessentially fuchsia background with the following text: "Puerto Salvador Allende," "1908" for the year of Allende's birth, "2008," for the year in which the park was opened. It also has the Ortega government logo that reads "Government of National Reconciliation and Unity," and tagline of the time, "the people president." Below is a fuchsia concrete monument with a quote from Allende with his signature in gold lettering. Inside the port-park is another statue of Allende. A gold Allende stands in front of an obelisk with his arm raised draped in a flag of Chile. Below

are two quotes of Allende and in flowers the Nicaraguan and Chilean flags. In another part of the park, a bust of Allende with his iconic thick-framed glasses stands atop a concrete block with a plaque stating the year he was born and the year he was assassinated, and 1970 to 1973, the years of his presidency. In another painted structure featuring Ruben Dario, Allende is painted next to a white dove and the Chilean flag. Below is a quote that reads, “to be young and not a revolutionary is a contradiction to biology.” The selection of this quote is a reflection of the regime’s preoccupation with youth. I believe the dedication to Allende is supposed to consistently conjure up the memory of U.S. intervention in Latin America. Across the Puerto Salvador Allende one will find a plethora of pastel colors lining walkways, flags and most notably benches. These benches are painted bright pastels each with a regime slogan like, “Nicaragua, the joy of living in peace,” “#Imakethehomeland,” “#alwaysbeyond,” “more victories,” and “Christian, Socialist, Solidary.”

Figure 3. Bench in Puerto Salvador Allende which reads, “let’s continue changing Nicaragua”



All of these slogans reinforce the narrative that Ortega is a moral leader bringing peace and prosperity to all of Nicaragua's families. The use of hashtags is an attempt to appeal to the youth. In a personal communication with Dora Maria she talked about the simplification of the state's discourses to empty slogans, the same of which are used to tag a landscape. Even in public spaces, one cannot escape the influence of the party. Mirna spoke of the discomfort this imposed party presence made her feel. Of a different park she noted,

I live near a park and I went to do the experiment of sitting down there to see how it feels. There you have the party house; the communal house of the party is inside the park. Is it symbolic or not? That a communal house of the Frente Sandinista party is inside the park, what are you telling me with that? The communal house must be outside, because that park is public.

Xochilt of Las Malcriadas, or The Brats, an organization of young feminists, who is also an architectural student, expressed a similar sentiment, exhibiting this same response of laughter and absurdity when I asked her about her opinion on state aesthetics. Of the Arboles de la Vida

We have heard of conspiracy theories *laughs* ehm well, that it is marked in Santeria and all this of Doña Rosario, but it is certainly political propaganda, everything is. I do not know if I can explain it the best but personally I feel as if I am in a place that does not belong to me, it is like when someone marks a place as his everywhere, then one does not feel free, people do not feel a belonging to those symbols that's why they started tearing them down when all this happened.

Xochilt also expressed that these aesthetics, the billboards, the Arboles and other public displays are to remind people that they, the Ortega-Murillos, are present and are there to remain.

Moving forward with other displays, Murillo began a new spree of public art installations in 2012 with a monument to ALBA, the Bolivarian Alliance of the Americas

founded by Hugo Chavez in 2004 and meant to reduce dependency on the U.S through regional bartering and economic aid. Funded primarily through Venezuelan oil, ALBA is often criticized as an oil-rich nation funding social programs of other nations for support—a regional patrimonialism funding national patrimonialism, like that of Ortega’s. Since 2007, Ortega has received some \$5 billion in aid through ALBA completely to his discretion to manage. It is widely suggested that oil money has become Murillo’s patron. The 2012 monument features 9 panels commemorating historical leaders of the ALBA nations, like Simon de Bolivar and Hugo Chavez.

In honor of the 34th anniversary of the revolution in 2013, Murillo installed the Arboles de la Vida, inspired by Gustav Klimt, across Managua. These multi-colored trees have become a marker of the absolutist nature of this regime in their permanence and widespread presence. These gigantic colorful metal trees that have been “planted” across Managua are an example of this regime’s obscene power. Each of the 140 trees across the capital costs \$25,000 and consumes \$1m in electricity annually²⁵, all in a country that is the second poorest in the region and 30% of the population subsists on about \$2 a day. Of these trees Dora Maria said,

The trees of life are actually managed from the perspective of the Ortega-Murillo as talismans, to protect them in their desire for power, right. That they use this as talisman is because they have magical beliefs, right, and that they have turned those magical beliefs into a public policy. That is, that the government offices, the government institutions are obliged to have those trees of life on their website, were forced to use these colors in their logo, is a statement, in their presence. That is, it is one thing that there is a magical belief, anyone has the right to have [to believe], another thing is to convert their magical beliefs of any kind, religious or not, into a public policy thing, right.

²⁵ Domingo, Redacción. “10 Cosas Que No Sabías Sobre Los Árboles De La Vida.” La Prensa, La Prensa, 5 Feb. 2017, www.laprensa.com.ni/2017/02/05/suplemento/la-prensa-domingo/2177251-10-cosas-no-sabias-los-arboles-la-vida.

Figure 4. Arboles de la Vida in Managua. Courtesy Google.



Amanda, a woman in her early 30s who experienced both the first and second periods of the FSLN shares similar sentiments with Dora Maria in terms of the motives behind the public art. When asked about the state aesthetics she said,

Look, I think it [the aesthetics] has a pretty messianic focus, right? That they are, that they are the saviors, that Daniel is the god, is our god, and that outside of that, there can be nothing good. I feel that, I mean, look, without let's say joking, I feel that I'm living a few pages of the 1984 book by Orwell. I mean definitely, these big posters, all this seems to me to be like that. Culturally, Nicaragua, and in many countries of Latin America, well you already know, we have quite a cosmic vision of things, that is, precisely, to believe in great gods, so for me that is exactly what it is, that she [Rosario] wants to put Daniel Ortega and herself and the rest of the party as this...the panacea, as what will save us, will give us the salvation, supernatural, spiritual revindication of the Nicaraguan. More than anything I think that's what that all goes towards. For me it is also part of the money laundering, but it is also brainwashing too. Because all those, I mean all that public spending on those big trees of life, there are more than 100 in all Managua, and each cost more than 20 thousand dollars,

can you imagine that, and really, they could invest in health, for example, in some resources, in some supplies for a hospital for example. But no, it is something that does not make much sense but is for them, if so. Because what they want is that, to look like gods.

As the trees went up, Murillo also unveiled the tribute to Hugo Chavez on a rotunda now called the “Hugo Chavez Eternal Commander Rotunda” on the Avenida Bolivar, one of the most principal streets in Managua in 2013. A multi-colored portrait of Hugo Chavez stands above a multi-colored sun amongst a backdrop of Arboles de la Vida and kitschy multi-colored plastic Christmas trees. This installation cost \$1.1 million. The tribute to Chavez invokes an internationalism of the early Front but rather than Mao, Lenin, or even Castro, the figure is now the state’s patron, an homage to a regional caudillo friend.

Figure 5. Rotonda Eternal Commander, Hugo Chavez in Managua. Courtesy of El 19 Digital.



In 2013 as well, another memorial to Sandino was constructed. A 40-foot high yellow silhouette of Sandino stands next to the same multi-colored sun of the Chavez

memorial imposed in a 2005-constructed acoustic shell that served as a public concert space. Sandino is guarded by a series of Arboles de la Vida on either side of the shell with the words Viva Nicaragua 80/35 (the anniversary of Sandino's assassination/the anniversary of the revolution in 2013). Placing the statue adorned by partisan aesthetics in an existing space constructed by a different government is an act of reclaiming space or territorializing that privatizes Sandino as well as the public sphere.

Figure 6. Acoustic Shell with Sandino, Arboles de la Vida and round figure in Pre-Columbian style. Courtesy Google.



Aside from specific prominent examples, the totalizing of the landscape can be seen in the uniformity in style across rural and urban spaces. Government building, like Managua's federal and INSS pharmacy buildings or the mayoral offices in Granada (southern pacific) and Leon (Northern Pacific) are painted fuchsia. In barrios across the country, small monuments are painted red and black to honor fallen combatants. This uniformity is a result of the monopolization of public art. Now, installations are

created from the direct mandate of Rosario Murillo, whereas before sculptors and muralists were funded and people from across the world came to paint in acts of solidarity. They were generally freer, given concepts to fulfill in their own way²⁶, as compared to now where it must follow the aesthetical guideline set up by Murillo. This constructed landscape is reified through individuals' collective experience of maneuvering the social space that is laden with memory.

Figure 7. Pink INSS Pharmacy in Managua with an old red and black monument in foreground. Courtesy Google.



Just as discourses have served to establish a legitimacy-conferring continuity for the Ortega-Murillos, aesthetical transformations of the landscape have also served the same purpose. Murillo has altered the landscape in a dream-like esoteric fashion to

²⁶ This did result in tensions between patron and artist at times, especially in depictions of women. A mural for the hospital in Estelí painted under the direction of American feminist Eva Cockcroft, depicts a nurse, patient, and doctor. Cockcroft wanted to reverse roles in a sign of progressivism and paint the doctor as a woman and the nurse a man. She recalls this idea being denied, citing it as a way in which contradictions between revolution and machismo came to the fore. (Kunzle 60).

match the flowery reality constructed via hers and Ortega's discourses. Both discourses and landscape display a totalitarianism via not only the construction of a reality that maintains power within the First Family, but also the uniformity established via control over style across the nation.

The struggle over the landscape as a proxy for ideological or political struggle continues today. The Arboles de la Vida came crashing down days after the April protests began. The suggested permanence of these trees and the veneer of normalcy were shattered. Public installations once again are removed to remove and reject an ideology, this time the Ortegaista familial totalitarianism. The destruction of monuments reflects a people's rescinding of legitimacy that was once conferred to the makers of these monuments.

Figure 8. Arbol de la Vida burnt during protests beginning in April 2018. Courtesy Erik Omar Campos.



Conclusion

At the time of this writing, Nicaragua has experienced a year of political crisis sparked by a new popular uprising against the Ortega-Murillo regime. Since April, nearly 600 have been killed, more than 2,000 have been injured and nearly 1,000 have gone missing²⁷, according to the Nicaraguan Association for Human Rights. Another approximately 25,000²⁸ Nicaraguans find themselves exiled in neighboring Costa Rica. The crisis began in the Indio Maíz Biological Reserve, in the southeastern corner of the country, where wildfires broke out on April 3, 2018. As the reserve burned, the government did little to address the problem, what many argued pointed to the state's incapacity to govern.

As one of the most biodiverse regions on the continent burned, President Ortega announced several reforms on April 16 to the social security system. Pensioners would see a 5% cut in their benefits, and future pensions would be reduced by 11.8%. Meanwhile, workers' income taxes would increase by 7%, and employers would pay 3.5% more in payroll taxes. The elderly took to the streets on April 18, joined by students and others. The next day, the first protestors were killed, giving rise to what is now known as the April 19 Movement. On April 22, Ortega rescinded the social security reform. But by then, dozens of protesters had been killed and the popular demands had gone beyond the wildfires and social security. What emerged is a vibrant

²⁷ Morales, Amalia. "Represión Suma Ya 535 Muertos En Nicaragua, Según ANPDH." *La Prensa*, La Prensa, 11 Nov. 2018, www.laprensa.com.ni/2018/11/11/nacionales/2494539-represion-suma-ya-535-muertos-en-nicaragua-segun-anpdh.

²⁸ Semple, Kirk. "Nicaraguan Migrants Fleeing Turmoil Test Costa Rica's Good Will." *The New York Times*, *The New York Times*, 22 Sept. 2018, www.nytimes.com/2018/09/22/world/americas/nicaragua-migrants-costa-rica.html.

and diverse social movement that has held massive marches and erected barricades across about 80% of the nation's roads. The movement now demands the removal of Ortega administration and other public officials, early elections, an end to repression and austerity, the disarmament of paramilitary forces and an independent investigation of state killings.

The images of a ravaging wild fire, repression from the hands of state police and the occupation of paramilitary forces shattered the crafted images of love, peace and reconciliation of *El Buen Gobierno*. This image is something that women have been critically denouncing since Ortega's return to power in 2006. Women sounded an alarm to the absolutist nature of power Ortega's return to power was sure to bring. As Mirna noted, "from the dawn, we know the day." Ortega's first act of abuse of power was the rape of Zoilamerica, his step daughter. Women have been relentlessly fighting a low-intensity warfare that has been both ideological and physical. Women can be said to have been the canaries in the coal mine, as they have been consistently voicing the illegitimacy and violence of this regime. Gender is a category of social experience. The knowledge generated from women's social location provides for an intersectional account to Nicaraguan politics that brings in an insurgent counter-memory given the long history of women's engagement in politics in the country. Women's narratives and analyses provide for an alternative view from below of Nicaraguan politics.

In this thesis I have attempted to comprehensively lay out the political culture of the Ortega-Murillo regimes and its impacts on women, which has largely gone unstudied. This is in part the result of international conceptions of Nicaragua as a post-revolutionary, feminist, and socialist state. The nuclear family, motherhood, and the co-

optation of memory, through what I have termed Sandinista Saintification, are foundational aspects of the regime's political culture, utilized as mechanisms of domination. The reliance on the heteronormative nuclear family has reified the gender asymmetry by enforcing traditional gender scripts. The nuclear family as a unit is utilized in transmitting a culture or disposition toward domination. The centrality of the family naturalizes hierarchy, authoritarianism, and prepares the members of this unit to assume roles in a 'public' hierarchy. The family can be considered the site of our primary politicization.

The second cultural strategy of the Ortega-Murillos, collective memory, is infused with notions of the nuclear family to establish a cohesive identity of one national family that stands in fealty to its grand patriarch, Ortega. The discursive space between historical record and the official state account are a critical site of inquiry into understanding how memory is malleable and mobilized for political purposes. As Svetlana Boym (2007) argues, nostalgia can be "politically manipulated through newly recreated practices of national commemoration with the aim of re-establishing social cohesion, a sense of security, and an obedient relationship to authority" (14). Ortega has seized upon the nostalgia of the revolution to establish a cohesive national identity, with all else that stands outside or opposed to this narrative constructed as a threat or contradictory, not a recognized subject. Memory is central to the project of a false reconciliation. This nostalgia and the family form the linchpins to the Ortega-Murillo political culture which has masked structural violence that point to a crisis of legitimacy and contradictions of the Ortega-Murillo regime.

Alongside a deconstruction of this political culture, I have examined how the public sphere is aesthetically politicized to illustrate the visual geography of political domination and struggle in Nicaragua. As noted, the public sphere has historically been remade with each successive government, made in opposition to its predecessor. Public art installations, murals, parks, and choice of paint on buildings carry power as they serve to reify the regime's official account of a Christian, socialist and solidary Nicaragua.

With any research, there are limitations, some of which I would like to address. My interviews were limited to women in Managua who were all Mestizas and are of the middle class, some holding professional positions. I was unable to interview women with whom I was in correspondence with in rural regions, like the *Colectivo de Mujeres de Matagalpa*, the Women's Collective of Matagalpa, situated in the north of the country. Further, I did not interview men who could have served as a control group to see gendered differences between how men and women speak about the Ortega-Murillo regime. I also spoke primarily with older women who had lived and participated in the revolutionary process. This yielded perspectives only they could provide given their historical frame of reference, providing a counter-memory of the revolution to the states. However, to better grasp how the memory of the revolution still plays a role in shaping women's consciousness and understandings of the state, it would have been fruitful to speak with more younger women. Two of my participants were younger and provided insight into this as they highlighted how the revolution has shaped their understanding of women's roles in society. The historical consciousness of women, both young and older, was ever present in our conversations and speaks to

the importance women place in articulating alternative accounts of history to understand the present. Despite these limitations, the women I interviewed offered immense insight into Nicaraguan feminism and the Ortega-Murillo regime's political culture. These women imparted deep knowledge into their lived experiences and also pointed me towards the importance of analyzing the regime's aesthetical and discursive presentation of itself as tools of domination of women specifically and the wider society.

Despite the limitations that this specified sample presents, it nonetheless yields a distinctive perspective that I intentionally sought out. These women represent receptacles of an alternative, gendered, collective memory of the revolution that was either experienced first-hand, or in the case of two of my respondents, Xochilt and Amanda, experienced via an intergenerational transmission of stories and values of the revolutionary period via their parents. These women's perspectives are like prisms that refract the disenchantment and betrayal that results from the suturing or hijacking of the collective memory of the revolution and traditionalism. These sentiments were palpable, a common thread across my interviews. They are also present in their critiques. The women's movement presents an alternative institutional memory to counter the imaginary of the Ortega-Murillos. Given their social locations which shapes their analyses, these women also provide an alternative feminist vision that relocates our imaginary of social change because it calls for a re-reading of history.

Given these limitations and the ongoing political crisis, more research must be conducted in the future. I would like to address these limitations by expanding my sample to include more women, more younger women, as well as men. I would also

seek to diversify my sample in terms of class and geographic location. I hope for this project to be a sort of prologue for future research into the rise of popular unrest in response to the state's crisis of legitimacy. As events unfold, I will seek to understand the role of women in these protests and their experiences, how motherhood once again is serving as a point of mobilization, the regime's rhetorical devices to explain the crisis, and the process of reconciliation that will come.

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