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“We’ve Lost Sight of The Blue and White, and We Need To Find It Again.” Youth, Divergence of Memory, and Political Polarization in Post- Conflict Nicaragua

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**“We’ve Lost Sight of The Blue and
White, and We Need To Find
It Again.”**

**Youth, Divergence of Memory, and
Political Polarization in Post-
Conflict Nicaragua**

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Abstract:

In this essay, I analyze the results from 20 interviews I completed in Managua, Matagalpa, and San Ramon, selecting 8 to delve into in depth. I conducted the interviews in pairs, asking parents about their memories of the Nicaraguan Contra war in the 1980s and then asking their children about the histories their parents shared with them and their personal views of Nicaragua. Through these interviews, I sought to understand in a Nicaraguan context the presence of historical memory, the politicization of historical memory, the diversity of youth activism, and the way that youth view reconciliation within their countries.

My results reflect first that in the context of my interviews oral histories were in every case passed from parents to children, although in many cases children would understand and internalize these stories in a huge variety of ways regardless of the intended principles that the parents wanted to pass on. The second major finding of my research is that although parents are convinced that the current generation of Nicaraguan youth is more united than their own, their children almost universally argued the opposite. I conclude the paper by arguing that despite the prevailing idea amongst youth in my interviews that another Revolution is coming, I found many instances of hope in their responses; their dissent is but a reflection of that hope.

Key Words: The Contra War, Nicaragua, Conflict, Resolution, Youth, Reconciliation, Intergenerational Dialogue, Memory, Political Polarization, Post-Conflict Societies.

Resumen:

En este ensayo analizo los resultados de 20 entrevistas que realicé en Managua, Matagalpa y San Ramón; seleccioné 8 que ahondo un poco más. Llevé a cabo las entrevistas en parejas, preguntando a los padres acerca de sus recuerdos de la guerra nicaragüense de los años 80 y después entrevisté a sus hijos acerca de las historias que sus padres habían compartido con ellos y sus puntos de vista personales de Nicaragua. A través de estas entrevistas, he tratado de entender dentro del contexto de Nicaragua la presencia de la memoria histórica, la politización de la memoria histórica, la diversidad de activismo juvenil y la forma en que ven a los jóvenes la reconciliación dentro de su país.

Mis resultados reflejan primero que en el contexto de mis entrevistas, las historias orales fueron en casi todos los casos pasadas de padre a hijo, aunque en muchos casos los hijos entendían e interiorizaban estas historias en una gran variedad de formas, independientemente de los principios que los padres querían transmitir. El segundo hallazgo importante de mi investigación es que aunque los padres están convencidos de que la generación actual de jóvenes nicaragüenses está más unida que la suya, la mayoría sus hijos sostiene lo contrario. Concluyo el ensayo con el argumento de que a pesar de la idea que prevalece entre los jóvenes en las entrevistas que otra revolución va a llegar a Nicaragua, encontré yo muchos ejemplos de esperanza en sus respuestas; su desacuerdo no es más que un reflejo de esa esperanza.

Palabras clave: La guerra nicaragüense, Nicaragua, resolución de conflictos, juventud, reconciliación, diálogo intergeneracional, memoria, polarización política, sociedades pos-guerra.

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Introduction

History always carries connections to the present, threads that intertwine with politics and culture, perpetually shaping and reshaping future realities. This relationship is especially prominent in post-conflict Nicaragua: in the graffiti plastered on the walls, in the shadow of Sandino overlooking the city of Managua, in the tense political discussions that always seem to relate somehow to the past. Nicaragua's history remains integrally important to its present day issues.

Dr. Jacquelyn Dowd Hall argued in her narration of the Long Civil Rights Movement that, "remembrance is always a form of forgetting".¹ That is because historiography is always changing and whenever one recalls a historical event, there is without fail something that is featured less prominently or obscured. Because of the importance of remembrance in Nicaragua, a country that has been so consistently subject to outside manipulation and internal conflict, I decided that I wanted to focus my project on memory and its importance in the reality of the country today.

I was especially interested in studying the ways that youth remember the conflict and process the oral histories passed on to them by their parents. Youth of this post-revolution generation, after all, live in the shadow of a history filled with violence and now must decipher how to conceptualize the sacrifices and dreams of their parents and incorporate them into a vision for the future of their country. Because of this, history, memory, and reconciliation all form an important nexus that is of the utmost significance in the future of post-conflict Nicaragua.

¹ Jacquelyn Dowd Hall. "The Long Civil Rights Movement and The Political Uses of The Past" *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 91, No. 4 (March, 2005): 1233.

Historical Background

Nicaragua's recent history is rife with turmoil and internal conflict. After nearly 40 years of violent political repression under the US-backed Somoza family, in the late 1960s a guerrilla force under the name FSLN (Sandinista National Liberation Front, or sometimes simply, "Sandinista") began to form in an attempt to liberate the country from the dictatorship. In 1979, after years of fighting against Somoza's National Guard, the Sandinista guerrilla forces overthrew the Somoza regime and came to power in a new government.² Many Nicaraguans flooded the streets in celebration, but others who had fought under Somoza fled fearing reprisals, relocating primarily to Honduras and, for those with sufficient resources, the United States. These dissidents of the new government went on to form the guerrilla military faction "the Contras", who, with the backing of Reagan and the US, waged an incredibly violent 10-year war on the Sandinista government known as the Contra War, which ended in a peaceful transition of power in the elections of 1990. Official estimates put the death toll for the war at 30,865, or roughly 1 percent of the Nicaraguan population, but those figures fail to take into account the massive destruction to the economy and to infrastructure that resulted from the war.³ This recent history remains incontrovertibly relevant to politics in the country today.

Researcher's Lens

Many aspects of my identity likely came into play during my interviews in ways that may have affected their eventual outcomes. For example, as someone who is biologically male, I

² Thomas W. Walker & Christine J. Wade, *Nicaragua: Living in the Shadow of the Eagle* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2011) 30.

³ Walker & Wade, 51.

found that in many cases women, particularly in the *campo*⁴, were much more timid in their responses towards me. My nationality in particular played a heavy role in my interviews because due to the actions of the United States (my country of origin), the history that I represent is tied inextricably with Nicaraguan history whether I spoke with a former Contra or a former Sandinista. In some of my interviews, for example, the person I was talking with would refer to me directly in their responses, identifying the US as “your government”, or “your country”. Thus, my nationality in many ways hindered my capacity to achieve a truly objective response during my interviews. Additionally, I had more exposure to Sandinista perspectives during my stay in Nicaragua and at least at the start of my project identified more with that party ideologically, which presented a challenge that I had to confront in regards to my objectivity while writing and conducting interviews.

Methodology



⁴ The *campo* refers to the rural parts of a country. In Nicaragua, the term is politicized, and there is often a divide between those who live in the city and those who live in the *campo*, which is often less developed and more traditional. ⁵ Map obtained on May 1, 2014 from: <http://w0.fastmeteo.com/locationmaps/Matagalpa.8.gif>.

I focused in my interviews on various questions of remembrance and how the oral traditions of youth directly affected by the historical conflict shape their ideas for the future of the country. How do these young people view their parents' history? How do they view each other? All of these answers play a heavy role in the outcome of the country, because it is the youth of Nicaragua who will go on to become the politicians, lawyers, doctors, and activists of tomorrow. In order to gain insight into these broader queries, I formulated a list of specific questions, some of which included:

“Do you think the Nicaragua of today is more united or divided now than during your parents' time?”

“Have your parents shared with you any accounts of their participation in the conflict? If so, have their stories matched what you have learned in school and from other sources?”

“Are the aspirations of your parents met today?”

“How do you think your parents' participation has affected your hopes for the country?” “If you could speak to another young person whose parents fought on the opposing side of the conflict, what would you tell them?”

“What does Nicaragua need to do to maintain peace?”

I also gathered information on the history of the parents during the interviews, meaning that each interview occurred with a pair of one child and one parent, with each part conducted separately. These interviews occurred in Managua, Matagalpa, and various rural communities in the area near San Ramon, a community about 30 minutes east of Matagalpa. In Matagalpa and surrounding communities, there is a particularly strong sense of history surrounding the war of the 1980s as most of the violence was waged in the mountains in the north of Nicaragua- the

same mountains that nestle the city today. I have attached a map above with Managua and Matagalpa labeled for the purposes of geographic clarity.

I was able to do ten sets of interviews in total: six in Matagalpa, two in Managua, and two in rural communities near Matagalpa (El Porvenir and El Zocon). In order to include more space for analysis, I will be incorporating into this essay only the four sets of interviews that I believe represent best the depth and breadth of my research as a whole. Although six pairs of interviews were not included explicitly in my essay, they still played a role in the formation of my analysis and my ultimate conclusions, and are thus listed in my Works Cited section. The 4 interviews I will develop in the paper were selected based on the diversity of their responses and the geographic areas that they represent. I chose not to include all ten in order to achieve greater depth of analysis within these four while still remaining more or less within the limitations of time and length proposed.

I separated each pair of interviews included into distinct sections, each section containing two principle themes: first, *Memory, Intergenerational Dialogue, and Reconciliation*, and second, *Youth, Dreams for the Future, and the Road to Peace*. Each of these sections in turn is divided into various subdivisions of analysis, the specific subdivisions sometimes varying based on the focus of each interview.

At the beginning of each interview set, I include some background information on those who responded to my questions, and present a summarized narrative in the first person of the life history of the parent with whom I talked, attempting to imitate the voice that they exemplified during their responses. I wrote the remaining sections in third person with interspersed dialogue from the interviews and analysis. After presenting the four sets of interviews, I will present an

analysis of all four interviews together, putting them into dialogue with each other as well as with previous scholarship conducted on the themes I explored before my conclusion.

Themes/Literature Review

While I was completing my interviews and doing research related to the themes I wanted to explore, I had four principle goals in mind, which I hope to achieve in the writing of this paper. These goals are: 1.) To give voice to the lived histories of certain individuals who experienced the Contra War in the 1980s, 2.) To examine how effectively stories (and perhaps more importantly, their intended principles) are passed between generations in the context of my interviews, 3.) To understand some of the ways that certain youth view peace and reconciliation in a Nicaraguan context, as well as the means to achieving them, and 4.) To provide young individuals with a platform from which they can speak about their passions, and hopefully shed light onto some of the diversity of youth activism in Nicaragua today. These four goals translate into four distinct themes which I will be developing in this essay, in the same order as the goals above: the presence of historical memory, the political uses of historical memory, resolution within in a Nicaraguan context through the eyes of youth, and an examination of the future of Nicaragua through the lens of youth's dreams. My literature review will thus be divided into these sections, as well as my analysis of all of the interviews together at the end of the paper.

The Presence of Historical Memory

Historical memory in most contexts, including that of Nicaragua, can be separated between the history that is passed informally between generations and that which is recreated and very intentionally communicated (or obscured) within schools and/or public spaces such as museums and public monuments. Many countries understand the power of collective history, and thus have attempted to frame historical events in a way that would lead to a certain consolidation

of power. In some countries, this manipulation of history is more prominent than in others. In El Salvador, for example, many horrific violations committed under military regimes were intentionally censored from the knowledge of the public (like a particularly gruesome mass killing of peasants in 1932 in the name of anti-communism known as “the Massacre”). Nonetheless, this censorship simply increased the power of private and intergenerational collective history:

“One of the great ironies of 1932- the eerie silence in the decades after the Massacre. The events were rarely discussed publicly, yet most everyone in the country knew about them because stories had been passed down in personal conversation and oral tradition. The versions of the events contained in these traditions varied significantly with each person and group, but most every Salvadoran know that something tremendous and horrifying had happened back in the early 1930’s. In this way, 1932 represented an element of shared national identity, in which knowing something about the events helped to define what it meant to be Salvadoran.”⁵

A significant goal of my project, then, was to explore the distinctions in a Nicaraguan context between the dominant collective history presented in government-sponsored spaces like schools and museums (both under Daniel Ortega’s FSLN and Violeta Chamorro’s UNO), and history passed through families- a history that many scholars argue has a larger impact on national identity. Nicaragua, after all, is composed of many people with distinct and varying histories, political views, and lives, and I wanted to capture the diversity inherent in this national identity, as illustrated through distinct lived experiences.

The Political Uses of Historical Memory

My analysis had to extend beyond a simple examination of the presence (or lack thereof) of historical memory in an intergenerational context, however. I also wanted to study the *uses*

⁵ Lindo-Fuentes, Hector; Ching, Erik; Lara Martin, Rafael: *Remembering a Massacre in El Salvador: The Insurrection of 1932, Roque Dalton, and the Politics of Historical Memory*, (Albuquerque, New Mexico: University of New Mexico Press, 2007), 4.

and *impacts* of these shared stories. Scholars have previously examined the powerful ways that histories can be used to divide and incite tensions between groups of people in conflict. For example, the presentation of one perspective on a single historical memory, even one that was hundreds of years old, provided a spark that would tragically lead to the war which divided the former Yugoslavia:

“The wars in Yugoslavia during the 1990s provide an excellent example of the mobilization of memory for political confrontation. Historians refer to Slobodan Milosevic’s infamous 1987 speech to commemorate a victory of the Ottomans over the Serbs in the battle of Kosovo in 1389 as a turning point in the dissolution of Yugoslavia. The Yugoslav leader used the memory of an event five hundred years earlier to inflame Serb nationalist feelings, and thus he ultimately put his country on the road to self-destruction. In the end Yugoslavia was fragmented by enraged groups fueled by memories. As Ilana R Bet-El puts it, ‘These were memories of aggressive acts committed by the others. Sin upon sin, national memories conjured up as if they were real, personal memories, locking each ethnicity into itself, making all the others abhorrent, unjust, and fearful. Words of the past became weapons of war.’ The fact that ‘words of the past’, alternative narratives of distant events, can become ‘weapons of war’ is the reason why the exploration of historical memory is as important as the exploration of ‘what actually happened’.”⁶

Nicaragua’s history of conflict is both extensive and extremely recent, and it remains undeniably potent in the present.

However, while many scholars focus on the negative uses of memory, others acknowledge its potential importance in reconciliation and peace-building processes amongst communities in conflict. For example, The Peace School in Italy, an organization that works with various groups seeking reconciliation, describes in its mission statement that, “The Peace School embodies the choice to make the memory active in the present. This process goes further than the mere conservation of memory; the historic narration, based on ongoing research, of the site’s tragic past becomes the starting point for challenging educational activities aimed at the establishment of a culture of peace. As we understand it, a culture of peace does not rule out the

⁶ Lindo-Fuentes et. al, 20.

existence of conflicts, but is a means of recognizing and accepting that conflict affects every aspect of our lives, and that we must creatively transform conflict when it arises.”⁷

One of my goals in my analysis, then, will be to put my research in Nicaragua into dialogue with the scholarship above, representing contexts as diverse as El Salvador, former Yugoslavia, and Israel and Palestine. I wanted to examine both the positive and negative roles that collective memory plays in current peace making processes within the country.

Examining the Future of Nicaragua, Through Youth's Dreams

In scholarship related to peace and reconciliation studies, the voices of youth are often neglected. This is ironic, given that their contribution to the future of any given society is undeniable. Discussing Northern Ireland, Siobhan McEvoy described why this exclusion of the perspective of young people is such a critical gap in current scholarship:

“Paradoxically, it is the currently disenfranchised young (those under 18) who will determine the success or failure of any peace process in the long term. It is important, therefore, to understand young people's attitudes toward the conflict, the conflict resolution process, and the system of communal deterrence that is both a symptom of the conflict and its sustenance. In-depth consideration of the young is justified by the requirements of positive and negative peacebuilding. Young people's attitudes, degrees of investment in the process, and perceptions of political efficacy will influence whether or not (and how) they use the ballot box, whether they instead opt out of politics or turn to violence (political or otherwise), and whether they find alternatives to, or reinforcement for, the 'deterrence community' psychology and lifestyle.”⁸

Young people will lead the future of Nicaragua. They will help determine if the country will experience another revolution or war, or if it will remain in peace. They are also ultimately

⁷ Baiesi, Nadia; MGigli, Marzia; Monicelli, Elena; Pellizzoli, Roberta, “Places of Memory as a Tool for Education: The ‘Peace in Four Voices Summer Camps’ at Monte Sole, *The Public Historian*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (February 2008), 30.

⁸ McEvoy, Siobhan, “Communities and Peace: Catholic Youth in Northern Ireland”, *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 37, No. 1 (January 2000), 86.

the experts on tensions and division amongst their own generation. I thus had the goal of highlighting their dreams, because while much scholarship has focused on the negative role that

young people play in the process of peace-building, few have focused on their potential for positive change. McEvoy illustrates this by describing how:

“Negative' communities, such as the gang, paramilitary group, or sectarian enclave, which are necessary and even desirable in response to threat, emerge when other forms of community do not exist or are weak, and in the absence of material, psychological, social and emotional support through other channels. The widespread manifestation of this phenomenon, from wars of liberation in Africa to urban gangs in the USA, underlines its importance in explaining intractable conflicts and the roles of youth in violence (Cairns, 1996; Fanon, 1966; Spergel, 1995; Straker et al., 1992). The importance of children's political socialization has long been recognized by those concerned with social values, citizenship, and the existence of stable communities (Coles, 1986). Yet, children and young people are not usually perceived as political actors. While it is now recognized that children and young people play important roles as soldiers in conflicts around the world (Brett & McCallin, 1996; Cohn & Goodwin-Gill, 1994; Klare, 1999; Wessells, 1998), they are much less frequently considered as peace-builders.”⁹

It was thus very important for me to move beyond the tendency to show youth as perpetrators of violence and conflict and rather hone in on the many and diverse ways that they are working beyond the capabilities of peace workers and the government towards a better and more peaceful society.

Resolution in a Nicaraguan Context, Through the Eyes of Youth

Another critical gap in current scholarship on reconciliation is simply what youth think about peace and reconciliation. Most scholarship relies on experts who have studied peace and reconciliation in academic contexts to opine on the political situations in various countries. As Clare Magill and Brandon Hamber describe, “In spite of an emphasis on promoting reconciliation among children and young people in post-conflict contexts...relatively little is known about how these post-conflict generations understand the concept of reconciliation. Nor has any concerted effort been made to explore what young people understand to be their role in contributing to reconciliation processes and, specifically, how they see this from an

⁹ *Ibid.*

intergenerational perspective.”¹⁰ While the perspective of academics is clearly important in understanding reconciliation in a diverse array of contexts, I wanted to contribute to a growing movement which focuses on young people as experts on their own country and on the struggles it faces.

Interview Case Studies

INTERVIEW 1: Jorge and Donald

Jorge and Donald live in the Colonia Maximo Jerez, in Managua, Nicaragua. Donald currently works as a cab driver, and Jorge, his son, is actively involved in the Sandinista Youth movement. Jorge is attending university in Managua to study Engineering.

Memory, Intergenerational Dialogue, and Reconciliation

Life History of Parent

“My parents homeschooled me and then I went to a private university in Managua to study accounting. Afterwards, I worked at the Nicaraguan Ministry of Health before entering my position with the Ministry of Defense under the FSLN. I collaborated with the FSLN even before the triumph, though. In 1976 and 1977 I was a messenger between Managua and other areas where Sandinista refugees were working to build up a guerrilla force that could overthrow Somoza. After the triumph of the Revolution, I served for 8 years in the Ministry of Security, primarily mobilizing in the mountains in the north of the country to fight Contra forces. Those of us in the army worked to protect the centers of production that the Contras were trying to destroy

¹⁰ Magill, Clare & Hamber, Brandon “If They Don’t Start Listening to Us, the Future Is Going to Look the Same as the Past’: Young People and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland and Bosnia and Herzegovina”, *Youth and Society*, Vol. 43, No. 2 (January 2009), 510.

as a part of their guerrilla tactics. They wanted to kill the *campesino*¹¹ and destroy the economy as a means of destabilizing the Sandinista government.

I always had the desire to protect the *campesinos*. They are the foundation of our society, and they uphold many of the structures that Nicaragua, or rather the world, is able to enjoy. They maintain the world. If we let the *campesino* die, then we too, will die; we always have to help our fellow brothers.

Many horrific memories from the war have remained prominent in my memory from the 1980s. One day in 1984, in Salto de Queso, near Rio Tuma, there was an attack on the Sandinista youth by the Contras. They ambushed the group of young people, most of whom were only 16 or 17 years old, in the early morning while they were still sleeping. This, of course, was intended to surprise them, and it was an effective strategy. That morning, around 30 to 35 people died, people who were not even adults yet. The sight of children missing fingernails, fingers, and limbs will always stay with me. The thing is, the Contras only thought to attack and kill, but they never decided to help after an attack, like true soldiers. They had so much hate for the Sandinista government that they would even kill children to achieve their goals. There were many other instances of massive death like this.

In terms of happy moments, I still remember very clearly the time we would spend in rural communities when we moved through the mountains to try and find Contra forces. We would participate in many of the cultural events there, like folkloric dances and presentations of music. I just enjoyed interacting with the *campesinos* because that is something that I hadn't been

¹¹ *Campesino* is a notoriously difficult word to translate due to the connotations associated with it. Its meaning lies somewhere between a farmer and a peasant, since agricultural land workers in Central America have often formed the lower class of a feudal system in which most of the wealth produced as a result of their labor has been concentrated in distant hands.

able to do before. I also appreciated the feeling of being able to mitigate some of the damage that the Contras were doing to these people when we brought doctors and medical supplies to help the injured. The *campesinos* were unable to work because they feared being kidnapped or killed by Contra forces out in the field, and so they spent a lot of time with us.”

How Children Perceive Parents' History

One interesting aspect of this set of interviews is the difference in how Donald and Jorge viewed memory and what should or should not be retold. Donald believed in imparting the harshness of war and its consequences, and thus shared a very specific moment of violence that persisted in his mind. This relates to his understanding of memory and its role in the present, in affirmative as well as preventative ways. He explained during the interview part of his rationale for communicating stories of his past:

“I have told my children some stories from my past with the goal of communicating to them how they can carry on the Revolution tomorrow. The Revolution lives on when you are humble, when you help others, without any form of contempt. The war was extremely difficult and I would never wish it on anyone. We all have to work together and fight for peace. We cannot have another war. If we are going to remember the horrific events that occurred during the war, we must remember them with the intention of never allowing them to happen again.”

In his commentary, he emphasized the importance of talking about the positive aspects of the Revolution (humility, selfless behavior) but did not shy away from criticizing violence and using stories of the horrors of war in order to encourage future peace.

Jorge, on the other hand, emphasized the importance of making the interview “objective”, and explained that although his father had communicated to him stories of violence, he preferred to focus on the positive aspects that society gleaned from the conflict. His recollection of the memories, then, focused on positive impacts of the war:

“ My dad talked a lot about how there was very little food, very few resources, so there was no running water, very little food. Because of that, everyone had to share what little that they had

amongst themselves. They had to learn to break free of the capitalist mindset, which taught them to think in terms of ‘yours’ and ‘mine’ and learn to share limited resources amongst each other.”

There was also a difference in focus between father and son on the motivations behind Donald’s participation in the war. While Donald emphasized that he fought in the war in order to protect the *campesino*, whom he viewed as amongst the most vulnerable members of society, Jorge focused on broader aspirations that he believed led his father to the war, explaining:

“He wanted to protect the liberty that had been won in 1979. Reagan wanted to overthrow the government that we had all fought so hard to put into power. He had to defend the Revolution and its ideals of equality for all Nicaraguans, not just those with money.”

In this way, the focus of Jorge’s statement was wider, emphasizing the stability of an entire government, whereas Donald focused on a smaller sector of society in describing his motivations.

Importance of Familial History and Challenges to the “Mainstream Narrative”

Donald stressed the essential nature of shared oral history and intergenerational dialogue, explaining:

“The communication of our histories is not just important, it is necessary. Our children have to in turn carry those stories on to their children, and their children onto the next generation, because we live through our stories. If we do not communicate these memories to future generations, then everyone will be ignorant and history will be doomed to repeat itself once more.”

Jorge, on the other hand, believed that sometimes shared oral histories could be important, but, “definitely not all of them should be shared. Children should not hear about the mistakes their parents have made or the stories from their past where they’ve been wrong.” This difference of opinion is also illustrated in the ways in which Jorge and Donald responded differently to the principle of sharing violent stories.

When I asked Jorge whether he felt that the stories of his father aligned with those which he heard at his school, he distinguished between two educational phases in his life: primary and secondary school under neoliberal governments, and his studies at university today under the current FSLN government. During the period of neoliberal government, he was appalled at the shift in historical focus he saw. He described indignantly how:

“Violeta Chamorro did everything she could to try and forget the Revolution and what it meant to our people. In the 90s, nobody in school talked about the Revolution, and they needed to manipulate historical events to fit their own tastes. They needed, essentially, to prepare the people ideologically to conform to their way of thinking. They didn’t manipulate only history related to the Revolution, however. For example, the neoliberal governments wanted to celebrate a holiday commemorating the Spanish conquest; commemorating the people who robbed and exploited us!”

Under the current government, however, he believes that the dialogue related to historical memory and its teaching is much more open than before. He contended that, “there’s now more space for dissenting voices and distinct perspectives that deviate from what is being taught in a classroom. It’s not like in Cuba, where you can’t speak your mind or say anything contrary to the government without fearing reprisal.” Even so, he acknowledged that some people don’t feel comfortable in academic settings expressing their dissenting political views. He didn’t think, however, that this was an issue with the atmosphere or that the government was stifling dialogue. Instead, he explained, “people only have fear to speak their mind when they don’t have the facts to back up what they’re saying.” It is from this lack of knowledge that he located the fear to speak, rather than from repression from the government.

“A House Divided”- Political Views of Parents vs. Children

Donald believed unequivocally that parents should let their children find their own path in life, including their own political views. He used the example of the political divisions amongst his own children to illustrate the diversity of passions and interests within a family unit:

Everyone has to make their own decisions and come to their own beliefs independently. I have two sons: Jorge is very active in the Sandinista party and Luis is more ambivalent. I don't love Jorge any more than Luis, though, because I acknowledge that they both have to choose their own path in life, independent of what I say.

Jorge presented a more complicated response, arguing that whether or not a family should be politically united was a, "complicated issue". He explained that he grew up with Daniel Ortega as a family friend and a role model, and thus had a "revolutionary spirit" instilled in him since he was a younger child. His family, however, stretches across political lines, and he described that conflict during the interview, saying:

Not all of my family is Sandinista, though. A few of them hate the FSLN because their land was confiscated after the Revolution. I can't speak to them about politics because we could talk for hours and never reach any conclusion, only ending up angry with each other. In that way, interfamilial division is something bad.

In terms of current political views, though, Jorge and Donald were mostly aligned in their responses. While they are both strongly Sandinista; however, the specific ideals that each focused on when they talked about their dreams for the future differed. Donald emphasized the importance of respect and education to avoid future wars, stating, "education makes people leave their ignorance behind." He articulated his dream for a future Nicaragua living in peace in this way:

The government can't make a people be peaceful, because it is honestly the act of every individual. We need to learn to listen and respect other beliefs. We need to voice more criticisms. We need to create more dialogue. And we must always put distance between ourselves and the option of war- above all, we must prioritize talking over fighting.

Jorge, on the other hand, focused more on loyalty, "to party, to the Revolution, to country." He also emphasized education, but not in the way Donald did, as a means of achieving respectful dialogue. Rather, he saw education as a conduit to being faithful to Nicaragua's history, citing an example from his academic past:

For example, someone I met told me that we should be thankful to the Spanish for the conquest because they brought us closer to Jesus when they brought Catholicism here. We can't just change history like that! They exploited us and set up a pattern of dependence that continues to this day. So really, it's a balance of being faithful to our history and trying to preserve that history while at the same time trying to respect others' ideas.

In this way, Jorge carried many of the views of his father, but offered a different perspective on them to some extent. Both father and son, however, agreed that what was most important was to carry on the Revolution.

Parents' Views of Youth's Unity vs. Children's

Donald, who served in the war, was a bit taken aback when I asked if the generation of Jorge was more or less divided than his own. He thought that it was clear, given that Jorge's generation wasn't in war, that they were more united. He attributed this shift towards unity largely to education, explaining:

I think there is more unity because there is more communication, due to increased access to free education. Education makes people leave their ignorance behind. In a school today, because of the fact that it is free, you will have poor people, middle class people, and upper class people interacting and engaging in dialogue on a daily basis from a young age. That kind of communication leads to unity.

Jorge, on the other hand, acknowledged that while there wasn't war in the country still, there were still heavy divisions in his generation. He explained, however, that while he technically grew up in peace, "we are now in a war of other sorts....a battle of ideas." He, however, attributed the reason to the material peace of this generation to technology, because:

I think that technology has helped this generation become more connected, really. Before, disagreements led more naturally to war, because if I don't agree with what you're saying, I can demonize you and shoot you. Now, we can talk over the internet and debate and we have that easy connection. There's less distance between us, even if the geographical constraints are the same.

Nonetheless, he clarified, "ideological conflict will always exist, in any country, at any time."

Youth, Dreams for the Future, and the Road to Peace

View of the "Other"

Explicitly, Jorge never explicitly mentioned an "other" in his responses, and argued that the country was moving towards a place of greater peace due to greater education and prosperity. However, his responses related the struggles of Nicaragua and his hopes for the future implicated an "other", namely, those who support neoliberal governments and those who ascribe to a "capitalist mentality" or the act of, "thinking of only yourself and not of others...thinking only in terms of mine and yours." Despite his view that the capitalist mentality (as well as those who perpetuate it) represented a major obstacle to the future of Nicaragua, he still said that he would tell a young person with opposing political views simply:

Let's work together. We are the ones who carry the future of the country on our shoulders, and we are the protagonists of our own time. We must be united.

Hopes for the Future

Jorge's dreams for the future largely related to, "the betterment of the Nicaraguan people." He believed that the best way to achieve a better Nicaragua was to, "continue the Revolution." When I further questioned what furthering the Revolution might look like, he replied:

It's about not losing that [Revolutionary] perspective. Continuing the Revolution means living with dignity and humility. It means fighting for human rights for everyone. It means being in a state where we could go to Sandino, or Fonseca, and tell them, "we are fulfilling the dreams you fought and died for." That is my dream for the country.

What is "Reconciliation"/The Road to Peace?

Jorge placed emphasis on three prongs by which Nicaragua would be able to find peace. The first, he argued, was education, because:

“Education communicates values and provides communal activities for youth to engage in. When we are educated, we learn to respect ideas that are different than our own. We might not always agree with those ideas, but we can always respect them.”

This education, however, must also be faithful to the history of Nicaragua, leading to the difficult paradox of, “being faithful to our own history while learning to respect others’ interpretations of that history.”

The second key aspect of finding peace for Nicaragua involved a greater presence of technology and communication, which Jorge argued would lead to greater respect and less superficial demonization of the other.

Finally, a last step towards peace was to move beyond the “capitalist mentality”, which also included the idea that, “everything can be resolved by throwing money at it. Those of us in the FSLN continued sharing voluntarily amongst ourselves, even during the neoliberal period when it wasn’t encouraged.” Thus, hints of the memories of Donald and the mentality of sharing the little that everyone had permeated Jorge’s views of the future of his country. A reckoning back to his father’s past paved the way for his views of the present to emerge.

INTERVIEW 2: Maria Luisa and Gabriela

This interview, of a mother and her daughter, was anonymous. I have thus assigned them fake names rather than using their real ones. The mother, Maria Luisa, was born in 1961 in the community of El Zocon, north of Matagalpa. She works as a domestic maid, walking three hours every day to work in the city of Matagalpa. Her daughter, Gabriela Martinez, who was born in 1981, has a daughter, and stays at home during the day to take care of her.

Memory, Intergenerational Dialogue, and Reconciliation

Life History of the Parent

“I remember some things very clearly from the war. In 1979 after the triumph, everyone here in my community was terrified, because suddenly the prices went up drastically. Under Somoza, the economy was much better. We could buy rice for one *cordoba*¹² per pound then. I also remember how the FSLN took my brothers and cousin to the war. Those of us from the *campo* were more timid and less educated, and the Sandinista government knew that. They took our boys from their rooms at night, crying, just so that they could go die in the war. They dragged the men and boys out of their houses even as the women in the house screamed and begged them to let them stay. They had no humanity. They heavily guarded our community and prevented us from going out or moving about on our own.

There was just so much death at that time. Many mothers in the *campo* lost their sons. The military never came during the day to steal our sons from us and take them to war; they knew that would be too difficult. They came like cowards in the night while we were sleeping. They would surround our community to make us helpless to fight them. One of my brothers, I remember, had already completed his two year contract fighting with the army, and they made

¹² The Nicaraguan currency; 25 *cordobas* is approximately equivalent to 1 US dollar.

him go back to serve three more months. Imagine that!! There was so much abuse. If one of the young men resisted, they would beat and hit that person in front of everyone. Eventually, they took so many of our young men that the only males walking around on the streets here were 75 or older, and those of us remaining barely had enough food to subsist. They gave my whole family 1 and a half pounds of rice to last us for 15 entire days!

The FSLN would always say, “we’re happy now after the triumph” and “now we’re a free country”, but for us *campesinos* it hasn’t been that way. Under Somoza’s National Guard, I never saw a soldier rip a son from his mother’s arms to take him to a war where he would need to fight and die for something he didn’t believe in. I never saw the National Guard torture and beat an innocent man if he refused to leave their family and community behind. Once, I saw FSLN soldiers take a girl they suspected of aiding the Contra and cut her fingers off, douse her in gasoline, and then burn her to death in front of everyone. I didn’t see the National Guard do that, even though the FSLN claims that us *campesinos* needed to be “saved” from them. It’s hard to see your son, sometimes boys of just 15 years, forced into a war you don’t want to be a part of. I saw mothers go crazy, mothers who died without the love of their sons and husbands. I can never forgive them for what they did to us.”

How Children Perceive Parents’ Stories

When I asked Gabriela about what her mother had told her about the conflict as she was growing up, she described that her mother’s memories actually served to supplement her own. She narrated the stories similarly to her mother, however, explaining how, “the soldiers would come and take all of the young men from our community...they took my father and I know that was really hard for my mom. She talks a lot about how difficult it was to live in anticipation, waiting for the news of their death.”

Gabriela also believes with full conviction that stories from parents ought to be passed from children. Rather than focusing on the personal impact that these stories had on her, however, when I pressed about why exactly these stories were important, she explained the impact that they had on her own daughter, adding a new dimension to the intergenerational dialogue I was studying:

Yes, I think the stories of parents are important, and pass through multiple generations. For example, my daughter, who is 5 years old now, asks me about Daniel Ortega because she learns in school that he is good for the poor and that he's socialist. So I tell her how it really is, how my mom remembers it, how I remember it. What he really did. Now because of that she no longer falsely believes that he's a good president.

In this way, the stories that are passed on have an explicitly political purpose, and serve to inform the present. They represent the transfer of family values, one of which is the communication of suffering endured through what they believe were unjust policies of the Sandinista government. Maria Luis also emphasized the political relevance of historical memory, delivering a particularly harsh indictment of the current generation of youth, particularly those in the Sandinista Youth movement:

The youth of today are freer. They don't know the horrors of the obligatory military service and so they support the FSLN more. They're deceived. They like to say, "Let's take the FSLN to more victories", without knowing the horrors they brought to us *campesinos*. The nightmare we lived. The young people in the Sandinista Youth movement are more ignorant than they claim us *campesinos* to be. They blindly worship Daniel Ortega. They know nothing.

Both mother and daughter claimed that lamentably, many youth today do not appear to be interested in learning from or understanding the history of their parents, which has political consequences that they believe will have dramatic negative effects on the future of the country.

Importance of Familial History and Challenges to the "Mainstream Narrative"

Gabriela was only able to go to primary school, and thus didn't have as much exposure to the education system in Nicaragua as others that I interviewed. Based on her experiences,

however, she commented that, “in schools, they really don’t talk very much about the conflict of the 1980s”. She did contend though, despite the lack of teaching on the conflict, that they focus extensively about the Revolution in a rather biased way. The schools, she explained, “talk a lot about how the FSLN was and is the party for the poor and is their only true advocate, without mentioning the horrors they brought to the poor with the obligatory military service.” She believes that this narrative is false and thus the responsibility lies on parents to clarify the “true” history of Nicaragua.

Parent’s Views of Youth’s Unity vs. Children’s

Both Maria Luisa and Gabriela agreed that the generation of youth today was more united than the generations in the past. They also gave similar rationale: they reasoned that technology has allowed youth from the campo to connect with those from the city in unprecedented ways. They argued that technology has breached the gap between ideological divides that led to war during the previous generation and allowed youth to involve themselves in debates from the respectful distance provided by a computer screen.

Youth, Dreams for the Future, and the Road to Peace

View of the “Other”

The “other” in this interview was very clearly the FSLN soldiers who came to the community during the late 1980s and the current youth who support the current Sandinista party. Gloria felt that one of the best ways to achieve reconciliation between her community and those she felt had wronged them was first for the former soldiers and the FSLN party as a whole to apologize. They also needed to, “stop acting the way they do”, to change their behavior as an antecedent to the apology. Although Gloria detests what the soldiers did to her mother and her

community, she calmly clarified, “many people would love to see them dead, but I don’t feel that way. That’s just not productive.”

Hopes for the Future

Gabriela thought for a while about her hopes for Nicaragua, and then clarified that her hope for the country related largely to a more personal betterment, for her and for her family. “My dream for the country is simple”, she explained. “My dream for is that we get more food that is readily available, that there’s more work, and that there’s more access to education. This will raise up the *campesino*.”

The Road to Peace

Gabriela argued that the country was currently in a state of peace, but was unsure of how long that peace would remain for. She articulated a relatively clear path to maintain peace, however, one that belied a knowledge of recent political events in the country- specifically the recent deal that Daniel Ortega made with a businessman in China to build a canal through Nicaragua. She clarified that, “if we want peace, I think we actually need to move towards a socialist model, and we need more unity. We need to stop serving the interests of foreign countries over our own.” She also argued, “We aren’t united under a blue and white flag, but rather under red and black. Many think that if you aren’t Sandinista then you aren’t Nicaraguan, and that simply isn’t true. We’ve lost sight of the blue and white, and we need to find it again. “

INTERVIEW 3- Jennifer and Adolfo

Adolfo and his daughter, Jennifer, chose to keep their identities anonymous in this paper, so I have assigned them fictional names. Adolfo is retired but once worked formally as a professor in the UNAN-Matagalpa. His daughter, Jennifer, lives in the house with her mother and father and takes care of her child.

Memory, Intergenerational Dialogue, and Reconciliation

Life History of Parent

“I was born on January 20, 1944, near San Ramon. My parents were agricultural workers. I only went to primary school because my parents simply didn’t have the resources to send me to school into the city beyond that.

In 1967 my father began to involve himself very actively in the Revolution because he wanted more than anything to see Somoza overthrown. It’s because my grandfather came here from Germany and during WWII, Somoza needed to prove his loyalty to the US and to the Allies. So, many of the Germans that came to Nicaragua before the war were sent to concentration camps during WWII, as a means of proving Somoza’s loyalty. My father never forgave Somoza for that.

Famous figures like Carlos Fonseca were regularly at my house. The thing about Carlos Fonseca is that even though he was Marxist-Leninist, he still maintained a mindset of democracy, following Sandino’s true example. He wasn’t a bad person. Unfortunately, after the triumph in 1979, Daniel Ortega was one of the only revolutionary leaders that remained.

The Revolution was initially a fight against a dictator, a fight for democracy. During the 1980s, though, it stopped being a Revolution as we had imagined it. It became radicalized and non-democratic, standing in opposition to democratic countries like the United States. The opposition came then, the Contras, to try and fight the new communist government, which resulted in a huge number of deaths. It was horrible.

The Sandinistas started to control everything, and then they forced everyone to serve in the army. During that time, I was sympathetic to the Contras, and sometimes would allow them to stay on our farm if they came through. They were fighting for the freedom and democracy that

the Sandinistas had robbed us of. They were fighting against the distorted and twisted Nicaragua the FSLN had created.

My strongest memories of the 1980s were definitely the confiscations of property and the forced military service. Why did they think that they had the right to take other people's property like that, without permission? We're still paying off debts from those decisions. I also remember clearly how there were many political prisoners who were criminalized for speaking out; it created a culture of fear where no one could speak their minds, one that pervades today."

Stories of Parents and How Children Perceive Them

Jennifer reiterated many of the specific instances that her father had related to me during his interview. She described that her parents mainly focused in their stories on, "how awful life was in the 1980s." The strongest memory she carries of their history, though, was the obligatory military service. She iterated how, "the Sandinista army would rip people from their families and force them to fight for the army...young people couldn't even walk in the streets due to the fear they had that the army would come and kidnap them."

The notable parts missing from the stories as Jennifer conveyed then to me in comparison to how they came from Alfonso were those that involved the work that Alfonso's family did for the Sandinistas while they were still a guerilla force, and the suffering that her grandfather underwent at the hands of Somoza. She didn't mention the confiscations of property either, although that played a significant role in Alfonso's narrative.

In terms of communicated principles of the histories, though, both father and daughter were certainly on the same page. When I asked Alfonso what he intended to convey to his daughter when he shared his stories, he replied, "I've shared all of the stories that I remember with my daughter because I want *my* daughter to have a democratic mentality. And today, she is

a democratic person; I know she understood my stories because of that.” When I presented the same question to Jennifer, about what she could learn from her father’s history, her response was markedly similar. She explained, “My parents’ stories taught me to honor people and most importantly to respect democracy. Because of their stories I respect all people-poor, rich, men, women, faggots- that’s the only way to be truly democratic.”

Importance of Familial History and Challenges to the Mainstream Narrative

Both Alfonso and Jennifer also agreed that it is important for a child to know the history of their parents. Alfonso replied that it is important simply because, “he who doesn’t know history doesn’t know anything.” Jennifer’s response was slightly more elaborated, as she explained that, “a parent’s history is not politicized like in the text books at schools. These histories protect objectivity and make it so that not everyone in the country becomes Sandinista.”

Jennifer felt strongly that the histories of her father were distinct from those that she learned in school. When I asked her why she thought that might be, she replied that, “It’s because all of the universities are Sandinista. Professors can’t speak their mind because they fear being fired.” In terms of how these stories differed specifically from those she learned in her family, she explained that, “they focus so much in lessons on the idealized and positive side of the Revolution without once considering the perspectives of other people.”

Parents Views of Unity vs. Children’s

The first time in the interview that I noticed Jennifer and Alfonso diverge in opinion was when they discussed the polarization within the current generation. Alfonso argued that, “young people today are more united today simply because they’re ignorant...they just party, so they’re joyful because they don’t care about politics.” Despite the unity that he argued this ignorance entails, however, he still believed that it was a shortcoming in the current generation of youth,

because, “the FSLN preys on this ignorance to try and instill in them a certain type of communist thinking.”

Jennifer believed that her generation was incredibly divided. When I brought up the concept of “reconciliation” she scoffed, “reconciliation...what a joke.” She placed the blame for this lack of reconciliation in two areas: a lack of objective education, and the actions of the Sandinista Youth. She explained first that, “before- during my parents’ time-there was an education system that was more objective...so there was more respect. Now education is only for the Sandinistas. They only talk about Chavez and Sandino, giving a very one-sided perspective.” She also put the blame squarely on the Sandinista Youth, stating that, “reconciliation isn’t the problem of those of us who think democratically, because we know how to respect...the Sandinista Youth need to stop terrorizing their opponents. They’re vulgar.”

Youth, Dreams for the Future, and the Road to Peace

Views of the Other

For Jennifer, the “other” that she identified in her interviews was the Sandinista party, and more specifically, the Sandinista Youth. She felt that she and those who thought like her had already done what was necessary to achieve reconciliation, and that it was now the responsibility of those in the Sandinista Youth to step up. She didn’t think that would happen, though, because she believed those in the Sandinista Youth were inherently incapable of living up to the responsibility, describing how:

They come from broken families and they’re un-educated and un-employed, so there’s not even hope for them to change. The FSLN searches for people like that, lower class people, because they’re more susceptible to fall for the party’s superficial rhetoric rather than engaging with it critically. Those youth from broken families are also the ones who benefit from the favors of the government the most.

Jennifer argued that while the government was on the side of the Sandinista Youth, giving them free reign to abuse their political opponents and defy the law without punishment, there could never be reconciliation between the youth.

Hopes for the Future

Jennifer was very animated and excited when she was talking about the issues facing the country. However, when I brought up her dreams for Nicaragua, she sat back and gave a small sigh, stating frankly, “Nicaragua doesn’t interest me; I have no dreams for this country.” When I asked if she had any dreams in general, she replied, “my dreams are for myself, for my own economic success. I want to become financially successful, and maybe even move to the United States.” Ironically, she had earlier in the interview criticized this same apathy claiming that, “we should be more like the youth in Venezuela, who right now are giving their lives to fight against a corrupt government. Youth here aren’t brave like that. Here in Nicaragua, we just turn a blind eye to injustice, conforming to the system.” Thus, although she explicitly stated that she had no interest in Nicaragua, her other answers belied at least a vague hope for a change in young people’s apathy towards current events.

The Road to Peace

Jennifer explained that although there is currently, “tentative peace”, she believed that the country was moving towards a “new revolution under a new dictator”, and that “armed political opposition groups” were already in the initial stages of planning this revolution. If the revolution did not occur, she argued, Nicaragua would move towards becoming a “communist state, like Venezuela.” She also feared that the current government was, “inviting military intervention from the United States, because they are conformist with international communism”, citing as evidence that, “ALBA just bought 2 million dollars in weapons from Russia. We’re all going to

hell.” When I asked what the country could do to move towards peace instead of towards the war that she predicted, she proposed two solutions. The first was a greater alliance with the United States. She explained, “It’s always those who work with the *gringos*¹³ that turn out better. I mean, just look at North Korea and South Korea; who is doing better out of those two countries? Who complied with the US government? Who defied it?” The second key to peace she set forth was a greater setting of respect overall, because, “Nicaraguans need to support each other rather than always silencing each other. The Sandinistas always think they’re the right ones and won’t accept other opinions. They need to change.”

INTERVIEW 4- Rosa Argentina and Maria Fernanda

Rosa Argentina works as a doctor in Matagalpa, and her daughter, attends college and works at a non-profit, Agents for Change, also located in Matagalpa.

¹³ An informal term that refers largely to foreigners, but is often used in the context of those who come from the United States.

Life History of Parent

“I am 55 years old and I was born in Matagalpa. I had a relatively normal childhood. My parents were very hard working. My father had a job at the Ministry of Health, and we also opened up a bread shop to supplement the income from that job. I have spent 46 years in this same house, because it’s also where my parents raised me.

I was involved in the conflict from 1979-1983. In 1980 I wanted to study medicine. So at first, my service was obligatory; in order to study for free I had to go to a rural community and work there picking coffee for a while; I was there mainly with a lot of other young people in the same position.

Afterwards, when I returned to the university to study medicine, I participated in the watch guard, an organization that worked to protect our campus from attacks from the Contras.

I think that free education was a really important product of the Revolution. But because of the ensuing war afterwards, the *campesino* suffered a lot. During Somoza, the government didn’t care for them at all, and while rich people in Managua lived well, the *campesinos* were starving and dying from illnesses.

I didn’t think it was right how much the *campesinos* were suffering, so from 1981-1983 I returned to the *campo* voluntarily to participate in a health brigade, where I took care of *campesinos* who were injured from their work or were suffering illnesses. During that time, there were various attacks from the Contra. Around that same period I also went to participate in the Literacy Crusades. Many with whom I worked were afraid, but the rural community where I was stationed was so close to Matagalpa that I was more comfortable during that time.

My favorite memories from when I served involved meeting many new people and most importantly, learning to share. We didn’t have very much, but what we did have we divided

between each other. Of course, there were moments of intense fear, moments where I was sick, where I fell down, but for the most part it was beautiful. My parents didn't want me to go, honestly, but I was so glad that I was able to."

Memories of Parents as Passed from Parents to Children

Maria Fernanda said that her mother had told her some of her stories that she remembered from her time in the *campo* during the 1980s. She recalled, "mom talking about how she would pick coffee in the *campo*." She argued, though, that the stories of her mother, "weren't as exciting or interesting as others because her life wasn't really in danger like some of the men that went to war." Thus, she takes less of a furtive interest in her mother's stories because she believes that they aren't necessarily as important as others, reflecting a bias towards the perspectives of those who carried weapons rather than those who carried teacher journals, pencils, and erasers during the Literacy Crusades.

Maria Fernanda didn't convey the ideals that her mother shared with me of the suffering of the *campesino*. She instead identified her mother's involvement as a product of an insatiable urge for adventure. She explained that, "I think my mom was involved in the conflict more because she had a sense of adventure than for any ideological reason. It wasn't really for the Revolution, since her parents were more Liberal anyways. It was about the adventure." In this way, although many of the stories themselves that were passed on are materially similar, the intended principles that they were meant to convey were not necessarily transmitted between generations.

Importance of Familial History and Challenges to the "Mainstream Narrative"

Despite the purported shortcomings that Maria Fernanda believed her mother's stories contained, both Maria Fernanda and Rosa argued that the stories of parents ought to be shared

with children. Rosa explained that, “everything has to be learned somehow, and it’s better that the lessons of life are learned in the familial bond where there’s trust and love, rather than out in the real world.” Maria Fernanda had a response that was very similar, communicating that, “a child needs to know the history of their parents in order to be able to learn from their errors and successes.”

Maria contended that the stories that she heard from her mother were different than those that she learned in school. In primary school, she explained, “they didn’t really talk about the campaigns of the Revolution in a good light.” She enjoyed the opportunity to be able to hear, “various versions of history.” Regardless, she questioned the education she received in school, positing, “how can a campaign where you’re helping poor *campesinos* to read be bad? Education is the first step to any further advancement of a community.”

Parents Views of Unity vs. Childrens

Rosa believed that the generation of Maria Fernanda was much more united than her own, “because they are not currently in any sort of war.” However, she argued that there was still room to improve and that current youth need to, “come to a place of loving each-other, of selflessness, and of non-violence...a love that is spiritual, familial, and national.”

Maria Fernanda, however, believed her generation was much more divided than that of her mother. She argued, “when technology began to develop, the division got worse because before, you actually had to speak and interact with someone with whom you had a disagreement.” Now, however, “we can divide without actually having any human contact with another person, hiding behind party labels hidden even further behind the screen of a computer.”

Youth, Dreams for the Future, and the Road to Peace

Hopes for the Future

Maria Fernanda had the hope that Nicaragua would in the future not only live in a state of internal peace, but also in a state of peace with other Central American countries- specifically mentioning the relationship with Costa Rica as problematic. As a result of that hope, she is currently involved in an organization called the “System of Central American Integration.” She believes that, “unity is important in our Central American context because we need it for development. We are small countries and so we are very easy to exploit. That exploitation would be more difficult in a large and united group.” She argued that the first step to achieving this unity would be to, “stop thinking in terms of parties all of the time”, and “to protect Nicaragua’s abundant natural resources for Nicaragua, instead of always letting the US and Europe benefit from them.”

The Road to Peace

Maria Fernanda had a more negative view of peace in Nicaragua, largely due to her pessimistic view of youth in general in the country. She argued that Nicaragua was moving away from peace and, “towards another revolution...Daniel Ortega is a dictator, just like Somoza, who is limiting free speech and allowing himself unlimited reelection. War is the only way to stop it, today, just like in the past.” When I asked about what Nicaragua could do to start moving towards peace, she replied frankly, “we need another generation... a generation that is more cultured, more studied, and more educated. A generation that doesn’t hide behind political divides.” She described indignantly how, “many people would fight to the death for a party they know nothing about.” She closed the interview with the critically somber statement, “this generation is just going to carry us into the next war in Nicaragua’s history.”

Conclusion and Final Analysis

Thematic Review

The Political Uses of Historical Memory

Of the ten pairs of interviews that I conducted, only two of the children conveyed that their parents had never shared stories about their history with them. All of the parents stated that they told stories of their past to their children. Thus, in the context of my specific interviews, interfamilial history was very present within children's lives.

However, although many of the stories themselves were similar as told by parents and their children, the children almost always honed in on one specific aspect of the story and applied their own individual meaning to it, shaping and conforming it to fit the confines of their own worldview. Jorge focused on the active role that youth played in the Revolution and from his father's story, gleaned inspiration for his own activism today. Maria Luisa remembered most specifically the aspects of her mother's history involving the obligatory military service and took this as a sign of the incompetence of Daniel Ortega as a self-acclaimed leader for the poor. Jennifer took the same stories of the horrors of military drafts under the Sandinista government and took from them a message of the importance of democracy. Maria Fernanda, although aware of her mother's stories, didn't think that they carried any significant messages or principles and were instead the result of her adventurous spirit.

The diversity of responses that youth have to their parents' histories illustrate that the principles passed on from the oral histories of parents, both intended and unintended, are equally as diverse as the stories themselves. Each person perceives and processes stories in differing ways based on their own lived experiences. As Jorge explained, he felt about half of his convictions came from his father's stories and half from his own lived reality. In this way,

historical memory as passed down inter-generationally can come to contain any number of messages in a given scenario.

Jennifer's emphasis on the maintenance of a "democratic mentality" and Jorge's description of the distinction between the "capitalist and socialist mentalities" and the ways that these ideals connected the development of their parents' histories illustrate the threads connecting memory to the present. Jennifer saw in her father's defiance of the FSLN an example of a man fighting for democracy, an ideal towards which she still proudly strides. Jorge identified in his father's service in the army and his work to defend the *campesinos* a "socialist mindset", and within those stories identified a path to continue with the Revolution in a modern context. Thus, regardless of the lack of universality in the perceived principles of parental history amongst youth, it is undeniable that in many cases these stories have a definitive impact on the views and ideologies of some of Nicaraguan young people today.

Examining the Future of Nicaragua, through Youth's dreams

There was a huge diversity of responses related to the dreams that youth carry for the future of Nicaragua. They ranged from equal rights to economic development to greater unity to more social justice. Some, like Jennifer, responded that they simply didn't care about the future of Nicaragua. Ironically, many of the more apathetic responses came from young people who were the most critical of the current state of events in the country and who had the most that they wanted to see change. Although many of the parents that I interviewed stated that the youth of today have no inspiration or passion, and simply like to party and drink, my experience illustrated a scenario quite to the contrary. The young people that I interviewed were wellinformed, critical, and even if they said otherwise, had clear desires for what they wished to see change in their world.

Reconciliation in a Nicaraguan Context, Through the Eyes of Youth

Nearly all of the youth that I interviewed carried a negative view of the current state of reconciliation amongst this generation of Nicaraguan young people. In every interview, the parent argued that the generation of their child was more united than their own, given that they are currently in a state of peace. In the majority of the interviews that I conducted, however (8 out of 10), the child argued that their generation was more divided, even while acknowledging that they lived in a period free of physical conflict. Some, like Jorge, instead identified the current ideological conflict as, “a battle of ideas”, explaining that this new war still sometimes had violent implications. Others argued that although there currently wasn’t any war, it would be inevitable if youth continued as they are today.

One interesting trend in their responses was that when I questioned youth about why they thought their generation was more divided or united, most identified technology as playing a distinctive role, but the consensus was split on whether that role was positive or negative. Some argued that technology provided more means to connect with youth from different geographic areas and across ideological divides while maintaining a certain distance to prevent violent confrontation. Others contended that technology simply facilitated a type of group think that allowed people to divide under parties and labels without ever having to interact with the “other”.

Concluding Thoughts

“Because in that lecture, he said something that I find more key today than ever. He said that imagining the other is a powerful antidote against fanaticism and hate. That is true. It isn’t simply about tolerating others, but rather about getting inside their heads, their thoughts, their

anxieties, their dreams, and even their own hates, however irrational they might seem, in order to try to understand them. And although we consider ourselves victims of their actions...to be nothing more than tolerant keeps us in a condescending attitude, like that of those who live within the same city, but in separate neighborhoods, and although they speak the same language, they live in a spiritual Babel, because they don't want to hear each other, it doesn't interest them to hear each other.”¹⁴

Gabriela argued that, “we've lost sight of the blue and white, and we need to find it again.” Most youth that I interviewed, in fact, communicated similar ideas. They want to live in a more united country, where they can engage in dissenting conversations with other young people and leave unscathed. Where the identity of being Nicaraguan is more important than ideological differences. Despite this relatively common hope, though, many young people in Nicaragua do continue to live in a “spiritual Babel”, desiring reconciliation while at the same time other-izing youth on opposing political sides and identifying them as the main source of problems in the country rather than focusing on the issues that they themselves present in the struggle to unite.

Although in many of my interviews, young people were convinced that another revolution and war were inevitable, I saw many glimpses of hope in their responses. I believe in the phrase, “dissent is patriotic”, because apathy rather than criticism is the opposite of love-including love of country. During my investigation, I observed youth who were passionate about their country, who wanted to see a Nicaragua that was more just, more developed, and more united. I believe in this generation of young people and their ability to reach their dreams in a Nicaragua that is more than simply a product of its history. While there are youth fighting for a better country and desiring unity, the quest to re-discover the blue and white will not end. The dream of the peace mural in Leon, an image of a young boy and girl (Liberal, Sandinista,

¹⁴ Torres Perez, Dennis. *Historia y Reconciliacion* (Managua: Instituto “Martin Luther King”, 2008), 207.

Nicaraguan) running hand in hand towards a future of peace, has not died while, “Nicaragua... has children that love it.”¹⁶



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¹⁶ A quote attributed to Augusto C. Sandino and painted prominently on a wall in Leon. “Nicaragua será libre mientras que tenga hijos que la amen.”

¹⁷ The Peace Mural, Leon, Nicaragua. Photo taken on February 5, 2014.

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