MURALS OF MANAGUA, NICARAGUA: THE VISUAL SYMBOLS OF CULTURAL IDENTITY AND HERITAGE

by

Mariah Trumbull
A Thesis
Submitted to the
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George Mason University
in Partial Fulfillment of
The Requirements for the Degree
of
Master of Arts
Anthropology

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Murals of Managua, Nicaragua: The Visual Symbols of Cultural Identity and Heritage

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts at George Mason University

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Bachelor of Arts
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Fairfax, VA
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DEDICATION

This is dedicated to my Nicaraguan friends. Esto está dedicado a mis amigos Nicaragüenses.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to extend my deepest gratitude and thanks to my family and friends who have supported me through this project, specifically my partner Caitlin Wordham, for supporting me even when I felt like I took on too much. There are many people I must thank for various roles they have played: To all participants in handouts, free-list sessions, and discussions, thank you for your input and participation, to Dr. Jason Paling for pushing me even when I felt ill and for providing an avenue for me to gather more research, Evan Sternberg for his aid with technology and providing maps for this project, Chico and Jarvin for providing transportation and friendship while in Nicaragua, Ely Molina for helping me when my Spanish eluded me, and Christina Wordham for constant edits and input. Clemente Guido Martinez, thank you for your time and support with this project. Your advice, knowledge of Nicaragua, and support during this project was instrumental to its success. To Rolando Bojorge, thank you for taking time to share your passion with me and providing me with an opportunity to learn about the mural history of Nicaragua. Thank you all for your help.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Figures .......................................................................................................................... vi

Abstract ................................................................................................................................. 1

Introduction ............................................................................................................................... 2
  Why Managua? ...................................................................................................................... 3
  Visual Anthropology ........................................................................................................... 5
  Methodology ......................................................................................................................... 7
  Fieldwork .............................................................................................................................. 9
  Thesis Outline ....................................................................................................................... 11

Identities of The Past .............................................................................................................. 15

Nicaraguan Murals as a Battlefield ....................................................................................... 36
  Commissioned Murals ........................................................................................................... 42
  Non-Commissioned Murals .................................................................................................. 61

Identity Reimagined .............................................................................................................. 73

Conclusion .............................................................................................................................. 92

Appendix .................................................................................................................................. 99

References ............................................................................................................................... 103
LIST OF FIGURES

Figures

Figure 1: Mural painted on the outside of Alcaldía main office in Managua depicting Ruben Darío. Photo taken by author July 4, 2016 ................................................................. 43

Figure 2: Mural located inside Alcaldía in the conference room. Photo taken by author July 4, 2016 .................................................................................................................. 52

Figure 3: Mural inside the conference room at the Alcaldía, located in direct opposition to figure 2. The image is generally the backdrop for events held in the room. Photo taken by author July 7, 2016 .................................................................................. 56

Figure 3b: Detailed photo of bottom left corner of figure 3. Photo taken by author July 7, 2016 .......................................................................................................................... 59

Figure 4: This image was found along an exterior property wall roughly 2 miles North of the Alcaldía. Photo taken by author July 1, 2016 .................................................................. 62

Figure 5: Non-commissioned mural located a few miles from the Alcaldía. Photo taken by author July 3, 2016 ........................................................................................................ 65

Figure 6: Image located just outside of the Alcaldía property along a stretch of wall that is covered in murals. Photo taken by author July 26, 2016 ................................................................ 67

Figure 7: This mural is located along the outer edge of one of the university properties, across from the bus station. Photo taken by author July 4, 2016 .......................................... 70

Figure 8: Map of downtown Managua and surrounding areas with GPS points for maps included. Image created by Evan Sternberg through Open Street Maps and GRASS ....... 99

Figure 9: Detailed map of the Alcaldía mural locations. Maps created by Evan Sternberg through Open Street Maps and GRASS ........................................................................... 100

Figure 10: close up of Alcaldía murals. Maps created by Evan Sternberg through Open Street Maps and GRASS ......................................................................................... 101
ABSTRACT

MURALS OF MANAGUA, NICARAGUA: THE VISUAL SYMBOLS OF CULTURAL IDENTITY AND HERITAGE

Mariah Trumbull, M.A.

George Mason University, 2018

Thesis Director: Dr. Linda J. Seligmann

This thesis aims to analyze and investigate the symbols used in commissioned and non-commissioned murals throughout Managua, Nicaragua in order to understand how murals are catalyzing shifts in identity formation processes within the country. Murals, because of their inherent intersubjective symbolic content, speak to the memories and lived experiences of the people and have become a primary avenue for communicating ideas, expressing discontent, and reaffirming connections to the cultural past. By employing perspectives grounded in art history, social history, and anthropology, I argue that the intersubjectivity of murals has catalyzed a move away from traditional hegemonic discourses of mestizaje toward new identity formation processes in which a “mosaic hybrid” approach is being constituted and expressed. This mosaicism allows for permanent spaces in which identities co-exist, such that “Nicaraguanness” becomes accepted alongside personal identities.
INTRODUCTION

Our work will be done when we give these young ones a new world, a different world.

- Dora María Tellez

Social and revolutionary movements have occurred in many parts of the world, and while some are well-known for specific aspects of their movements, it is largely the visual representations of these movements that people remember. In Latin America specifically, these visual representations have had the capacity to communicate ideologies, combat oppression, and convey key dimensions of cultural heritage and patrimony. Movements such as those in Cuba and Mexico are known for the posters and murals they inspired, respectively, and while in-depth investigations have been conducted on Mexico’s mural scene, Nicaragua’s has been left largely unstudied (Kunzle 1995). David Kunzle, an art historian, argues that Nicaragua’s murals rival those of Mexico and Brazil, and he spent years documenting them during the revolution between 1979 and 1992, especially those in the capital of Managua. Although a local mayor destroyed many of the murals in 1990 (because of his campaign against the popular Sandinista symbolism of the 70s), a new wave of mural art throughout Nicaragua began shortly after (Kunzle

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1 Nolan 1984, 106.
2 *Mestizaje* refers to the mixture of two or more races, and will be discussed below in further detail.
1995). These murals provide a window into shifting ideas of identity that have been sweeping the country from the 1990’s to the present day (2018).

Since these murals have rarely been studied, and this new wave has focused on different themes than those that characterized murals dating from the days of the Nicaraguan Revolution (1970s), this study examines the ideologies of these murals through an investigation of the ways in which they promote and communicate specific identities through symbols. In this thesis, I argue that murals, through their symbolism and imagery, communicate ideologies and create spaces of dialogue for new identity formation processes to come into play. By studying the images and locations of murals, I unravel how shifting ideas of identity, such as de-indianization, mestizaje, and hybridity, are being portrayed and perceived by those who create and view them. Through the acceptance of mosaic hybridity in murals, the Nicaraguan government and its people are attempting to break from the traditional hegemonic discourses of identity related to mestizaje, creating an environment in which “Nicaraguanness” is deemed culturally important. This break from the historically exclusive representations of identity attempts to affirm an acceptance both of national and personal identities simultaneously.

**Why Managua?**

Nicaragua is located in the epicenter of the Central American isthmus. Sandwiched between Honduras and Costa Rica, its 57,143 square miles makes it the largest Central American country (Walker and Wade 2017). In 2015, the population of

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2 *Mestizaje* refers to the mixture of two or more races, and will be discussed below in further detail.
Nicaragua was estimated at 6.1 million people. Nicaragua has experienced a dictatorship, a revolution, and the devastating impacts of two major earthquakes in 1972 and 1992, the effects of which are still being felt throughout the country. Its capital, Managua, is located near the western coast of the country and borders the southernmost section of one of the two largest lakes of Nicaragua, Lake Managua (also known as Lake Xolotlán).

Large areas of Managua have not been rebuilt since the earthquakes, and the destruction they caused can be seen in the image of the National Cathedral, whose walls are riddled with bullet holes and crumbling. The Spanish influence on the city can be seen in many of the buildings in the city center. While many of the traditional Spanish style Cathedrals and buildings near Managua have been destroyed by the earthquakes, others can be found in cities throughout the country. While Managua is densely populated, the areas that have not been rebuilt from the earthquakes have pushed many residents further from the city center.

The suburban sprawl has caused the highways and outskirts of Managua to spread and become lined with scrap metal shacks and housing, as well as schools, small businesses, development homes, and smaller pockets of shops and trade businesses. Despite all of the lingering destruction caused by the earthquakes, as one travels through the city, the mural-filled walls give way to intermediate zones of development dispersed within the beauty of rolling hills, pitayha (dragon fruit) farms, tortilla stands, towering volcanoes, and lakes. A volcano chain runs through Nicaragua, and while there are still a few active volcanoes, many are inactive but provide nutrient rich soil for crops. As a
result, much of the suburban area is covered in bean and corn fields, creating two different worlds that are nevertheless closely linked.

**Visual Anthropology**

In order to delve into the images and symbolism of Nicaragua’s post-revolutionary murals, it is important to explain how visual anthropology provides a key framework with which to analyze them. Originally, visual anthropology was based primarily on three key approaches: 1) the study of visual elements of culture; 2) the use of visual media and images to produce ethnographic knowledge; and 3) the production of visual representations of research (Pink 2008, 130). In its formative years (from the establishment of visual anthropology as a discipline in the 1880s to the early 1900s), photos or videos were viewed as a way to gain information about or represent relatively unknown groups. Until the mid-twentieth century, anthropologists and other academics supplemented their research and enhanced their textual analysis with the unsystematic use of their photos. In the 1970s and 1980s, visual anthropology began to focus on ethnographic film production and writing about films. Scholars began to interpret and analyze the narratives being produced rather than regarding them as transparent documentation. At the same time, the visual media were not necessarily examined in light of the sociopolitical context in which they emerged. During these years, images became less of a supplemental feature in ethnographic work and more an important aspect of a dynamic narrative.

It was not until the early 2000s that a shift away from language-based models of analysis took place and the field began to question practices of representation themselves,
recognizing that images were intertwined with written or spoken words as much as with sensory qualities, such as touch or sentiments. Scholars sought to engage with the visual beyond image-as-text approaches. As anthropologist Sarah Pink wrote,

To engage with the visual beyond the existing treatment of image-as-text requires more than simply the use of a camera during research. Rather, it implies rejecting the idea that the visual can be objectified through words, and rethinking how the sorts of visual and sensory embodied experience and knowledge, that is the essence of ethnographic research can be represented and communicated by combining images and words (2008, 134).

This transcendence of image-as-text requires rethinking what images are and the processes in which images are used in ethnographic and anthropological studies. “Visual research methods can encourage people to reflect on and thus define their experiences to us as researchers, and provide researchers with opportunities to experience similarly and use their own sensory embodied knowledge as a basis from which to learn about that of others” (Pink 2008, 148). By using images as not only an examination of similar experiences, but as a reflection of experiences, images transcend text-based explanations and become a source of evidence in their own right.

This project aims to continue the re-examination of image-as-text by viewing visual media as an important part of human identity and human experience. By examining the complexities of the social constructions of identity, studied not only by the researcher (myself), but also by the people who create and experience these visual forms firsthand, it is possible to examine the ways images are intertwined with words just as much as with emotions and feelings. Images, such as those presented in this project, communicate complexities that are not just supporting evidence for a textual argument,
but rather are symbolic representations of ongoing social constructions of human experience in the Nicaraguan historical and political context.

**Methodology**

This thesis is grounded in theories and methodologies that draw from anthropology, sociology, and art history. Through an analysis of data gathered during my fieldwork in the summer of 2016 in Managua, Nicaragua and surrounding areas, this thesis seeks to answer the following questions:

- How do government commissioned murals and those created by the public differ in their symbolism?
- What kinds of identities are being depicted and projected in these murals? Are murals a space where multiple identities may compete with each other for legitimation?
- Are these murals contributing to a sense of identity? And if so, among whom? If not, why not? Do they influence how people may think about a shared national identity? How do shifting ideas of identity in the post-revolutionary era affect the images displaced in the murals?

To begin to answer these questions, I collected data about known murals from local Nicaraguans in the Chiquilistagua and Managua areas through conversations and semi-structured interviews. I took photographs and documented GPS points for each of the murals in order to create a collection from which to work.³ During this process, I relied

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³ The maps that were created from these GPS coordinates can be found in Appendix A.
on participant observation to discern interactions people were having with or around the murals to understand their relationship to the space around them. I complemented these observations by coding each image photographed with the names of the figures found in the murals, the color schemes, the location, types of interactions that were being conducted around and with the murals, and any personal observations. Through a semi-structured interview with local artist and Alcaldía (Mayor’s office) mural producer, Rolando Bojorge, I was able to gain more information on the background, intent, and perceived meaning of the murals along the Alcaldía property. My conversation with Rolando shed light on the symbols and figures used in his murals and their importance to society, which allowed me to ascertain encoded ideologies and the appropriation of symbols.

While the interview provided me with an understanding of the personal connections Rolando had with the murals he created, it was the handouts I created that allowed me to gather a better understanding of the ways in which the audience perceives these murals. I created six different handouts, all of which incorporated four questions regarding murals in general: How do you define mural? What kinds of messages do you believe murals communicate? Are there specific places where you expect murals to be seen? And, what things come to mind when you hear the word mural? These questions gather general information about the perception and importance of murals in my participants’ everyday lives. After establishing general ideas about murals, participants were asked to elaborate on the symbols and ideas being communicated by the image and to offer any comments or thoughts they might have about the images themselves. These
handouts were given to four participants, all of whom were Managuan area locals who had lived in Nicaragua their whole lives. My four participants were from various walks of life, one was a student and the others acquaintances with differing professions, backgrounds, and ages. Three of these participants were closely linked to my everyday activities and were willing to provide their thoughts. Jéu became involved with the archaeological team I was working with in Nicaragua, and agreed to offer his answers to help with the study. Additionally, I conducted a free-list session with the local archaeological team, consisting of eight North Americans, which was intended to expose some of the initial reactions non-local audiences had to murals found throughout the city. During this session, I asked similar questions as those in the handouts to guide the discussion and used Figure 4 (see page 63) as the subject. This session allowed me to gather thoughts that my participants had on the mural with very little guidance. The combination of the semi-structured interview with Rolando, the completion of four handouts, photo catalog, participant observation, multiple informal conversations, the free-list session, historical research, and literature review allowed me to gain a better idea of the identities and ideologies that these murals create.

**Fieldwork**

During my fieldwork, there were a few obstacles that I encountered. Chiquilistagua, where I was staying, is along Carretera Vieja a León (the old road to León, a city located to the north of Managua), roughly fifteen minutes outside of the city. A five-minute walk down the road one direction took one to bean fields looking across the lake to Volcán Momotombo; five minutes the other direction and one arrived at the
local school. This area experienced a lot of traffic, as it was one of the main roads to and from León, and it was precisely its location close to, but outside of, the city that made it a prime location to conduct research. Despite being close and being along a main road, transportation into Managua was difficult. Not having my own vehicle limited travelling to and from the city. While there was a bus station down the street and I could hail cabs or tuk-tuks (an auto rickshaw), because I was travelling alone being reliably and safely transported with my camera and notebook proved difficult in some circumstances. A local friend provided much of my transportation for me, since he would go into the city for classes at a university that was nearby my research site. This solution worked wonderfully, but since he and his family only had a few vehicles and had other things to attend to, there were times where scheduling could be difficult, especially when searching for murals outside of the Alcaldía property.

Once I got to my site at the Alcaldía, language and communication was sometimes difficult. While I have taken many years of Spanish and have used it during my travels, communicating effectively and eloquently in Spanish was sometimes a challenge. However, the most difficult obstacle to overcome during my research trip was being ill. Roughly two weeks into my research trip, I contracted Zika (diagnosed by a Nicaraguan doctor and later confirmed in the U.S.), which provided a full body rash, the inability to keep food down, and overall weakness. This lasted for much of the last three weeks of my trip, and inhibited some of my research goals. After interviewing Rolando Bojorge, the Alcaldía mural artist, we agreed in my participation in painting a new mural on the property, however, I was unable to paint with Rolando because I was very sick,
which hindered further research I had planned on gathering. During the last weeks, I spent most of my time working from home and traveling into town only when I had enough energy and transportation. The arguments that follow are a culmination of the work achieved and information gathered during this trip.

**Thesis Outline**

In chapter two, “Identities of the Past,” I provide a synopsis of Nicaraguan history with a specific focus on the effects of U.S. interventions on the country from its independence from Spain in 1821 to the years after the revolution in 1979. On the basis of the histories and political analysis of Nicaragua provided by journalists, anthropologists, and historians, I argue that U.S. interventions caused an already unstable country to experience increased instability and disunity. While this chapter focuses on U.S. interventions, it also pays special attention to key figures in Nicaragua, such as Anastasio Somoza, Augusto Sandino, and Ruben Darío and their historical importance in Nicaragua. These actors, especially Sandino, as well as the U.S. interventions, had major effects on identity and identity formation processes within Nicaragua, and are highlighted because they continue to permeate Nicaraguan life and culture today.

Throughout this chapter, I show that the political and social spheres created by U.S. interventions affected how Nicaraguan identity was perceived, but that identity is not static and unchanging. From independence from Spain in 1821 to the revolution in 1979, identity in Nicaragua shifted from being rooted around traditional working class ideologies to a revolutionary consciousness and solidarity created in response to oppression, which provided a non-ethnic identity based on shared understandings and a
sense of nationalism (Field 1998). After the FSLN victory in 1979, the implementation of specific programs was intended to spark creative renewal and cultural regeneration in terms of this revolutionary consciousness and resistance solidarity. These programs provided an arena in which art could transcend aesthetics and communicate ideologies, which played out in the public sphere through the use of graffiti and murals that reflected the shift in identity processes through the symbols and figures employed.

In chapter three, “Nicaraguan Murals as a Battlefield,” I employ an art historical and social history approach to analyze the styles utilized in the Nicaraguan mural scene over the years, as well as to analyze the murals birthed from the FSLN creative renewal campaign. Through an investigation of the symbols depicted in these murals, I offer an analysis of the ideologies, resentments, memories, emotions, and meanings of each symbol used through the data gathered from my handouts and interviews, as well as through my review of previous mural and identity studies. These symbols are often dichotomous or create a mosaic that represents the contesting sides of images or figures that are depicted. Through a comparison of commissioned and non-commissioned murals, this chapter unveils the competing and contesting ways that these symbols are being used to break away from hegemonic discourse through the memories and lived experiences of the people.

Placing these murals in a historical lens allowed me to analyze the effects the FSLN programs are having on the meanings communicated. Through the creation of social links, many of these images transcend race and class boundaries and through the use of a dialogical approach put forth by the FSLN government, communicate ideas to all
Nicaraguans. This approach, and its use of symbols in dualistic and contesting ways, has generated spaces for new identity formation processes to come to light in which hegemonic discourses can be challenged and renegotiated.

In chapter four, “Identity Reimagined,” I investigate new identity formation processes in light of the symbols being used in commissioned and non-commissioned murals. Through a re-investigation of mestizaje, hybridization, and multiculturalism, I argue that these murals are attempting to break away from the hegemonic approaches to mestizaje, and reaffirm a new national identity within a hybrid understanding of the contesting and dichotomous identities within everyone. Using Peter Wade’s “lived experience” approach put forth in “Rethinking Mestizaje: Ideology and Lived Experience,” in which identity operates within the embodied person, I will show how people experience identity formation processes through art and murals (Wade 2005), and more specifically, how they experience mestizaje and hybridity. I also argue that while working to create a national identity, this new approach creates tensions, and I outline future research on the implications of these tensions.

In this thesis, I argue that these murals, because of their inherent intersubjective symbolic content, speak to the memories of the people and affirm and renegotiate the terms of hybridity rather than simply reaffirming traditional hegemonic discourse surrounding mestizaje that constitute past conceptualizations of Nicaraguan identity. The murals provide one avenue to discern the ways that Nicaraguans are not identifying in opposition to mestizo, nor being re-inscribed into the traditional approaches to identity on mestizo terms, but rather are renegotiating a Nicaraguan identity based on unique
“Nicaraguanness.” This new identity means that Nicaraguans can be simultaneously ethnically Nicaraguan and culturally indigenous (Miskito, Sumu, Rama, Garifuna) or ethnically indigenous and culturally Nicaraguan.

For the purposes of this argument, I am reflecting on Peter Wade’s views of mestizaje and hybridity, in which mestizaje is viewed as lived experience, and is not inherently homogenizing because it “must include spaces of difference while simultaneously providing a trope of sameness through a sense of shared mixed-ness” (2005, 249). This requires an interweaving of multiple processes through which permanent spaces are created from a mosaic of identity formation (Wade 2005). As Wade states, “this mosaic is rather different from the mosaic of what might be called official multiculturalism, in which each ‘culture’ is constrained within certain institutional boundaries, because the mosaic of mestizaje allows the permanent re-combination of elements in persons and practices. Mestizaje is not best understood as a simple rhetorical mask of inclusion that covers a reality of exclusion” (2005, 252). Throughout my discussion of identity since the 1990’s, I will be adapting his argument by using the term ‘mosaic hybridity’ to express the combination of multiple identities wherein each has to fight for permanent space within the reinvestigation of traditional approaches and understandings of mestizaje and hybridity throughout Nicaragua.
IDENTITIES OF THE PAST

*The History of Nicaragua is the history of civil war.*

- José Coronel Urtecho

Identity is a contested arena in which visual representations play a key role in communication and the ways in which images are employed for purposes of communication can unveil important social processes. In the case of Nicaragua, its history plays a key role in the construction and representation of identities through visual means. In this chapter, I offer a brief synopsis of the highlights of Nicaraguan history taking account, in particular, of U.S. interventions in Nicaragua and the treatment of indigenous groups within Nicaragua. This will allow me to show how tensions and conflict unfold through the medium of murals, up until the present day.

While Urtecho points to civil war as the common factor in the history of Nicaragua, I would argue that Nicaraguan history is also the history of U.S. interventions in Nicaragua. In this chapter, I outline a brief history of Nicaragua, highlighting the ways in which Nicaragua’s sense of stability and unity has been a struggle over the years, and how that instability has had specific impacts on identities and identity formation. By looking at the war and the immediate post-war period in the eighties and nineties, a

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framework is established in which to view how the war has shaped identity formation in Nicaragua and the roles that murals and other visual phenomena have played in these formation processes in the post-war period.

Nicaragua’s past is riddled with war, conflict, and U.S. interventions, as is true of many Latin American countries. After fighting for independence from Spain for many years, Nicaragua finally achieved it in 1821, but the conflicts continued between the conservatives and liberals that had beset the country for years. In Nicaragua both the conservative and liberal groups would be considered moderates or conservatives by American standards; what separates them is the location of their power base and the socioeconomic divides between those two regions (León and Granada), as well as their views of the church’s involvement in government affairs. The liberal’s political base was run out of León and generally consisted of working class people, while the conservatives came from Granada and consisted of higher status citizens with more resources (Walker and Wade 2017, 13). Despite their differences in ideals, independence caused the conflict between the two factions to grow into a power struggle since Spain no longer served as a mediator between the two factions (Booth 1982).

The party divide made it difficult for the country to agree upon a government that could unite everyone. From 1821-1855, government control was inconsistent; no one maintained control for a long enough period of time to create stability. Instead, the country became increasingly divided between conservative and liberal groups and in an effort to finally gain control, the liberals hired William Walker and his small group of
mercenaries in 1855 (Christian 1986). This marked the first of many interventions by the U.S. Walker, instead of aiding the liberal cause, decided to take matters into his own hands and chose to fight for the U.S. to gain land rights for a canal. He declared himself the first President of Nicaragua; his primary goal was to annex Nicaragua to the United States, and then sanction slavery (Christian 1986). After several years, the U.S. government’s support for Walker began to wane, so Walker “offered land grants to attract American troops, declared English the official language, legalized slavery, decreed a vagrancy law to ensure forced labor for landowners, appropriated major landholdings, and instituted a general Americanization program” (Booth 1982, 19). Franklin Pierce, President of the U.S., originally supported Walker, likely because his actions supported the hegemony that the U.S. wished to instill throughout the region.

Eventually, the backlash from Walker’s sanctions and disagreements between Walker and the U.S. led to the U.S. government’s concern about access to land rights for the transisthmus canal. Additionally, concern began to grow over the general stability of other Central American countries and their relationship with Nicaragua because of Walker’s actions against the indigenous peoples of Nicaragua (Kornbluh 1987, 2). Walker’s attempt to annex Nicaragua as a slave state also put pressure on the already tumultuous pre-civil war government in the U.S. So, with support from Cornelius Vanderbilt, the U.S. funded the ousting of Walker by providing weapons and money to

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5 Walker was an American soldier and adventurer that attempted to gain personal control throughout most of Central America in an attempt to filibuster; he was executed by firing squad in Honduras in 1860 after being exiled from Nicaragua.

6 He sided against Cornelius Vanderbilt and the majority of United States support, putting much of the United States control of the land in jeopardy.
Costa Rica, which then used military action to force Walker into exile on May 1, 1857 (Christian 1986).\footnote{Vanderbilt was an American business magnate who built his empire through the railroad system in the United States, his status as a businessman provided him with a wealth of political influence as well.}

As a result of the liberals’ poor judgment with respect to Walker, the conservatives then took power, leading to the longest period of political stability in Nicaraguan history. U.S. interventions were limited during this time. However, when President José Santos Zelaya became president of Nicaragua in 1893 his intense political actions and his dictatorial control of the country caused tensions and civil disputes to mount, which led to a second military intervention by the U.S. in 1909 (Christian 1986). The 1909 intervention led to Zelaya’s resignation and an agreement that a two-party president (a liberal) and vice-president (a conservative) would be elected in an attempt to keep the peace (Christian 1986, 8). After ousting Zelaya, the U.S. continued its interventions in Nicaragua sporadically for 24 years, propelled by the belief that they were not only helping Nicaragua, but also that they were protecting their vested interests in a country experiencing a civil war (Booth 1985). Three years later, in 1912, a new rebellion brought U.S. Marines back, and after suppression of the rebellion, a supervised election took place in 1924, at which point Carlos Solórzano became president and Juan Bautista Sacasa, vice president (Christian 1986, 8-9). The next year, in 1926, General Emiliano Chamorro seized power in a coup, leading to another U.S. intervention. Chamorro’s inability to get U.S. backing led to his resignation, after which Adolfo Díaz was named president.
A year later, former vice president Juan Bautista Sacasa received Mexico’s backing and declared a constitutional presidency on the Caribbean coast, but U.S. support for Díaz allowed him to finish out his term (Booth 1985). Sacasa was elected president in 1932, after Díaz’s term finished. Two prominent liberal generals rose during his regime: Anastasio Somoza and Augusto Sandino. However, although they were liberals, this did not mean they shared the same ideals; Somoza embraced U.S. interaction and made himself an invaluable political actor within the government while Sandino was enraged by U.S. interventions. As Somoza embraced the U.S. involvement in Nicaragua, Sandino felt it created more problems than it solved. In 1932, after being foreign minister in Díaz’s presidency, Somoza was chosen to be the chief director of the U.S. trained Nicaraguan National Guard. Sandino followed a different path (Booth 1985; Christian 1986).

Sandino’s values were influenced by his mixed upbringing as the illegitimate but recognized son of an affluent liberal landowner of Spanish descent and his Indian maid (Booth 1985; Walker and Wade 2017, 28). Born in Niquiníhomo, Nicaragua as Augusto Nicolás Calderón Sandino, he was raised in abject poverty by his mother until his father took him in to provide his education. His father’s liberal ideologies made an impact on him, and he got involved in an altercation because a prominent conservative insulted his mother. After injuring the man, he had to flee the country (Christian 1986). During this period he worked in Guatemala and Honduras and eventually in Mexico for an American
oil company (Booth 1982; Walker and Wade 2017; see Christian 1986). Mexico’s revolution was in its post-revolutionary stage and Sandino was impressed and influenced by the Mexican labor movement and its indigenismo ideology and became increasingly frustrated with the U.S. interventions in his natal country (Field 1998, 437; see Christian 1986). He therefore returned to Nicaragua to work to free his country from the grip of U.S. influences and became an important General in the Liberal Army in the mountain regions, however he was still relatively unknown to those of high status and in control. So, his request for official support was rejected from the recognized liberal forces causing him to search for arms and support elsewhere and become a general of his own guerilla army, made up of mostly working class Nicaraguans in the mountain regions.

The presence of American military members and the instability that Nicaragua was experiencing caused great anguish for Augusto Sandino. Sandino and his group of guerillas fought against imperialist U.S. policies and actions in Nicaragua as well as the U.S. trained National Guard (Guardia Nacional), and attempted to break free from the grip of the U.S. For Sandino and his supporters, U.S. interventions exacerbated problems, increased socioeconomic divides, and furthered the interests of the U.S. far more than those of Nicaragua (Booth 1982). As Sandino’s forces grew, so did Somoza’s grip on the National Guard. Clashes between the two (government-controlled groups and Sandino’s guerillas) increased and continued to exacerbate political issues within Nicaragua. While

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8 It is unclear which oil company Sandino worked for in Mexico. Booth and Rushdie state that he worked for Huatasca Petroleum Company and Walker and Wade state he worked for Standard Oil of Indiana. What is clear is that he worked for an American Oil company while in Mexico.

9 Les Field explains that indigenismo is “a term used from Mexico to Argentina that connotes reverence, usually heavily romanticized, for the pre-Colombian civilizations of Latin America.” He further states that in Mexico “indigenismo became official state policy and was implemented by bureaucracies dealing with Indian communities and artisanal production” (1998, 441).
the conservatives and most of the liberal groups, decided to seek a truce because of the increasing expenses and lives wasted on war, Sandino felt that peace could not be established until Nicaragua was no longer controlled by the U.S. and its interests, and refused to participate in peace talks.

For years, peace came close, but remained elusive until 1934. After a third set of peace talks with President Juan Bautista Sacasa, and the establishment of an agreement with the U.S. to withdraw its troops, Sandino agreed to sign a peace deal. As Sandino, two of his generals, and his father left a dinner with president Sacasa at the presidential palace in Managua on February 21, 1934 they were stopped by the National Guard. Sandino and his generals were killed execution style and dumped into a shallow, unmarked grave nearby (Booth 1982, 51; see also: Kornbluh 1987). Sandino’s death shook the country, and allowed the National Guard to grow stronger under Somoza’s control; the following years were marked by disappearances, arrests, and increasing military control throughout the country as Anastasio Somoza used the National Guard to undermine president Sacasa and take control of the country.

In 1936, after over twenty years of U.S. involvement, Anastasio Somoza forced out president Sacasa and became the president of Nicaragua with backing from the U.S., thus beginning the 42-year Somoza family regime of power from June 6, 1936 to July 17, 1979 (Christian 1986). Somoza’s control over Nicaragua was anything but peaceful. The majority of his actions benefitted those within his elite inner circle, causing uproar

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10 At this point at the whim and control of Anastasio Somoza, President Juan Bautista Sacasa’s nephew.
11 Despite searches for this grave, it has still not been found to this day (Booth 1982, 51).
12 Somoza seemed to be the best candidate to not only gain control of the country and provide stability, but to maintain U.S. interests.
from thousands of Nicaraguans who were peasant or working class, and furthering the
economic divisions within the country. Somoza and his family had increased their control
over the country’s funds, siphoning off money to their closest friends and relatives, as
well as further controlling the distribution of goods throughout the country. However, the
sanctions on free speech generated the greatest outcry. The Somozas’ most vocal
opponent in the 1950’s was Pedro Joaquín Chamorro, the owner of La Prensa magazine.
Chamorro used the newspaper to attack and fight against the Somoza family and used his
status as a known writer and friend of the revolution to gain support from Che Guevara
and Fidel Castro (Booth 1982). After gaining their support, he attempted to attack
Somoza and failed, so he returned to his tactics at La Prensa (Booth 1982). The
Somoza regime attempted to limit free speech by closing down newspapers run by the
opposition and only distributing information they felt necessary to share, but La Prensa
remained up and running. During these periods of conflict, murals, posters, and
newspapers became the primary means of communicating ideas, issues, and memories
(Kunzle 1995). Since Somoza was shutting down many of the newspapers, and posters
were becoming too expensive to produce, many Nicaraguans relied on murals as a
primary mechanism for communication.

Given these political tensions, coupled with the rage caused by the loss of free
speech and individual rights, Sandino’s ideas resurfaced and became synonymous with
revolution against the status quo. Carlos Fonseca, Silvio Mayorga, and Tómas Borge

13 In 1959 Chamorro, under UDEL (Union Democratica de Liberación) led a band of 100 armed men in a
military attack against the Luis Somoza Debayle government. It was unsuccessful; its members were
captured and Chamorro was tortured and jailed for a short period of time (Guevara, Che. 2002. Guerilla
created the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (FSLN) in 1961 in response to the dictatorial control of the Somoza family. It began as an attempt to spark a revolution that would free control over goods, speech, and resources (Christian 1986). Sandino’s ideas and actions, despite his death in 1934, became the basis for the FSLN’s “revolution of poets.” David Craven states that “this unusual designation, which has surfaced in numerous references from street graffiti to Hollywood movies, seems appropriate for several reasons, among which is the fact that many Sandinistas are accomplished poets, painters, musicians, and novelists” (1989, 1). This designation is also due to the revolution beginning as a response to the suppression of creative expression. Kunzle explains,

Nicaragua is known as the land of poets, and its revolution as the revolution of poets. In Nicaragua, its former president has said, everybody is considered a poet until he proves to the contrary. The literature of this little country, especially poetry, was inspired and stimulated by the Nicaraguan founder of Latin American poetic modernism, Rubén Darío. Poetic modernism achieved international renown...as a form of national and political expression (1995, 63).14

The literary and artistic roots of this revolution catalyzed the formation of groups in opposition to Somoza’s control over artistic expression and speech, and grew out of the working class ideologies of poets around the nation.

After its inception in 1961, the FSLN worked tirelessly to outwit and overthrow the Somoza family regime through political means and military operations. On December 23, 1972, the beginning of the fall of the Somozas came in the form of a devastating earthquake (Christian 1986). Eighty percent of the capital city of Managua was

14 Rubén Darío coined the term “modernism” in the 1880s (Craven 1989, 5).
destroyed, and over ten thousand people were killed (Christian 1986, 35). As recovery efforts began, the country received hundreds of millions in dollars of relief money, the majority of which was siphoned off by the Somoza family for their own endeavors (Booth 1982). When this became public knowledge, FSLN support grew. The FSLN’s attacks became more successful, and on July 28, 1977 they received an advantageous break when Anastasio Somoza Debayle had a heart attack and was sent to Miami, Florida for treatment (Booth 1982). During this time, Nicaraguan writers and politicians, who supported the FSLN had been attempting to make known to the U.N. and to U.S. government officials the civil and human rights violations that were taking place in Nicaragua. In light of these actions, Somoza, still recovering, returned to Nicaragua and attempted to exert even greater military control over the nation. On January 10, 1978, Pedro Joaquín Chamorro (owner of La Prensa and outward FSLN supporter) was brutally shot twenty times in the face, arms, chest, and throat by three men (Booth 1982, 159; see Christian 1986, 54-56). Somoza was blamed for his death, causing a mass outpouring of anti-Somoza rage.

The combination of these events led the U.S. to support the election of a new president. Cuba, Costa Rica, Venezuela, and Mexico also reneged on their support for Somoza because they feared further disruption and instability in Latin America if he retained control. With his support diminishing, Somoza agreed to step down in 1981 after the 1980 elections, but fear of new or continuing issues with elections and control led to increased attacks on National Guard outposts by the FSLN. Despite peace talks and

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15 Pedro Joaquín Chamorro became a key figure in the fight against Somoza for his continuous use of the newspaper and his attempt to break the grip on free speech and expression throughout the country.
discussions about the transfer of power, wars broke out in many towns across Nicaragua; one of the largest took place when Sandinista guerrillas attacked Estelí and neighboring towns, where fighting continued for a week (Booth 1982; See Christian 1986). On July 13, 1979 Somoza was run out of the country, and Francisco Urcuyo Maliaño took over the presidency for seven days (Booth 1982, 182). On July 20, 1979, the FSLN officially gained control of the country.

Despite gaining control of the country politically, stability and unity remained elusive for the FSLN government. Tensions between the United States, which continued to want to control Nicaraguan policy by means of the Contra War, and the many years of conflict and war had taken their toll on the country and its people. In 1990, those tensions culminated in a shift in the political climate with the election of UNO (National Opposition Union) presidential candidate, Violeta Barrios de Chamorro (Craven 1989). Her election ended the Contra War, but the shifting political tides in Nicaragua changed the ways in which art and creativity were approached. Arnoldo Alemán was elected mayor of Managua the same year, and while he created urban renewal projects aimed at re-invigorating the city, his approach was very different from that of the FSLN government that had preceded him. Aléman’s urban renewal focused on improving road

16 In 1978, despite agreeing to relinquish control in 1981, it became clear that Somoza would not allow democratic elections, so the FSLN took control early.
17 After the revolutionary win in 1979, former national guardsmen formed guerilla units with support of Argentine Special Forces. In 1981, seeing U.S. interests being challenged, the CIA on Ronald Reagan’s orders took over control and support of these counterrevolutionaries (contras) in order to overthrow the FSLN government.
18 UNO, or the National Opposition Union was a coalition of parties from all sides of the political spectrum that traced its origins from the Nicaraguan Democratic Coordinating Group (CDN). The UNO’s coalition included fourteen political parties: four conservative, seven centrists, and three leftist (which included Nicaraguan communist parties).
conditions, bringing in large supermarkets, and creating new restaurants and businesses to spark economic growth, while simultaneously leading a campaign against the popular symbolism of the Sandinista revolution (Babb 2001, 53-54). He destroyed or painted over many significant revolutionary murals throughout the city, erasing sites of memory and identity for thousands of Nicaraguans that made historical references to the revolution, Sandino, and the war (Kunzle 1995).

After the Chamorro/Alemán leadership, the FSLN regained political control. In 2006, a “changed” Daniel Ortega was re-elected president of Nicaragua with new approaches to global and economic policy. He has since resurrected, revamped, and re-appropriated many of the original aims of the FSLN government, such as creative renewal and use of cultural icons, to accommodate the shifting social arena. With his new leadership has also come a new understanding of the mistakes that the FSLN made immediately after the revolution took place. Despite fighting for gender freedoms, for example, their practices kept women out of the popular discussion for many years, even within the realm of literature and art. The post-revolutionary objectives also argued for a reinvestigation of the majority’s role, alluding to the known abuses of colonialism and neo-colonialism in their country as well as the U.S. interventions in indigenous territories. These ideas were never truly hashed out, and the new dialogical process still excluded culture groups on the outskirts, like the Miskito. The revolution had not treated them well, and yet, the inclusion of these groups in the national discussion was minimal.

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Ortega is currently serving his third consecutive term as president of Nicaragua. He was previously leader of Nicaragua as a member of the Junta and then as president from 1979-1990. His loss in 1990 caused him to rethink and change some of his economic and global policies, however, some of his approaches are still sparking intense debates about identity and oppression especially along the Miskito coast.
In order to address the past grievances, the ideas of the Miskito and of women needed to be included in the discussion, especially in discussions of identity. The post-revolutionary era of Nicaragua had much more work to do to create spaces for identity inclusion, but the frameworks that were in place in the 1980’s and 1990’s at least helped unveil the consistent lack of prior focus on indigenous peoples and women in national dialogues and decision-making. Further, the acknowledgement of these issues helped spark discussions of the rights of differing identities within the national dialogue, and to push for the inclusion of indigenous and female rights, perspectives, and identities.

From Nicaragua’s independence from Spain in 1821, and through the conflicts and turmoil of Somoza’s control and the revolution, the identity of the country has been in flux. One of the most well known arguments in identity theory challenges the idea that identities and ethnic groups remain static and unchanging despite movement and interaction. Instead, Fredrik Barth argues that ethnic identities are created and changed through dichotomization sparked by interaction. He states, “A dichotomization of others as strangers, as members of another ethnic group, implies a recognition of limitation on shared understandings, differences in criteria for judgment of value and performance, and a restriction of interaction to sectors of assumed common understanding and mutual interests” (Barth 1969, 15). However, Barth proposes that we not only examine how these identities emerge through interaction, but also how changes in the shared understandings and experiences shift how identities are understood, thus creating a space in which specific traits create new positions and patterns for articulation in a variety of ways.
For many Nicaraguans, the traditional peasant and working class ideals of self-sufficiency, honor, and family were challenged during the Somoza conflicts; but the revolution, led by the ideologies of Augusto Sandino, attempted to incorporate these values—the cultural importance of self-sufficiency, honor, and family—into the discourse of the revolution (Grossman 2008, 84-88). Sandino wrote a letter on October 26, 1930 to Enoc Aguado, in which he stated, “Beloved brother in the homeland, is the salutation in correspondence among members of our army. With this our intention has been to keep present in our people the concept that the Homeland is our Mother, that since we are brothers in her, it is our duty to go to the forefront of her defense, because in defending her, we defend ourselves” (Grossman 2008, 80). By referring to the nation as a mother, and fellow soldiers and supporters as brothers, Sandino invoked core beliefs of familial solidarity as synonymous with the nation (Grossman 2008). These ideals allowed Sandino to change the ways in which many Nicaraguans viewed their identity.

Instead of identifying as separate ethnic groups, Nicaraguans, who shared revolutionary consciousness, identified themselves as one non-ethnic national group, crossing racial and class divides (Field 1998). For the majority of the revolution, the main source of identity was rooted in familial Nicaraguan-ness. Sandino’s idea of national identity was fixed around his connections to his indigenous identity. He said, “I am Nicaraguan, and I feel proud because in my veins circulates more than anything else, Indian blood… My highest honor is to have arisen from the bosom of the oppressed, who

20 Here, I am not suggesting that these groups abandoned their value as black, Miskito, or indigenous for solidarity sake, but instead that the value that solidarity brought was employed in this instance to create and spark a change.
are the soul and nerve of the race” (Field 1998, 437). By affirming his indian identity and using the core cultural ideals, Sandino brought about affirmations of indian-ness not based on ethnic race or social class, but through core values and shared understanding of oppression.

As Les Field states: “Identities are strict, but they can also shift depending on the surrounding social, political, and economic structure – they are situationally defined” (1995). In the case of Nicaragua, political and social dynamics shifted how Nicaraguans throughout the country viewed their identity. Sandino’s, and therefore the FSLN’s, ideologies rooted identity in family values, which focused on the whole of the Nicaraguan family. The ability to be self-sufficient was also a large factor in identity formation during the revolution; for the FSLN, and those who supported them, this sufficiency meant the removal of United States aid and dependency. The use of Sandino’s ‘peasant’ ideology and anti-imperialism in the revolutionary FSLN movement encouraged those who had been previously voiceless to become qualitatively transformed and play a role in the revolutionary process. This period saw the organization of many groups for a common goal. “In fact, the various mass organizations did not so much affirm and defend specific interests on the basis of their particular identity, but rather they used these identities as a means of mobilizing social forces for a frontal struggle against the Somoza regime” (Coraggio 1985, 5). Therefore, this immediate post-revolutionary, as well as revolutionary identity was based on social and political opposition to Somoza and somocismo instead of along ethnic or cultural boundaries. Manuel Castells would classify this as resistance identity: “Generated by those actors who are in positions/conditions
devalued and/or stigmatized by the logic of domination, thus building trenches of resistance and survival on the basis of principles different from, or opposed to, those permeating the institutions of society” (2010). In this case, the resistance identity was embedded in Sandino’s traditional, ethnic values and anti-imperialist ideologies that created a common, shared goal for the people. Although Sandino was not alive during the Somoza regime and the FSLN revolution, the memory of what he stood for became the doctrine of the FSLN revolution of the seventies; and the competing values between the FSLN and the Somoza regime worked in opposition to create differences in shared understandings, and therefore identities.

The interactions of the two groups created a space for shared understandings and experiences to be created across divides, and through these spaces new patterns of identity formation and articulation emerged. Castells explains how, in such liminal periods (such as those described by Victor Turner during ritual processes), resistance identities have the power to rally everyone across structural divides to create change, even though such an identity or ideology cannot sustain itself for an extended period (2010). Castells shows how limbo and liminality can be a transformative site of political change. Nevertheless, this kind of liminal period can also be unstable and contested. Since Nicaragua is still working through this liminal period of political resistance, its stability remains in flux in terms of identity formation. Nevertheless, identity discussions have become integral to national dialogues and continue to be articulated in new ways.

Immediately following the revolutionary victory in 1979, these ideas of identity came to the forefront in the form of educational reforms and creative renewal through the
institution of various policies. The importance of art and culture to the revolution was laid out by the FSLN in the 1969 manifesto, specifically Section III, titled “Revolution in Culture and Education” (Craven 1989). This section stated:

The Sandinista people’s revolution will establish the bases for the development of the national culture, the people’s education, and university reform. A. It will push forward a massive campaign to immediately wipe out “illiteracy.” … D. It will give attention to the development and progress of education at various levels (primary, intermediate, technical, university, etc.), and education will be free at all levels and obligatory at some. E. It will grant scholarships at various levels of education to students who have limited economic resources. The scholarships will include housing, food, clothing, books, and transportation. F. It will train more and better teachers who have the scientific knowledge that the present era requires, to satisfy the needs of our entire student population… H. It will adapt the teaching programs to the needs of the country; it will apply teaching methods to the scientific and research needs of the country. (Craven 1989, 11)

In the early eighties, the Sandinistas continued with the general tenets of this manifesto and established a literacy campaign through the Ministry of Culture in an attempt to spread the groundwork for creative renewal, using Rubén Darío as a key example. They intended their cultural renewal campaign to follow Paulo Freire’s idea that “every human being, no matter how ‘ignorant,’ no matter how submerged in the ‘culture of silence,’ is capable of looking at the world critically in a dialogical encounter with others” (Freire 1968, 13; Craven 2002, 136). That dialogue emerged forcefully after the fall of Somoza and the FSLN victory in 1979.

Nicaraguans of all backgrounds expressed their thoughts about the tumultuous political strife through aesthetic expression, but the new encouragement of dialogue saw these expressions play out in the public arena in new ways, as murals became

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21 The literacy campaign of 1980 raised the national literacy from 50% to almost 90% (Craven 1989, 2).
transformed from a form of resistance to forms of identity-making in which lived experiences were reflected. Throughout the revolution and in the immediate aftermath of the revolution, murals throughout the country seemed to stay relatively consistent in content (Kunzle 1995). During this time, they were used in similar ways as revolutionary posters in Cuba and Mexico. They were meant to create solidarity and spark outrage by showing the atrocities inflicted by the government (Kunzle 1995). Murals of this time were “predominantly figural, with bodies, gestures, and attitudes ranging from the monumental to the miniature, the murals foreground the idea of ordinary people taking power into their own hands” (Kunzle 1995, 27). The people’s revolution meant that they controlled the country’s government and had power in their own hands, but by using murals to continue the spread of ideas through images, ordinary people or large community based groups, became a part of the national discussion. This was a shift from the Somoza regime in which only those who had high status and money had any control. The people were celebrating, not just the changes in their everyday lives, but also their memories of the revolutionary victory. The ideology of these murals, as Kunzle says, was “simple, direct, unnuanced, and celebratory rather than denunciatory” (1995, 28). Color content of murals during this period reflected the celebration of change and freedom through specific color usage; most represented the colors of Nicaragua (white and blue), intertwined with the colors of the revolution (red and black) in order to show national pride and solidarity. Further, many images not only celebrated the victory, but depicted desires for change in the future (Meiselas 2018; Kunzle 1995). Many new murals were
created depicting strides in healthcare for women, education for the masses, and further freedoms that had been taken from them during the Somoza regime.

Since this period of mural creation was overwhelmingly positive and celebratory, images of somocismo were limited, but when they were shown, they were extremely bloody and violent, depicting murderous scenes, bloodshed, or torture. Otherwise, images of Somoza violence were depicted in the background of FSLN wins, in which guerillas defeated airplanes or tanks, continuing the celebration of victory over a dictatorial regime. However, the most heavily depicted image of revolutionary victory was that of Augusto César Sandino. His image littered the streets of Managua in many forms, but the most interesting aspect of his image is that it penetrated the minds of everyone even without the inclusion of his face. Sandino, in his ten-gallon hat or by his silhouette alone, has become a symbol of the revolution and the revolutionary victory. In many places throughout Nicaragua, he is depicted in silhouette only, but is widely recognized in any form he is depicted. While the color combinations and the subjects of these murals are interesting, the most intriguing aspect of murals of this time was that their creation was a response to the revolutionary victory; it was a time for the ordinary masses to have their voices and feelings represented after years of oppression and marginalization. Walls throughout the country became the “blackboard of the people.” Murals, especially when created by the people, have the ability to memorialize the past, uncover shortcomings, depict the tensions, and project new desires and needs of the people.

After the victory, the Ministry (currently known as the Nicaraguan Institute of Culture) also encouraged creativity throughout the country by using the murals that were
created during the revolution as an influence to continue to push for freedoms and catalyze change and progress, and by protecting them with laws that recognized them as sites of cultural patrimony (Kunzle 1995, 13). According to Kunzle, “The destruction of the murals violated the constitution, chapter 4, articles 126, 127, and 128, relating to the protection of Nicaraguan culture, and law 90, respecting the preservation of historic patrimony and specifically citing the murals in question, as well as article 30 protecting freedom of expression” (1995, 17). The ministry encouraged free-thinking, allowing for new identity processes to form, by commissioning murals throughout the 1970s and 1980s.

In the 1980s Nicaragua became the mural capital of the world because of the policies and programs that established and encouraged free-thinking and creativity, bringing artists from other countries to come work and study to enhance the creativity of the nation (Craven 2002, 158-159). The dialogical process employed by the FSLN through Paolo Freire was intended to spark discussions about nationality, identity, and the future. Post-war Nicaragua was a time of questioning the past and reaffirming the heterogeneity of the country. The poetry and art that was being created “opened a new chapter in history that allowed a rethinking of the nation’s past, a re-situation of the majority’s role in history” (Craven 2002, 123). Through this process, the unavoidable heterogeneous, or mestizaje, cultural lineage of Nicaragua could be investigated and recombined with new revolutionary ideologies to form a new identity (Craven 2002, 123). Murals were arguably the most salient form of art for offering “a history of the past, recent and more distant, and the projection of a better future promised by the revolution”
(Kunzle 1995, 12). By displaying history and projecting the future on walls, which could not hide, the government brought the public into the discussion about the direction of the nation. Allowing walls to become the blackboard of the people created a space for dialogue about the past transgressions and memories, as well as the potential for change. Furthermore, murals became a space where past tragedies were memorialized within the memory of the cityscape, allowing no one to forget the events of the past while also allowing people to communicate tensions and new ideas.

Through an examination of these murals, especially those created after Alemán became mayor in 1990, it is possible to see how the dialogical process has unearthed and reaffirmed identities throughout the country. By understanding the political processes and the social tensions that were created because of the conflicts in Nicaragua, as well as the construction of identity during the revolution, we can make better sense of the themes that are being expressed in murals. The new climate of Nicaragua has continued to foster new modes of identity formation, dialogue, and mosaic hybrid understandings of identity. Looking at murals constructed since 1990 constitutes one avenue through which it is possible to trace how that shift has continued in recent years and in what ways.
NICARAGUAN MURALS AS A BATTLEFIELD

*Mural art is ideology, education, history, daily life, beauty, conflict, action, even violence*

-Leonar Martínez de Rocha, director, National Museum

The FSLN’s encouragement of freedom of expression in new ways meant that the citizens of Nicaragua were able to make walls their outlet, creating both commissioned and non-commissioned murals and art pieces that spoke to the country’s history, identity, and culture. While older murals, painted in times of revolution and upheaval in the hopes of preserving national and personal memory, tended toward “primitive” art styles, depicting everyday activities conducted in natural environments or revolutionary victories, the new murals of Nicaragua lack a specific style, but instead employ the use of strategically placed and widely recognizable symbols in order to communicate their meanings. By examining these specific styles, using photos of murals taken in Managua, Nicaragua, I outline the ways in which these symbols have become important to communicating the future of Nicaragua’s new dialogical processes of identity formation. Combining anthropological understandings of symbols, art historical perspectives, and social histories will allow me to view these symbols in a variety of ways. Further,

22 (Kunzle 1995, 26)
comparing the symbols and styles of commissioned murals and non-commissioned
murals will allow me to understand what ideas, resentments, memories, and social justice
issues are being communicated and in what context.

Murals have been used in many revolutionary movements throughout Latin
America, but Craven (2002) argues that despite the well-known mural history of Mexico,
Nicaragua may have a richer but relatively unknown mural history. Since becoming the
mural capital of the world in the 1980’s, Nicaragua has seen an increase in murals painted
throughout the country. In the seventies and eighties, many murals were being
commissioned by the government in order to promote freethinking and cultural renewal.
However, the invitation of artists from other countries, and the FSLN’s use of Paulo
Freire’s philosophy (1968) with respect to including and educating every person in
society, meant that murals were not only being created by artists, nor were they being
painted within a specific style, but instead were being created by people of all
backgrounds and in a wide range of styles.

The lack of a consistent or well-known mural style in Nicaragua meant that
following the history of murals was more like following the history of the country. The
“style” shifted during different periods of conflict or peace. Both David Kunzle and
David Craven show that earlier murals (immediate pre-revolutionary time period)
followed “pintura primitivista” style, in which non-professional and spontaneous art was
created focusing on interactions with nature. These murals used bright but earthy colors,
and depicted people conducting everyday activities with nature, such as farming (Craven
2002, 146-148; Kunzle 1995, 66-70). These primitivist paintings did “not so much
‘realistically’ represent *campesino* (peasant) life, as evoke an almost tactile feel for its daily fabric, from everyday activities of production and ordinary social relations to the ever present nature in which rural dwellers are easily immersed” (Craven 1989, 73).

However, after this “pintura primitivista” stage a different mural style appeared in direct response to the violence and oppression happening before and during the revolution.

For a time, murals and much of the art in Nicaragua shifted from depicting nature to depicting the atrocities of the war in a variety of ways. Kunzle’s (1995) book, *The Murals of Revolutionary Nicaragua, 1979-1992* provides not only a background on Nicaragua, but also a catalogue of murals during that time period. His catalogue, which is arguably the most exhaustive of Nicaraguan murals that can be found, shows that the types of murals found during the revolution and in the aftermath of the revolution were intended to be sites of shared memories.23 This revolutionary phase of mural art focused on showing the struggles of the war in positive ways. Despite the intense violence that was experienced throughout the country, the violent atrocities were rarely depicted in visual form. Instead, these murals included revolutionary figures and important revolutionary symbols; however, when violence was depicted, the focus was on the people overcoming the violence. This is seen in the common picture of Sandinistas throwing Molotov cocktails at National Guard soldiers, or the image of guerillas in the mountains taking down a helicopter with small arms. These murals created a sense of solidarity among a group of people who felt oppressed by the Somoza regime.

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Since there was no set mural style, it is the specific symbols that have become more important in these murals, as they have the ability to communicate a wide range of ideas within a single image. As Bill Rolston and Sofi Ospina write in “Murals and memory in Colombia,” “the metaphors and symbols speak to those who know how to read them and can be missed or ignored by those who do not” (2017, 35). The lack of style means that we must examine and understand the specific symbols within murals to understand the importance of the mural itself.

In Symbols in Ndembu Ritual, Victor Turner defines a symbol as “a thing regarded by general consent as naturally typifying or recalling something by possession of analogous qualities or by association in fact or thought” (1967, 273). Turner’s research showed three ways that structures or properties of symbols could be inferred: through observable characteristics, interpretations offered by specialists and laymen, and through specific contexts worked out by the anthropologist (1967, 274). This meant everyone did not always understand symbols in the same way, and that some of the meanings of symbols could themselves be symbols (Turner 1967, 274). Thus, my understanding and interpretation of a symbol within these murals could be, and likely is, different from someone else’s because of my background and experiences, but from the historical standpoint I will be taking, I can extrapolate context behind the murals that may not be taken into account by others. This powerful aspect of symbols also means that even when people understand the meaning of a symbol in radically different ways they may all be moved to respond or act because of that symbol.
In Turner’s view there are three properties of symbols: condensation, unification of disparate meanings, and polarization of meanings (1967, 278-278). Condensation refers to the ability of symbols to represent multiple things and actions within a single formation. For example, the red and black colors of the FSLN flag represent not only the FSLN, but also the revolution, Sandino, and freedom. The unification of disparate meanings means that symbols may bring together radically contradictory meanings because of their common possession of analogous qualities or by association in fact or thought. Finally, symbols work to show two clearly distinguishable poles of meaning, the ideological and the sensory. Turner writes, “at the sensory pole are concentrated those significata that may be expected to arouse desires and feelings, at the ideological pole one finds an arrangement of norms and values that guide and control persons as members of social groups and categories” (1967, 278). The confluence of the ideological and sensory poles creates a performative dimension of symbolic expression, in which the viewers of the symbols interact with what has been created or performed, which combines with a person’s own view of the symbol; ultimately creating an oretic (the sensory pole associated with emotions) quality that arouses sentiments from those who view them. In this way, symbols communicate feelings and create spaces for action through the dialogical process.

For Turner, symbols as a whole are associated with human interests, purposes, ends, and means, whether they are explicitly formulated or have to be inferred from the observed behavior, and they produce action and interaction (1967, 273-274). This means that in many cases “groups mobilize around them, worship before them, perform other
symbolic activities near them, and add symbolic objects to them, often to make them shrines” (Turner 1967, 275). The specific context of a symbol becomes important in understanding how ideas, social links, and shared political mobilization can communicate across boundaries. Some symbols, Turner argued, are used in certain rituals or contexts for a specific purpose, while others are dominant symbols that appear across many different contexts and can help explain how murals communicate, and to what end.

Despite not having a specific mural or art style in Nicaragua, there are many symbols that are regularly found in Nicaraguan murals. Two of the most common symbols are not actually symbols in the traditional sense, but color schemes: blue/white and red/black. Blue and white are the colors of the Nicaraguan flag and are a symbol of both the country itself and a sense of national pride. Those who are familiar with revolutionary movements in Latin America likely recognize the combination of red and black. These colors, used by the FSLN party, have become synonymous with revolution. It is not uncommon to find red and black plastered along walls throughout Nicaragua. Sometimes they are accompanied by Sandino silhouettes or posters of Daniel Ortega, but more often than not, they stand alone as a representation of the victory over Somoza, the overcoming of oppression, as well as pride in the country and its people, and hope for the future.²⁴

Sandino is another widely recognizable symbol found all over Nicaragua. It is not the image of Sandino himself that is most recognized, but his ten-gallon hat. Sandino’s figure looms over Managua in the form of a silhouetted cutout that towers down from the

²⁴ Daniel Ortega is the current President of Nicaragua and was one of the original FSLN Junta members.
old presidential palace, but his image is seen in every corner of Nicaragua. In many places, his silhouetted form is all that is seen; in others, his face, but the one constant is his ten-gallon hat. The hat has become so synonymous with Sandino that it is likely you will see his hat more often than you will see his full image. It has become a symbol within a symbol, and like Sandino, represents freedom, revolution, and national pride and patrimony.

For the purposes of this thesis there are two categories of murals- those that are government commissioned and those that are created by the public (non-commissioned). While both of these categories of murals may create a sense of community and unity, the intent may vary. A comparison of these two types of murals and the symbols being employed shows the ways in which viewpoints can be communicated through visual means. By including information obtained from interviews, handouts, and focus groups, it was possible to see how the messages affect or interact with those who view them.

**Commissioned Murals**

Government commissioned murals are generally straightforward. They have a specific purpose and therefore, a certain theme that reflects the desires of the government that commissioned them. In this study, all of the government commissioned murals are located on the Mayor’s (Alcaldía) property in Managua, Nicaragua and all are painted by Rolando Bojorge, a Nicaraguan artist, from ideas collaborated with governmental officials.
Figure 1, depicting Ruben Darío, is located on the side of the Alcaldía offices in Managua, which is located near a local market and blocks away from a local university and bus station. Its location near the hustle and bustle of everyday life allows these images to be seen by people of all backgrounds every single day. The landscape of the city, in this case, created a space in which specific ideologies become communicated to the public.

Figure 1: Mural painted on the outside of Alcaldía main office in Managua depicting Ruben Darío. Photo taken by author July 4, 2016.

25 Alcaldía is the Mayor’s office. Throughout this study if the term Alcaldía is used it is in reference specifically to the Mayor’s office in Managua, Nicaragua.
The most striking symbol in this image is the use of a very specific color scheme. As mentioned above, blue and white are the colors of the national flag of Nicaragua, but they are also colors associated with peace. Psychologists, in a study associating colors with specific emotions, show that blue is the color people most associated with hope and pride (with white and red in second, respectively), and was the second color chosen for thoughts of joy, freedom, and peace (yellow was chosen first for thoughts of joy, and white for both freedom and peace) (Sutton and Altarriba 2015). This sentiment is communicated two-fold by the inclusion of the white dove, a powerful symbol in its own right as a representation for Peace.

A deep knowledge of Nicaragua’s history is not absolutely necessary to understand the cultural significance of Ruben Dario, but knowing his role in Nicaraguan history and his relationship with his homeland can provide a better understanding of his image (pictured in figure 1). Dario was Nicaragua’s most famed poet, and his image and name are found throughout Nicaragua. He is the first image travelers see as they land at Augusto C. Sandino National Airport in Managua; the national theatre is named after him (Ruben Dario National Theatre); and schools and government centers throughout the country name buildings, educational centers, and theatres after him. However, his relationship with his country was not always so intimate.

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26 While this study was conducted in the U.S., not all participants considered themselves American, and many spoke other languages, however, the majority of participants were English speaking Americans and that may have an affect on the results of the study since color and emotion can be culturally influenced.

27 The dove became the symbol for the first ever peace conference and was painted by Pablo Picasso for such occasion. However, the dove itself was associated with peace long before through its biblical connections to a dove with an olive branch.

28 Augusto Sandino’s image is also seen upon landing at this airport, putting Dario and Sandino on the same level in terms of national pride.
David Whisnant (2001) looked at Darío’s role in Nicaragua from a social historical perspective, which I would argue gives a deeper insight into the ways in which he is depicted throughout the country, and the meaning behind his image. Darío as an image and a symbol has been employed by multiple groups in order to promote Nicaragua’s cultural legitimacy and identity, and Darío’s conflicted relationship with Nicaragua allows for his image to be controlled by different groups in order to communicate different messages. Darío is not only significant to Nicaragua as their most recognized and revered poet, but he is also one of Latin America’s most widely recognized poets, and is known as the poet who took back the Spanish language, but his relationship with his homeland was tumultuous.

Darío, born Félix Rubén Sarmiento García, grew up a poor child from rural Nicaragua but always felt the need to transcend his socioeconomic status. At the age of 15 he left for El Salvador, never spending more than a few months at a time in his natal country. However, he felt connected enough to his home to be called to political service and served as minister to Spain for many years. The government, experiencing their own turmoil, did not support Darío in the ways he was promised and his frustrations grew. Darío, through his writing and his travels, “fought to escape Nicaragua, especially its rustic provincialism and the financial insecurity and social marginality suffered by its writers” (Whisnant 2001, 10). Through Darío’s writing, Whisnant shows that Darío struggled to affirm his “nicaraguanness” while also separating himself from the country and his low status (Whisnant 2001). He alludes to his natal country infrequently, and the recognition of indigenous culture is sparse. Throughout his life, government support was
inadequate or non-existent, but in his death, Darío was deified; death was the final move in transcending his status, and he became a figure of national pride. Whisnant states “A prime example of this deification was the elaborate statue erected in Managua in 1933, which portrayed Darío in a flowing toga with a large angel perched on his right shoulder” (2001, 21). Further, the naming of the national theatre after him and his presence at the national airport deified his name and figure.

Despite his lack of straightforward connections to Nicaragua, Darío also championed the reunification of Central American states throughout his poetry (Whisnant 2001, 18). While he sparingly wrote of Nicaragua, he wrote extensively of atrocities he felt affected Nicaragua. For example, he said that William Walker brought Nicaragua “only the barbarity of blue eyes, cruelty, and the rifle” (Whisnant 2001). He also contrasted this barbarity with the “more ancient and vital culture, the passion, the deep faith, and vibrant dreams of la América Española (Spanish America),” which showed his distaste for U.S. imperialism in Nicaragua and pride in the indigenous past (Whisnant 2001). While inconsistent, Darío did write of Nicaraguan pride, as in his famous poem Retorno, whose most celebrated phrase is written on this mural: “si pequeña es la patria, una grande la sueña” (A small country can dream big). The full poem celebrates pride in Nicaragua, but the last few sections are the most well known, most celebrated, and most relevant.

The Atlanteans were our guests. A great Revelation one time had the great Moctezuma, And Hugo saw Momotombo as an organ of truth. Through the fatal pages of history. Our earth is made of vigor and glory. Our earth is made for humanity.
Vibrant, strong, passionate, proud people;
People who have the conscience of being alive,
And that gathering their energies in a beam
Portentous, to the vigorous Homeland demonstrates
That you can bravely present in your right hand
The steel of war or the olive tree of peace.

When Dante carried the Sorbonne science
And his wonderful Florentine heart,
I believe it concretized the soul of Florence,
And his city was in the divine book.

**A small country can dream big.**
My illusions, and my desires, and my
Hopes, they tell me that there is no small
Homeland.
And today, Leon is like Rome or Paris.

I would like to be now like the Great Ulysses
That tamed the arches, and the boats and
Destination. I want to tell you now, see you
Later!
Because I do not resolve to say goodbye to you!29
(Dario 1909, 87-88; emphasis and translation by author)

The famous line “a small country can dream big” represents pride in his homeland and its people in a way that is attempting to be realized by the current government, despite their size they can achieve big things. However, it was this type of pride that he showed through his poetry as well as his distance from his homeland that allowed his figure to become a contested form of cultural capital.

Further, the representation of Dario in various ways constitutes an understanding of both sameness and difference simultaneously within him. Wade, while discussing

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29 This is only the second half of the poem Retorno, which highlights how important this celebrated phrase is. (Dario, Rubén. 1909. *El Viaje a Nicaragua e Intermezzo Tropical*. Madrid: A Teneo.) Full poem also found at https://www.poemas-del-alma.com/retorno.htm
Barbara Placido’s work on the “Three Powers” of Venezuela’s María Lionza cult outlined the ambivalence the figures represented in visual forms (2005, 250). The three figures consist of “María Lionza (usually seen as a white woman), El Indio Guaicaipuro (portrayed as an indigenous man) and El Negro Felipe (portrayed as a black man)” (Wade 2005, 250). However, these figures are represented in a multitude of ways based on their role in the creation of cultural capital and hierarchies. In Caracas, María Lionza’s statue depicts an indigenous woman, mounting a tapir and holding a human pelvis above her head (Wade 2005, 250). While this is not her typical representation, Placido and Wade argue that “each spirit while it is a representation of one individual, contains and suggests all other images and possible manifestations,” which is true of Darío’s image in the case of Nicaragua (Wade 2005, 250).

Darío’s mosaic view of life and the contestations within his poetry and actions have made him a prime form of cultural capital in Nicaragua. His name and image have become a site of contestation, showing that there is not one side to people or to identities. Whisnant states that “what Darío was pushing the Vanguardistas toward, they felt, was a sense of necessity of insisting on the worth and integrity of Latin American culture within the system of the world’s culture, a proud acceptance of the fact of mestizaje, and (to a lesser extent) a grounding of the creative process of native materials” (2001, 21). I would argue that Darío was not only pushing the Vanguardistas, but all Nicaraguans, to accept a new form of mestizaje, in which the “mixture” was not negative, but a necessary combination of the contesting aspects of each person. No matter what his point, Darío has become an important image in the formation of national identity and pride, on par with
Sandino. In this way, both Darío and Sandino’s image have themselves become symbols. As Turner states, “some of the meanings of important symbols may themselves be symbols, each with its own system of meanings (1967, 274).

Contesting symbols are also represented in this image with the inclusion of Darío’s diplomat uniform in the foreground and Volcán Momotombo in the background. Environmental figures, such as volcanoes, are used throughout Nicaraguan art as a representation of the cultural past, which is more connected to the environment. The use of Momotombo mimics the “pintura primitivista” art of earlier periods that uses iconographic landscapes (Craven 2002). Craven outlines a specific artwork named “Cotton Harvest” by Miriam Guevara, in which she uses the iconographically charged Volcán Momotombo. He states, “far from being simply a formal device, the depiction of Momotombo in Guevara’s painting signifies several things, the first of which is a reaffirmation of Native American cultural values” (1989, 85). These cultural values that Craven argues are represented by Volcán Momotombo speak to the general belief in the sacredness of geographic phenomena by the Chorotega-Mangue indians, descendants from Chiapas, Mexico who inhabited Nicaragua in the pre-Colombian era (1989, 85). By employing the use of symbols that have a deep-rooted cultural connection to the indigenous past, artists like Guevara are able to communicate the beliefs and ideologies of the indigenous history through visual ephemera on a grander scale. However, what has become interesting in Nicaragua is the use of these indigenous symbols with modern

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30 The classic Maya did not extend south of Honduras, but many cultural descendants did. The Chorotega were of Mayan descent, while the Nahuats were Toltecan. (Craven 1989, 71).
depictions of martyrs and revolutionary figures, as well as new modern representations of older symbols.

Volcán Momotombo, while being an important cultural symbol that connects to the past’s indigenous belief systems, has also been turned into a new symbol of technological development. In 1983, the FSLN government constructed the first geothermal electricity plant on Mt. Momotombo, which accounts for half of the country’s energy supply (Craven 1989, 88). The government was successfully able to combine the indigenous views of the volcano, with modern ideas of progress and development. Craven states, “By using volcanic steam, a naturally renewed energy source, the Nicaraguan revolution has arrived at a way of meeting its modern technological needs while at the same time reaffirming the indigenous, Native American respect for the nature’s ecosystem” (1989, 88). The past and the future now collide within one symbol, and represent a guarantee of a new and promising future.

Dario’s image, while representing the mosaic properties of identities, is also an image closely associated with education within Nicaragua. His poetry was distributed during the 1989 literacy campaign by the FSLN. In the image, the inclusion of children as the creators of the image therefore becomes an even more important symbol. Children and students are the creators of a hopeful and peaceful future in Nicaragua. It is also important to note that the children in the image are painting Darío amidst the rubble of a destroyed building -- with this in mind, it is possible to argue that the promise of the future is bright if improvement is sought. One of my informants in Nicaragua, Chico, when asked about the image, wrote that it shows “that a nation is covered in peace,
beauty, and color when the companionship, love and desire for improvement is exemplified” (personal communication, July 16, 2016). The following image has a decidedly different statement to make to those who view it. It is a mural painted on the inside wall of the Alcaldía offices, in its conference room. This room, while it may seem cut off from public view, is the site of many public events hosted on the Alcaldía property. So, while it may be located inside, it is seen often. This figure and figure 3 are placed directly across from each other in the conference room, and yet they have very different ideas to communicate. The photo provided, as well as the analysis of the photo, is only on half of the image.

During my fieldwork in Nicaragua, this was an image that struck me, so I decided to use it in my handouts and during discussions with local Nicaraguans. The responses I received clearly showed the kinds of ideas that this image creates for those who view it. The color scheme—dark and violent—is striking. The use of deep reds, greens, browns, and blacks communicates violence, despair, and anguish within the image. Above these dark colors is a distorted Uncle Sam-looking figure, represented by his signature red, white, and blue top hat. However, this is not the friendly or encouraging Uncle Sam that is depicted in the U.S. comics and posters; instead he is a thin, malnourished figure with a distorted and angry face. Instead of arms, he is dropping SR-71s (which is a reference to Contra era spy planes) below him.

31 It is important to note that not only is this image inside the conference room, but is also located directly above the doors for the restrooms, a feature that one of my informants was quick to point out in his handout answers.
This image exudes violence in so many ways. One handout participant, Chico, pointed out that he is dropping bombs on the toilets, stating that, “Everything amounts to nothing because it goes down the pipe without valuing life,” showing a feeling of hopelessness amongst this violence (personal communication, July 16, 2016).

All four participants from Nicaragua to whom I distributed handouts pointed to violence as the key theme of this mural. Some, like Jéu, said that it “represented the lived experiences of Nicaraguans since 1860.” He continued, saying that the image “represents

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The left side of the image shows the commonly depicted martyrs of the Revolution on a bright yellow backdrop, but for the purposes of this paper I decided to highlight this half of the mural.
the political intervention of the U.S. government in Nicaragua and Latin America” (personal communication, July 13, 2016). His comment, combined with the history of Nicaragua, outlines the enduring effects of the repeated U.S. interventions in Nicaragua over the years, even for Nicaraguans who did not live those experiences directly. Jéu’s comments reflect directly Wade’s (2005) argument that *mestizaje* and identity are lived experiences, in which the symbolism of origins shapes embodied persons; showing that identity and ideologies are constructed around and within memories of lived experiences (2005). The violence experienced by one generation is expressed and understood by members of another generation through the transference of memory experiences in visual ephemera. Other participants, Ana and Chico, simply stated that the image represented violence and transmitted fear, violence, and the power of the U.S. air force (personal communication, July 16, 2016). Interestingly, when these same handouts were given to American students some expressed pride in the U.S. instead of the pride Jéu expressed in Nicaragua. The ability for the same image to express pride in a variety of ways speaks to the dichotomous nature of symbols. While this is interesting, what I found most interesting about the handouts was that, other than Jéu, the participants paid little attention to the two fists in the image.

Fists raised in the air in defiance have become a common and well-known symbol in resistance movements and revolutions. From their use in the Black Panther and Civil Rights movements to today’s women’s rights movements, they are a commonly used symbol of resistance. In this mural, there is a fist on each side of Uncle Sam, angled slightly toward him as if in defiance of his violent actions. This alone is a powerful
symbol, but coupled with the obvious representation of violence by Uncle Sam, it becomes even more powerful. Jéu, a student at a local university, wrote in response to this image, “In a certain way there is a little pride to remember that even during the interventions there have always been those who fight for the sovereignty of the country, and from my point of view that is the gesture this mural expresses: the struggles that Nicaragua has undergone by the hand of North American intervention” (personal communication, July 13, 2016). So, despite the dark colors and violent expressions, this image at once condemns the actions of the U.S. and celebrates those who have resisted violence, creating a space of memory.

The left half of this mural, although it is not pictured here, paints an entirely different picture, which you can see in a small section on the left side of the image. Placed directly next to this violent, dark-colored Uncle Sam is a bright sun shining on four revolutionary figures. What I found most interesting about the contrast between the two halves of this mural was the use of real, martyred figures on one side and the fictional military symbol of Uncle Sam on the other. The commercialized symbol of Uncle Sam used as a depiction of the violence of U.S. imperialism drew my attention. For the purposes of this project I chose only to use this half of the image to convey the various types of subject matter that are seen throughout the government-commissioned murals in Managua, Nicaragua, specifically the Alcaldia property.

This bright and colorful mural (figure 3) is located directly across from figure 2 and contrasts sharply with the latter’s dark colors. There is much to analyze in this image, but here we will focus on a few key (and repeated) symbols. First is the image of Ruben
Darío, once again in his diplomatic regalia. As discussed above, his image is a representation of contesting identities that promotes the reinvestigation of mestizaje, or mixed, identities, while simultaneously representing a great deal of national pride. Opposite him is the image of Sandino, shown in his signature ten-gallon hat. Like Darío, Sandino’s image represents a reinvestigation of identities. Field highlights Sandino’s fondness for his Indian identity. He quotes Sandino as saying, “I am Nicaraguan, and I feel proud because in my veins circulates more than anything else, Indian blood… My highest honor is to have arisen from the bosom of the oppressed, who are the soul and nerve of the race” (1998, 437). Both Sandino and Darío are representations of “multiple motivations, multiple perspectives, multiple roles, and multiple voices—even, one might argue, multiple and sometimes contradictory identities” (Whisnant 2001). Further, Sandino represents an intense amount of national pride, as does Darío. These figures are in many ways synonymous with each other, as well as freedom. Ernesto Cardenal, minister of Culture and a revolutionary in his own right, said that “This revolution was a dream of Darío, and a decision of Sandino, and a strategy of Carlos Fonseca” placing Sandino, Darío, and Fonseca as the three key figures of the Nicaraguan revolution (Whisnant 2001, 36).

While the presence of Sandino and Darío is evocative, it is the inclusion of the symbols between them that puts their role in this mural in context. The white dove is once again found here, as a representation of peace and hope. Below the dove, also in

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33 Salman Rushdie, in his book The Jaguar Smile about his experiences in Nicaragua in the aftermath of the revolution, writes about Sandino and his hat. He states, “I was struck by the fact that is was Sandino’s hat, and not his face, that had become the most potent icon in Nicaragua. A hatless Sandino would not be instantly recognizable; but that hat no longer needed his presence beneath it to be evocative” (Rushdie 1997, 12).
white, is the geographical outline of North and South America, with specific focus on Central America (it is centered on the image).

Figure 3: Mural inside the conference room at the Alcaldía, located in direct opposition to figure 2. This image is generally the backdrop for events held in the room. Photo taken by author July 7, 2016.

Immediately below the dove are three people dancing and celebrating. The combination of the dove, the dancers, and the geographical outline of the Americas points to a representation of the peace and harmony within the region. As Craven stated, “Sandino will be remembered…not merely as the hero of a Nicaraguan episode, but as the symbol of struggle against imperialism,” he was for all of Latin America (2002, 12). Similarly,
Darío represented the heart of Latin American poetry and became the voice of modernism for the region. So, the placement of these two figures on each side of the geographical outline again shows the influence they had on the country, and speaks to their importance not just at home, but throughout the region.\(^\text{34}\)

In this middle section of the mural is also a large ear of corn. Corn, a staple crop for the majority of Latin American countries, is important to the livelihood of many farmers and indigenous peoples. In 1981, Ronald Reagan eliminated a loan for Nicaragua to buy wheat, so the FSLN government sponsored a national “Feria Nicaragüense de Maíz” (National Corn Fair), in order to push for the use of corn in place of wheat, and show the U.S. that it did not need their support (Craven 1989, 70). The fair was the brainchild of historian Dr. Dávila Bolanos’ research into the Mesoamerican legend of Xilonem (Craven, 1989 71). Mesoamerican history is full of legends of the origin of maize, but for Nicaragua and Bolanos, the legend of Xilonem, the goddess of maize, seemed fitting. It told of how, during a starvation causing draught, the Mayan princess Xilonem sacrificed herself so that her blood could bring the crops back to life and end the drought and famine for her people (Craven 1989, 71).\(^\text{35}\) The creation of the corn fair brought about a new reliance on corn instead of wheat-based products in Nicaragua, and solidified a cultural connection to an indigenous history. Corn is now seen as a culturally important crop within the country for many reasons, which is likely why the large ear of

\(^{34}\) It is important to note that Carlos Fonseca is missing from this image. This could be because he is depicted in other murals throughout the Alcaldía property.

\(^{35}\) Craven states “As such, this myth was a pertinent symbol for this contemporary situation: Xilonem, signifying self-sufficiency as much as self-sacrifice, was specifically evoked as a sign of modern self-determination in the face of hostile external forces” (1989, 71).
corn was represented in this mural as a way of bringing attention to the ways in which the current government has helped renew connections to Nicaraguan ancient culture.

Above this, almost connecting Darío and Sandino is an arch of indigenous symbols and Nicoya petroglyphs. Kunzle explains that the “Nicaraguan visual connection to the pre-Colombian past is minimal, but pre-Columbian decorative motifs and the connection to the past have resurfaced” (1995). These symbols mimic those of Maya glyphs, and are likely Chorotega and Nicarao-style symbols from the Nicoya region (the region between lake Nicaragua and the Pacific Coast that was inhabited by pre-Columbian groups, extends South to Costa Rica as well). The Chorotega, (a linguistically Otomanguean group) also known as the Chorotega-Mangue likely migrated from Chiapas, Mexico (Henderson and Hudson, 2012). The sub-dialects of the Chorotega-Mangue, the Dirians and Nagradans, were located between Lake Managua and the Pacific Coast, and the Nicarao (a Nahua speaking group) have some of the deepest connections to pre-Colombian cultures in Nicaragua (Henderson and Hudson, 2012; Olson 1991, 94). While the tribes and groups that lived in Nicaragua are not as present on a monumental scale like the Maya or Aztecs were in Mexico, Costa Rica, Honduras, or Guatemala, there is a deep connection to the Maya, Chorotega, and Nicoya groups in specific regions within Nicaragua, like Ometepe Island. The island is covered in Petroglyphs and is home of most of the published archaeological studies in Nicaragua (see Geoffrey McCafferty). These petroglyphs and symbols continue throughout the mural in the spaces on the edges.
To the left of Darío’s head is a spiral image that looks like a curled up snake with feathers extending from its body on the outside. This is likely a representation of the feathered serpent (known as Quetzalcoatl in Aztec culture, and as Kukulkan or Q’uq’umatz in various Mayan cultures). In Aztec culture, it is believed that the hero-god, “who created humanity with his own blood, turned himself into an ant so as to be able to steal a single grain of maize that the ants had hidden inside a mountain; this he gave to humans so that they might be nourished” (Coe and Koontz 2008, 28). Similar to Xilonem, this symbol represents a connection to the indigenous past through folklore and memory.

One of the most striking aspects of this mural is that among the bright, celebratory colors and the optimism conveyed by the image itself, is a further representation of the violence represented in figure 2. In the bottom left section of the mural, figure 3b, Uncle Sam is seen with an injured right foot and arm, seemingly angry, on crutches, walking away from the rest of the image. A banner hangs from the back of his neck that says “no admiten dominio, ni sometimiento” (Accept neither dominance nor submission). This small section of the mural, contrasts with the image of Uncle Sam dropping SR-71 spy planes and shows the triumph of Darío and Sandino’s ideals over those of the imperialist north. Further, the
inclusion of the indigenous symbols between and around the images of Darío and Sandino, play into the representation of those two figures as a mixture of identities. They are at once symbols of the revolution, and of their ladino and indian identities, while also being a representation of the connection to the indigenous past.

All three of these images show a sizeable amount of pride in Nicaragua, its cultural figures, and its history, partly because the Nicaraguan government commissioned them. They are also strategically placed in the landscape of the city. Since Rolando technically works for the office of MINED (the Ministry of Education), many of his murals are intended to depict the past and promote aspects of culture that the government feels are important for education. In these cases, the promotion of Sandino, Darío, and the historical struggles of Nicaragua within the context of their indigenous identity came to the forefront for me. During an interview with Rolando, he explained that the murals he is commissioned to paint are ideas given to him by the person commissioning it, but he “captures the idea and translates it in his own way” (interview with author, July 26, 2016). He also explained that “the painter always has to paint for the public, for himself, and also connect the themes of the ideas they gave you,” illustrating the intersubjective nature of murals; he is at once painting his feelings and emotions, trying to evoke those feelings in his audience, and communicating the ideas desired by the commissioning group (interview with author, July 26, 2016). It may be for these reasons that there are many indigenous symbols and connections in some of his murals. For Rolando, a deep connection to the indigenous past gives him inspiration. Living in Diríamba, Nicaragua, Rolando spends a lot of time in the mountains, and for him, the petroglyphs found
throughout the mountains provide a cultural and spiritual connection. By understanding this, we can see the ways in which Rolando’s influence is shown in his murals, despite the subject being chosen by the government entity that commissioned him. While Rolando is given a certain level of freedom, his pieces are still designed in coordination with the local government officials who commission his works, meaning that he is still limited in his scope of freedom. However, the artists of non-commissioned murals are provided more artistic license to choose their subject and express themselves.

Non-Commissioned Murals

Because of the freedom granted to artists for non-commissioned murals, the subject matter may not be as easily understood. It is partly the product of the individual artists’ lived experiences and desires. The lack of information on the artists and their intentions means that our understanding of these murals is based solely on the perceived symbols seen within the mural. Non-government commissioned murals have a wide range of subjects and their themes are based upon personal, societal, and religious beliefs and views of not only those who create them, but also of those who view them. The interpretations and meanings of these murals are therefore far more subjective than those of commissioned murals. With these murals, the key theme or subject may not be as simply laid out as it is in government commissioned murals, because of the artists need to communicate their ideas without directly challenging the government in a way that could reflect poorly on the artists.
Some of the images created by local artists support Kunzle’s (1995) argument that Nicaraguan muralists have no specific style, but are aesthetically pleasing, and concerned with content; figure 4 is no exception. This image was located on a stretch of an exterior property wall alongside a few other murals and a plethora of graffiti and tagging, and was the cleanest of the ones along this wall; it drew my attention because of its imagery. The earthy greens and blues of this image draw the viewer’s eye to the middle of the image where the artist combined the face of a woman with a tree trunk. The trunk’s roots and thin branches stretch out throughout the landscape of the images background.
As the trunk thins, a woman’s head spreads from the top, as if a piece of the tree. Her light brown face and the use of the trunk as her body establish a connection to nature and perhaps to indigenous history of the natives of Nicaragua as roots. However, this image seems to speak to more than just indigenous representation. The woman’s hair, pulled into a bun, has a pencil stuck through the middle of it. This pencil may be a small aspect of the mural, but its presence suggests an element of education. This, combined with the indigenous representation of the woman, shows an argument for more education about indigenous groups and for indigenous groups.

The figure on the left side of the image appears to be a woman. However, she has wings, and is dressed in clothing whose patterned edges resemble the clothing found among indigenous groups (Orr and Looper 2014). The figure’s outstretched arm is holding a square shaped item, which resembles a small building. With her other hand she is pointing at the tree figure. These two figures are clearly the focus of this image since they take up the majority of the space on the wall. However, the tree like figure, from its location centered on the mural, takes precedence. The interaction between the two, in which the “angel figure” is encouraging the “tree figure” to share her knowledge by placing a small building that looks like a school between the two of them. This further points to the encouragement of indigenous knowledge sharing.

This image was the center of a focus group conducted in Nicaragua with the American members of the archaeological team I was traveling and working with. During the focus group, a few questions were asked, but the idea was to get the seven participants to have an open discussion about the image. The first comments made were
about the tree figure, alluding to it as the “Lorax” or “Mother Earth,” eventually leading to the idea that it was a representation of the motherly tree of life, and the local goddess watching over other members of the community. The most discussed theory was that the “angel” figure was helping to rebuild the education and culture of society by allowing mother nature to flourish; which led to a discussion of key themes: tradition, education (the confluence of tradition and modernization), and indigeneity (personal communication, July 1, 2016). Although there was no full agreement on any topic, many of the same themes and ideas were presented in different ways by those involved, such as education and indigeneity. Ultimately, almost all the focus group participants agreed that the central idea of the mural was a representation of new growth and the re-creation of identity.

The group pointed to an idea that this image was intended to promote representation of indigenous knowledge and a re-integration of indigenous growth, and the handouts completed by American students pointed to themes of growth and change as well. However, my analysis of this mural is that it is promoting the spread of indigenous knowledge, in part due to debates over the proposed creation of the transisthmus canal. In 2013, a private company owned by Jing Wang, bought rights to build the oceanic canal in Nicaragua (Oppenheimer, 2017). The creation of the canal would displace thousands of people, the majority of whom are members of indigenous groups (the Rama, Miskito, etc.) but little work has been done on the project since the widening of a road in 2013 (Oppenheimer, 2017). Despite the lack of progress, the topic itself remains a sore point for the government and its citizens. During my fieldwork, after meeting with a member of
the Nicaraguan government, I was instructed not to ask questions about the canal in any interviews. This shows that the political and social impact of this canal has made it a widely discussed and controversial topic in Nicaragua. The looming red image of what looks like a barge on the right side of the mural could be alluding to this contested canal. With that approach in mind, the representation of indigenous knowledge and a re-creation and resurgence of growth in indigenous knowledge is even more important.

This muralist, through the representation of nature, the use of earthy colors, and the contrast of the red barge, is able to communicate a political issue without outright stating it. The ability for artists of all calibers to create art is increasingly important in the dialogical environment that the FSLN has been creating since the revolution. Rolando, the artist of the murals on the Alcaldía said, “I think that painting has connected me to many things, when I feel more I find myself. And when there are things I can’t express, instead of protesting something, I protest it with painting” (interview with author, July 26, 2016). For me, this image represents the sentiments of another non-commissioned mural, just in a more artistic way and a different aesthetic manner. The image here (figure 5) is artistically simple, but speaks to the political issue of the canal. Río San Juan is one of the areas of contestation in

Figure 5: non-commissioned mural located a few miles from the Alcaldía. Photo taken by author July 3, 2016.
the push for the transisthmus canal in Nicaragua. In this mural the simple image of the river and the riverbank with the words “¡Río San Juan!! Patrimonio Natural,” communicate a sense of pride and respect for the river. Despite not being as widely recognized a symbol as Volcán Momotombo, Río San Juan is still home to many indigenous populations in Nicaragua, making the cultural significance of protecting it more tangible. The stylistic differences in these two murals shows the eclecticism of Nicaraguan mural style, and both use nature and other recognizable symbols to show their views.

The use of less recognizable symbols is common in non-commissioned murals because they lie outside the realm of the government, while still being intertwined. These symbols are supposed to combat or supplement the views of the government, but the messages are usually intended to reach every person who views the mural, employing the oretic and emotional connection experience with the mural. By using these less-recognized symbols, these artists are able to find ways to communicate similar messages while using their own versions of the symbols. However, in some instances, symbols that are widely recognized, but not directly relevant in the spaces it is used become a representation of broader connections.

The artist of figure 6 used this technique. Although the artist did not paint widely used symbols in these murals he was able to nevertheless use symbols that are not seen in the commissioned murals to communicate similar kinds of ideas. The man painted in this mural is the main focus; his aged face is painted with a circular nose ring, and from his

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This image was taken in Managua, Nicaragua by the author. Unfortunately, its location amongst the other murals was not properly mapped, but it was not far from the other images in this project.
ears dangles feather earrings. The age of the main figure, the man, is important. In most cultures, elders are to be revered and respected, and in many indigenous cultures around the world, elders are considered wise.

Figure 6: Image located just outside of the Alcaldia property along a stretch of wall that is covered in murals. Photo taken by author July 26, 2016.

The depiction of his age presents this figure as someone with knowledge and experience. Most Americans who are familiar with Native American populations would associate the symbolic accessories worn by the man as being indigenous, and that is likely what the artist intended.
Feathers are a symbol of veneration in much of Native American and in many indigenous cultures are considered a connection to the heavens. In Maya and Aztec cultures, the ancestors of the Chorotega, Nicarao, Dirianes, and Nagradanos, the quetzal feathers were highly venerated and a symbol of status, wealth, and power. Ear spools, especially those with jade, shell, or feathers attached, were seen on those who had high station in society (Orr and Looper 2014). Feathers here, again, represented a connection with the heavens, and therefore the gods. So, the use of feathers in this mural is likely a call to these connections to the direct indigenous identity and indigeneity in general. Similar connections can be made to the nose ring. Ornamentation of this kind, especially with a piece that is likely gold, speaks again to high status and wealth. Only those high on the chain of command, or those who were good warriors, would be found with this type of bodily ornamentation (Orr and Looper 2014).

Behind the figure is a large yellow/orange circle with a black background. The inclusion of smaller and different sized circles to the right and left of the orange circle give the illusion of the universe, with the sun and the planets orbiting. If this is the case, the placement of the figure centered in front of the sun and in front of the rest of the universe, places him in league with the cosmos, while also showing veneration and respect for him and his connections. This, combined with the use of feathers, a symbol of heaven, further argues for the connections of indigenous groups to the universe and cosmological order. The whole of this image, in its simplicity, seems to be representing a respect and veneration for indigenous peoples of all backgrounds. By using broader symbols, such as the feathers and nose ring instead of symbols specific to Nicaragua, the
artist is showing respect for all indigenous peoples in all corners of the earth. However, while this symbology can be employed to fight for respect for indigenous groups by showing respect and reverence, it also creates further non-distinct indigenous people by implying one ethnic group through the use of broad symbols. This non-distinction strips indigenous peoples of their individual identities and implies a single indian identity.

In many instances, non-commissioned murals communicate through implied symbolism instead of direct symbolism, which is the case in this image. Visibility is a key factor in the communication of dialogue, and figure 7 has prime visibility. Located on a main road with heavy traffic, this mural is seen daily by many travelers. The image depicted here parallels that of Uncle Sam dropping bombs as in figure 2, with the same color scheme - dark greens and the use of black, but what it has most in common with figure 2 is its depiction of violence. However, here the violence is implied and not as visibly obvious. The young woman in this image is wearing a military style helmet, with an inscription that is illegible, but it is her face that speaks volumes. The left side of her face is intact, and seemingly calm, while the right side is down to bone, a skeleton of what once was. This imagery of a woman being alive and yet dead is powerful to anyone who views it, but the message that it communicates is dichotomous.

This mural is reminiscent of a revolutionary mural that circulated in the 1970’s and 1980’s of a woman with a rifle slung over her shoulder, nursing her child on her breast (see Kunzle 1995). In both images, the violence is not direct, but the presence of a rifle, or a helmet represents the feeling of impending or past violence. On the other hand, the left half of the woman’s face above, serene and calm, as well as the woman nursing
her newborn child represents hope and peace. Women, generally viewed as peaceful, are shown here as having multiple sides.

Figure 7: This mural is located along the outer edge of one of the university properties, across from the bus station. Photo taken by author July 4, 2016.

Since it is unclear what side the helmet represents (the contras, the guerillas, or the old National Guard), it is unclear what the exact message is. However, what is implied is that involvement in any military or militaristic action is dangerous and leads to violence and death. Specifically, from this image, it seems that the artist is conveying concerns about the future of the younger generation if violence continues and reflects similar feelings of a mural created in the revolution depicting masked young men with
guns in their hands (Meiselas 2018). The similarities between this image and those created during the revolution make a connection to lived experiences of the emotional history of the past. By depicting violence in an indirect manner (through the use of the military-style helmet), this artist is able to ensure that the violence of the past is never forgotten, and is embedded in the fabric of the city. Rolston and Ospina found that murals in Colombia had similar effects; they were intended to communicate the atrocities and become sites of memory for those who experienced the violence, but in this case the memory is not intended solely for those who experienced it, but also for those who have felt any of the lasting effects of the war (2017). In this case, the significance of memory, an important aspect of identity, is visibly depicted on the walls of Nicaragua. By using symbols, direct or indirect, all of these murals speak to the memories and history of Nicaragua and its people, but they also depict hope for the future and become sites of contestation and dialogue.

The symbols used in these murals, both commissioned and non-commissioned, are important to the new approaches to identity formation in Nicaragua because they provide a space for dialogue to happen. However, symbols, even as Turner has argued, can be used in conflicting ways, depending on who is employing them. The FSLN government and the local artists are in many ways trying to evoke connections to indigenous identity; the FSLN government in their use of Sandino and Darío, speak to people’s memories of the revolution, and the local artists who directly represent indigenous land and symbology, project a reverence for the cultural importance of these places and people. By employing different symbols, each artist is communicating feelings.
and creating a space for action to those who view the images by speaking to the emotions of the viewers.

The symbols employed in these murals show the ways in which art -- in this case murals -- communicate to those who view them. By creating social links and political mobilizations through visual ephemera, these images transcend race, class, and political boundaries. Further, the use of symbols, which carry with them mosaic representations reflect the differentiation within people, their identities, and potentially national identity. The new dialogical approach that is being promoted by the FSLN government is providing a space for identity to become a part of the discussion. In this case, the re-investigation of the process of mestizaje through the solidification and de-indianization of cultural connections to indigeneity is a central part of the discussion. The symbols used in these murals have shifted identity formation processes since the revolution through the representation of mosaic symbols, and can help lend an understanding to the ways in which these shifts have come into play in Nicaragua today.
IDENTITY REIMAGINED

Rivers run through me  
Mountains bore into my body  
And the geography of this country  
Begins forming in me  
Turning me into lakes, chasms, ravines,  
Earth for sowing love  
Opening like a furrow  
Filling me with a longing to live  
To set it free, beautiful,  
Full of smiles.

I want to explode with love...

-Gioconda Belli37

Identity formation processes, specifically those in countries that have experienced colonialism, have become a topic of interest for many scholars over the last twenty years (Wade, Field, Hale, Grossman, Rahier, Hooker, to name a few). In Latin America, these identity formation processes are important in understanding and analyzing the revolutionary movements that much of the region has participated in since the 1950’s. In this chapter, I investigate the ways the symbols in the murals analyzed in the previous chapter have helped communicate and reflect a shift in identity formation processes in Nicaragua, focused specifically on a re-investigation of the dynamics of mestizaje.

hybridization, and multiculturalism.\textsuperscript{38} Further, I argue that these approaches may create tensions in the capacity of Nicaragua to create a unified identity in Nicaragua if they do not heed the failures of previous nationalization movements in Latin America. By investigating murals painted after the Revolutionary victory in Nicaragua in 1979, it is possible to infer how Nicaraguan people and the state are challenging and changing the definition of \textit{mestizaje} by shedding prior \textit{vanguardismo} and \textit{sandinismo} approaches to identity and examine the processes of de-indianization and hybridity in light of the memories of revolutionized Nicaragua.\textsuperscript{39} While these approaches are changing the ways in which identity processes are understood, they also create spaces for indigenous peoples on the Atlantic coast to become non-distinctive.\textsuperscript{40}

Murals, such as the ones analyzed in the previous chapter, show the ways in which the inclusion of historical figures and symbols as memories, as well as representations of lived experiences shape identity. Ernesto Cardenal is quoted as saying, “Our friend Margaret Randall has said that memory is identity, which is why we must continue to talk about Nicaragua and its cultural legacy for popular democracy, we must sharpen our struggle against the full erasure of memory” (Kunzle 1995, XV). The memories evoked by murals in Nicaragua have become important aspects of identity.

\textsuperscript{38} \textit{Mestizaje} translates to miscegenation, or the offspring that result from mixing between those thought to be of different racial backgrounds. It is often views as a nationalization ideology that values whiteness and excludes and marginalizes blackness and indigenousness, but in reality requires the necessity of both sameness and difference simultaneously (Wade 2005). Hybridity is also the combination or mixture, but lacks the implication of race specifics, especially mestizo.

\textsuperscript{39} \textit{Vanguardismo} and \textit{sandinismo} are both national identity approaches that were previously used in Nicaragua, and which we will examine later in the chapter.

\textsuperscript{40} There are six distinct ethno-racial groups that inhabit the Atlantic coast: the Miskitu, Mayagna (or Sumo), Rama, Creoles, Garifuna, and mestizos. Three are indigenous peoples: the Miskitu, Mayagna, and Rama, while the Creoles and Garifuna are of African descent (Hooker 2005, 31).
processes. The use of symbols that are inherently Nicaraguan, such as Ruben Darío, Augusto Sandino, and Volcán Momotombo, speak to the memories of people and add to the dialogue about national and personal identity in new ways. By displaying well-known symbols and including the multifaceted contradictory dimensions of each symbol, these murals, specifically the government commissioned murals, are allowing the dichotomous nature of the images to be explored by viewers, connecting each aspect to a memory and experience of the Nicaraguan people. The intersubjective nature of these symbols—which emerge out of the relationship between artist and mural audience in the context of the broader social arena as well as out of how I, as anthropologist have made sense of these interactions—at one and the same time connect individuals through personal memories and to memories that have become inherently social and collective memories. These memories, in turn, are creating spaces for dialogue among individuals in what becomes a complex and interactive dynamic.

Bill Rolston’s research on murals in Northern Ireland, and his collaborative work with Sofi Ospina in Colombia show the impact murals can have on memory and memory expression. In “Politics, Painting, and Popular Culture: The Political Wall Murals of Northern Ireland” (1987) and “Picturing Peace: Murals and Memory in Colombia” (2017) Rolston and Ospina outline the importance of memory as an aspect of identity formation specifically in mural studies. In Ireland, wall murals became the equivalent of national monuments (Rolston 1987, 7). At once a site of mass consumption and of historical and political remembrance, the murals in Ireland transcend time and history, and have become a form of communicating collective identity and memory.
For Rolston and Ospina, murals were not just images; they were symbolic messages that spoke the truth of what happened through “real memory” (Rolston and Ospina 2017, 28-30). By using public spaces, these “real” memories came into view and challenged the official state memory. In many instances, the events being remembered were traumatic and, as Rolston and Ospina (2017, 31) put it, “the antidote to memories of horror is to find a mechanism for communication to take place whereby, somehow or another, the event is assimilated and takes on the character of experience; in short, that trauma is transformed into memory.” In both of these instances, the use of murals as a site of memory production allowed people to challenge state control over history and ideologies, and articulated memory in these murals as a source of dialogue. Rolston and Ospina write that “memory requires language; all memory involves dialogue,” making murals a space for communication between the state and its people (2017, 30).

Similarly, Alessandro Portelli discusses the importance of oral histories in *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History* (1991). In discussing Luigi Trastulli’s death with multiple informants, Portelli found that the date and circumstances of Trastulli’s death was a negotiable and shifting memory that was shaped by politically and historically important events. When discussing the importance of oral histories in the creation of written record specifically, he spoke of the importance of the inclusion of interwoven modes of memory. Through oral histories, an image of the personal “truth” coincides with the shared “imaginations” through memory (1991, 48).

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41 Here, the use of the term “real memory” is used to signify the contrast with the official memory of the state; it is the memory of those who lived the experiences that they are portraying or memorializing.
These memories transcend time since “a remembered event is infinite, because it is only a key to everything that happened before and after it” and represents the historical and political events of multiple times (1991, 1). In Portelli’s research, time was an important aspect in the communication of memory, not only through the affects that time had on memory, but the ways in which time was stretched and morphed to create a vacuum in which one memory affected events of different periods. He wrote, “Time takes away as much as it adds. There is a limit to how much material can be stored in an individual’s or a group’s memory,” which makes dialogue a necessity in combatting the erasure of memories and in the continuance of challenging hegemonic understandings of events (Portelli 1991, 62). Memories, in Portelli’s research, work on three different levels: the institutional (political, governmental, national, international, etc.), the collective (community, neighborhood, etc.), and personal (private and family life), but through oral histories, and also mural history in the case of this research, these levels meet, run simultaneously, and mix together. This confluence shapes the way people think about and tell their lives and experiences; they interweave, communicate, and influence each other through a constantly moving dialogue of memory and experience (Portelli 1991, 70). Oral histories, in this instance, transcend time and work on multiple levels to communicate ideologies and memories that challenge the “official” memories of events, similar to the ways in which murals are communicating and challenging memories through the representation of key political and historical actors and events.

This process of memory formation through oral histories in Italy, and murals in Nicaragua, as well as in Colombia, became arenas in which the hegemonic
understandings of identity were challenged. It is this encounter between the state, its creative actors, and the people that is essentially and inherently interpersonal and intersubjective in nature. Such encounters involve the interaction of multiple parties, and in the case put forth here, intersubjectivity allows the identity formation process to come to light in a dynamic fashion in order to shed light on some of the changes that have taken place as well as possible new ways that people are challenging hegemonic discourse. The relationship established between the artist and viewer creates multiple subjectivities that come into play in the sociopolitical arena, especially through the memories connected to specific symbols.

The murals in Chapter four make connections to the memories of the people by employing the use of symbols that represent significant events in Nicaragua. The violently depicted Uncle Sam image speaks to the memories of the aggressiveness experienced at the hand of U.S. interventions, and connects emotionally to those who experienced the interventions, as well as those who view the murals. This was reflected in the comments made by Jéu and Chico, who both alluded to the lived experiences of Nicaraguans since 1860, and the feeling of hopelessness throughout the violence. While this image is represented as a depiction of violence, it is also an image of defiance because of the use of the raised fists. By including both images of aggression and hope, the artist shows that within the violence, optimism for the future can co-exist and that this kind of simultaneous mosaicism is not uncommon. Further, the imagery seen in Figures 1 and 3 represent hope and encouragement of a new future through symbols that speak to the indigenous roots by using petroglyphs and Volcán Momotombo, which again play to
the emotional side of the experiences of those who view them. However, while portraying an image of hope for the future, these images also connect to the memories of the people through the use of Darío and Sandino, at once placing them within their role as arbiters of change and drawing attention to the tensions in their identities that are in conflict with one another.

For Les Field, memory is a huge factor that influences the way people view their identity and art, specifically folk art, is considered one expression of lost Nicaraguan identity (1995, 791). Portelli writes, “what is really important is that memory is not a passive depository of facts, but an active process of creation of meanings” and therefore intersects and interacts with actors and events in different ways (1991, 52). The reappropriation and reaffirmation of indigenous symbols in art then becomes a site of resistance in which the shared struggles of indigenous peoples arises; it brings their memories into the mainstream. Field’s research looks at the intersection between ethnicity, identity, culture, and history, and the ways in which those intersecting issues influence and challenge the myth of mestizo.42 The dictatorial regime, U.S. interventions, and civil rights disputes have created an arena for shared understandings to be formed and created spaces for the memories of the past to become a shared understanding of the nation. By using well-known symbols like Ruben Darío and Augusto Sandino in murals commissioned by the government, their histories, their ideologies, and their role in the shared understandings of the people are put on display to create a reflection of perceived national identity.

42 The myth of Mestizo refers to both a philosophy and political assumption that projects as truth that indians have disappeared and Hispanic mestizos predominate (Field 1995, 431).
Over the years, the Nicaraguan state has shifted its own approach to establishing a national Nicaraguan identity. Throughout much of the Somoza dictatorship and the beginning of the revolution, they sought to establish an identity based on *vanguardismo*. This process portrayed Nicaragua as a predominantly indigenous-Hispanic country in which Spanish paternity was most valued (Hooker 2005). This approach emphasized positively mestizo connections and focused on the perceived value of Spanish descent. This, of course, caused some backlash from many Nicaraguans who identified with their indian roots, specifically Sandino. The historical struggles led to the abandonment of *vanguardismo* and the adoption of a new approach through the FSLN revolution, aptly named *sandinismo*. This approach, instead of valuing Spanish paternity sought to use the dominant indigenous ancestry of Nicaragua as the basis of the nation’s identity (Hooker 2005).

This shift highlights the process of de-indianization that Field argued changed the way people understood mestizo, in terms of identity. De-indianization is a process in which indian heritage, culture, and identity becomes more prominently displayed and normalized, essentially de-“othering” them (Field 1995). This process of de-indianization, according to Field, was present in the actions and words of Augusto Sandino. For Sandino, his connection to his indigenous identity on his maternal side was extremely important to his view of national identity, which is likely why the shift was coined *sandinismo*. By using Sandino’s image in commissioned murals, the FSLN government is promoting Sandino’s dichotomous image, with a focus on his indian heritage. However, while his indigenous identity was important, for Sandino it was more
about being Nicaraguan than whether he was indian or mestizo. So, by displaying his image in terms of his indian identity along with indigenous symbolism, the government was attempting to blur the lines between indian and mestizo by displaying the indigenous heritage Sandino created through solidarity as the prominent factor for national identity.

Dario’s image has a similar effect. His struggle with his indigenous heritage and his rustic provincialism pushed him to seek out the mestizo aspect of his identity, and allowed him to explore other facets of his identity that warred with each other within himself. His image, specifically that of him in his full regalia, plays into this dichotomy. By depicting a man that is a representation of national pride for his poetry and his ability to represent an entire region in his Spanish ambassador regalia, results in viewing Dario as a fully Nicaraguan symbol and as a mestizo. The freedom of an artist, or in this case a government entity, to use recognized symbols such as Dario and Sandino to promote their messages and ideologies is an indication of the cultural capital of the symbol. In many cases, these recognizable symbols can be used to play into or to challenge the hegemonic discourse of memory. Value is placed on symbols because they are culturally important. By using these symbols to speak to the memories of the people and including the contradictory meanings of each symbols, the FSLN government is not only attempting to reaffirm their vision for Nicaraguan identity, but also show the ways in which arriving at a unified Nicaraguan identity has been a constant struggle throughout the revolution. In 1981, Daniel Ortega reaffirmed his sandinismo vision for Nicaraguan identity, stating

From the moment when the clash took place in the colonial era between the conqueror who came to dominate and colonize…in our countries since then a heroic, titanic struggle has been taking place, a resistance in order not to be crushed by the different colonizing currents that have hurled
themselves continually against our population, colonizing current that have sought to negate our identity…the conqueror was not able to crush us and make our own identity disappear, instead our own identity imposed itself over the colonizer and in spite of his presence, our people were able to maintain a permanent presence of our roots (Hooker 2005, 29).

Ortega and the FSLN party sought to show that despite previous conceptions, indian heritage and identity was still alive and well, shattering the mestizo ideology. Similarly, Les Field’s (1998) research in Nicaragua challenged the existing assumption that indians had disappeared and Hispanic mestizos predominated, coining the expression the myth of the mestizo. He showed the ways in which identities were not homogenous, but rather varied, arguing that ethnicity was not necessarily based on or clearly marked by cultural practices, but instead was created in opposition to other identities. However, I think that identity is varied, but is defined by the person experiencing it, so it can be culturally defined or defined in opposition to other identities (or identity formations).

This shift in understanding identity formations changed Nicaragua’s approach to identity formation processes in the 1990s to a focus on multiculturalism that does not claim that every citizen is biologically or culturally mestizo, but that they are all mestizo because of the different racial groups that comprise them (Hooker 2005). This, as Hooker says, recognizes racial and cultural difference while reinscribing it within mestizaje (2005). However, I would argue that Nicaragua is not necessarily implying that all of Nicaragua is mestizo, at least not in the way that we understand mestizo, but that they are a mosaic hybrid. What I mean with the use of the term “mosaic hybrid” is closer to Peter Wade’s approach to mosaic mestizaje, in which there is a “mosaic of identity” wherein “different racialised elements and heritages are perceived to co-exist, rather than melding
into an undifferentiated fusion” each element and identity retains its own permanent space (2005, 246). Hybridity in this instance is being claimed and affirmed because hybridity inherently lacks affinity for mestizo or ladino identities and can become something new, other, varied, and dichotomous.43 The acceptance of this hybridity allows Nicaraguans to move away from the “homogenizing mixture” attitudes of the past, and instead embrace their mosaic and dichotomous identities as Nicaraguans. Rather than re-inscribing mestizo identity, it leads Nicaraguans to a recognition of their multiple and mosaic hybrid identities as Nicaraguan rather than as Indo-Hispanic, African, or Indian.44

In considering the role of intersubjectivity in ethnography, Johannes Fabian wrote, “dialogue, arguably a softer version of intersubjectivity… can be manipulative and deceptive; selective emphasis, secretiveness, withholding information, and outright lying are also forms of communication and dialogue made possible by intersubjectivity” (2014, 206). If this is the case, then it is also possible for intersubjective approaches to emphasize specific aspects within material culture, which is the case in some of the mural symbols employed by the FSLN. While the FSLN government is pushing for an understanding of dichotomous, multicultural identities in terms of Sandino and Dario, they are doing this through their own portrayal of Nicaraguan memory. This approach negates the memories of the people, especially those who are left out of the discourse of representation. The non-commissioned murals show, through the use of non-distinctive indigenous symbolism, the ways in which this process could negatively affect the

43 *Ladino* is a socio-economic mestizo identity, specifically found in Guatemala.
44 “Mosaic hybrid” is the term I am using to refer to the combination of multiple identities in which each have their own space within the reinvestigation of *mestizaje* and hybridity.
establishment of Nicaraguan identity. While Sandino and Darío themselves evoke multiple identities, their ideologies helped create non-distinctive indigenous peoples of Nicaragua. Sandino’s war against U.S. imperialism, and the subsequent *sandinismo* ideology that emerged, brought the citizens of Nicaragua together in solidarity. Carol Smith states,

> According to Gould, when faced with significant outside threats, nation-builders such as Augusto Sandino of Nicaragua abandoned divisive ethnic categories inherited from the colonial period (i.e., Indian and *ladino*), which emphasized difference and hierarchy, to create and use various unifying symbols of the nation’s people (such as *raza indohispana*) that emphasized shared blood, territory, and political interests (Smith 1996, 150).

However, in creating this environment of solidarity, these ideologies brought further oppression to the Atlantic coast populations such as the Miskito, Rama, Sumu, and Garifuna, which have continued today.

While Field focused mostly on the mestizo/Indian dichotomy, Charles Hale (1996) investigated the shifting ideas of ladino and mestizo identity in Latin America in “Mestizaje, Hybridity, and the Cultural Politics of Difference in Post-Revolutionary Central America”. Drawing on the case of Guatemala specifically, Hale argues that the lack of historical and spiritual grounding of ladino identity is causing many Guatemalans to cease identifying themselves as ladino (1996). Instead, many are building their identities on experiences, such as oppression, that they share in common, and creating new spaces of collective identity (1996, 34-35). As Field states, “identity is shaped not by traits retained from the ancient past, but by a history of resistance to nation-states” showing that identity is not just about cultural markers, but about many intersecting
issues such as resistance, perceived personal identity, memory, and history (1995, 432). Similarly, Wade argues that, “people’s experiences of mestizaje [and therefore other identities] are lived within a broader context wherein changing ideologies about the nation; its racialized components and their relative value are disseminated” (2005, 246). These streams of collective identity permeate Nicaragua to this day and may prove helpful for Nicaraguans to continue to talk about identity and identity formation since it brings them together in ways that were not possible via previous approaches to nationalization projects. However, the post-revolutionary era is also allowing for shifts in identity creation and formation to come to fruition through processes of creative renewal instead of collective identity. For Hale in Guatemala, and for the case of Nicaragua discussed here, the process of creative renewal allows for a number of ideas, concepts, and themes to be viewed as integral to people’s cultures and identities. Since mestizaje alone evokes a plurality of subjects because it is an encounter of two or more racial or cultural groups, this means that to be mestizo is to claim a consciousness shaped by multiple factors (Hale 1996, 39). In the post-revolutionary era, the shifts in ideologies are pushing many people to affirm hybridity, as distinct from mestizaje and its consistent inscription of mestizo power. Since the designation of hybridity does not have a strong affinity with either mestizo or indian, it embraces the creation of culture through a variety of means, such as creative renewal. However, the hybrid multicultural approach implies that each ‘culture’ be constrained within certain institutional boundaries and therefore continuously excluded, which is why it is more apt to refer to this shift as an affirmation.
of mosaic hybridity, in which a new understanding of *mestizaje* and hybridity are understood (Wade 2005, 252).

Nicaragua’s push for a national multicultural identity has both positive and negative effects on the personal identities of its citizens. It can help push for a new understanding of the dichotomous nature of each individual, and can lessen the effects of racism through the acceptance of the unique identities of its people, while further acknowledging the existence of indigenous peoples as sources of identity. While accepting the hybrid nature of life, people, and identities can blur the lines between racial distinctions and create an undifferentiated culture, it can also create the possibility for dually, or multiply defined identities to exist in new ways in the mainstream. For example, the Maya of Smith’s Guatemala, because they have won political and economic rights, may be identified as culturally Maya, but are simultaneously Maya and Guatemalan, affirming the hybridity or mosaicism of their identity (Smith 1996). By accepting the indigenous identities of the Atlantic coast, and casting them as individual actors of their cultural heritage, instead of defining people as mestizo or as Indian it may be possible to define someone as culturally Miskito, Rama, Sumu *and* ethnically Nicaraguan, or as culturally Nicaraguan *and* ethnically Miskitu, Rama, or Sumu. By allowing people to identify as Nicaraguan with no preconceived political value, they could establish a national identity that does not exclude Indians or mestizos, but that accepts Nicaraguan as an identity that is coupled with an individual identity, such as Miskito. As Wade shows in the case of Brazil, the use of *negra* is not only a racial distinction, but a separate lived experience. One woman’s refusal to identify as *negra*
despite her familial background boiled down to the fact that her lived experiences were
different from what she considered a negras’ to be. Wade states, “For this woman, and
others like her, being mixed meant maintaining simultaneous identifications, rather than
fusing everything into a homogeneous new whole in which origins lose their meaning”
(2005, 253). It is possible to be Nicaraguan and be indigenous, just as it is possible to be
Nicaraguan and be Creole by abandoning the mestizo oriented past and accepting the
properties of sameness and difference within each person and the nation.

However, while this could be a positive shift, the dialogic approach being pushed
by the FSLN must be approached with caution. As Fabian writes, “we must never lose
sight of the fact that communication in not unequivocally positive” (2014, 206). The push
for this type of multiculturalism could conceivably further divide mestizo and indian
identities and erase Creole and indian populations from identity conversations. Since the
existence of mestizaje in itself leaves Creole and African indigenous groups out of the
realm of identity formation and discussions, the reinvestigation of mestizaje within the
acceptance of a multicultural identity continues to blur the lines and leave these
populations as anomalies, which has continued to cause problems along the Atlantic
coast. As Hale states, “we analyze mestizaje almost exclusively as an ideology of race
mixture involving Europeans and Indians, but not peoples of African descent…the myth
of harmonious mestizaje…erases black people from the mix” (Rahier 2003, 44). Jean
Muteba Rahier similarly points out “blacks are unambiguously excluded” from
conversation and politics. “They are ideologically constructed as the ‘ultimate others’”
(Rahier 2003, 46). If Nicaragua wants to be successful at this nationalization project, they
will need to heed the warnings of other Latin American countries and find a way to include the Atlantic coast populations, especially the Creole and African groups, in the discussions.

National identity, such as ladino, mestizo, or indian can require people to give up too much of their personal identities. That is: identities are not infinitely flexible. Nicaragua’s approaches to identity processes are still controlled by hegemonic culture, but the dialogic process and freedom of speech is allowing a certain level of discussion to be controlled by people in order to investigate and represent aspects of their personal identities that have previously been overshadowed. While the commissioned murals of Managua, Nicaragua continue to reveal hegemonic discourse at work, by hiring an artist that experiences connections to the indigenous cultures of Nicaragua, and allowing artistic freedom, some of the concepts and ideologies of indigenous culture are permeating the hegemony and inscribing them in the discussions. Further, the allowance of artistic freedom has made non-commissioned murals a possibility, and artists, as we have seen, take those opportunities to promote symbols that speak to the memories and histories of those who view them, creating an emotional connection to personal identities and taking back some of the personal identity that has been lost.

This push could blur the line between mestizo and indian and create a deepened sense of Nicaraguan identity and pride based on the solidarity created through oppression. However, while it can create deeper solidarity and understanding, it could also push those who are already outside of the discussion further away by continuing to leave them out of the mainstream conversation. While de-indianization is helping bring
their identities into the conversation, the hegemony of *mestizaje* in itself excludes those in the periphery, especially those of Creole or African descent, like the majority of the Atlantic coast. If the Rama, Sumu, Miskito and Garifuna groups take this chance to push back as the Maya did in Guatemala by defining themselves not as just Indians, but specifically as Maya, the de-indianization could lead to the victory of better rights and status for their people, and a place within the national discussions through political appointments. Previously, provisions were put in place by the FSLN that would grant some political power to the Atlantic coast groups, but the approaches to identity formation did not allow many changes to take place. If these groups situate themselves in the political arena in a new way (as the Maya did in Guatemala), within this new dialogic environment, they could break through the blurred lines and create a more unified representation of their multiple identities within the national context.

While this process of identity formation through dichotomous understandings of the conflicting identities within each individual could be effective, continuing to approach it through a nationalization project aimed at affirming hybridity could be problematic. If the state chooses to continue with a nationalization project that abandons previous notions of *mestizaje* for new notions of hybridity, there may be a chance to establish a new acceptance of identity. However, the ability to disconnect entirely from the historical hegemony of *mestizaje* is impossible. Instead, Nicaragua is left with the warnings from national identity projects of other Latin American countries. For example, in Bolivia, a country where the majority of the population is indigenous, presidential candidate Felipe Quispe challenged the traditional *mestizaje* ideology with an *indianismo*
ideology. His radical approach to identity, which argued that either one is Indian or non-Indian was too extreme, which led to the election of a different indigenous president in 2009, Evo Morales, whose approach was more inclusive. This contradictory recognition of identity (indianismo) proved difficult for a country where there are many indigenous actors by turning the tides and recognizing those who are usually marginalized and negating those who are traditionally recognized. It caused violent outbreaks and intense backlash, and this push could potentially pose similar problems for Nicaragua by creating further instability if caution is thrown to the wind. Brazil’s national identity project furthered the racial divides and generated deeper racist ideologies while creating undifferentiated and marginalized indigenous populations on the periphery. Guatemala pushed for a reinscription of mestizaje in a non-distinctive way, which has led to a Mayan movement that is pushing for a specific recognition of Maya populations. That movement, despite bringing a certain level of legitimation to Maya and other indigenous groups in Guatemala, has caused tensions in the sociopolitical sphere. Whether Nicaragua is able to heed these warnings remains to be seen, but the failures of these countries should serve as a warning for Nicaragua. Identity formation is never an easy process, and will always leave certain groups on the edge of the discourse, but these failures may help guide the future of Nicaraguan national identity formation.

What I think has been missing from discussions on identity politics and processes is a recognition that by attempting to work within a framework that recognizes specific identities, we lose sight of the fluidity of identity altogether, and reify it in ways that ignore reality and assume that it is static. Since much of identity is formed around lived
experiences and memories, a certain level of fluidity needs to be available on the national scale to account for varied lived experiences. Whether it is in Nicaragua or elsewhere, a multicultural approach such as this may eventually allow for fluidity to be commonplace through an acceptance of mosaic hybridity and dichotomy. Nicaragua’s push for an acceptance of dichotomy within identities is the final step in its revolution over U.S. imperialism. By reaffirming and reimagining *mestizaje* as a hybrid mosaic that is an acceptance of mestizo and Indian traits that are inherently Nicaraguan, they are shedding their last relationship with the imperialist North of the past and reaffirming identities on their own terms.
CONCLUSION

Like everything else in our country, mural painting is being reborn in spite of war and its many sacrifices. We are searching for the pieces of an identity that is truly our own.

-Luis Morales Alonso

I have analyzed the symbols found in Nicaraguan murals in order to understand how the murals are catalyzing shifts in identity processes within Nicaragua. Taking account of the political and historical context in which the murals were created, I discerned key patterns in the identity processes currently underway in Nicaragua. From the outset, my goal has been to shed light on the ways in which specific symbols have been appropriated and created to promote ideas of national identity that conform with new identity shaping processes, and to contribute to ethnographic and anthropological knowledge on the use of images as forms of communication and representations of identity.

The tensions and conflicts that characterize Nicaragua’s past created an avenue for visual media to communicate and to catalyze, in some instances, change. From images painted on the Berlin wall in protest against political policies or in celebration of the end of the war, to Mexican murals and posters sparking a grassroots movement, to

45 (Craven 1989, 183).
Nicaraguan murals responding to oppression and violence, images have promoted particular ideologies and memories, and created solidarity through emotional links to memories. The memories of the rich and violent history of U.S. interventions in Nicaragua, channeled into visual representations, have served as catalysts for dynamic identity formation processes among Nicaraguans. Throughout the revolution and the post-revolutionary era, these shifts in identity formation processes can been seen, but one of the most dramatic began in the 1990’s, resulting in new approaches to understanding identities that is being communicated through the symbols depicted in the murals of Managua, Nicaragua.

The use of specific color schemes, such as red/black or the blue/white of the Nicaraguan flag, or nationally recognized and specifically Nicaraguan symbols such as Augusto Sandino, Ruben Darío, and Volcán Momotombo in the murals investigated in this project reflect some of these new approaches to identity. These symbols speak to the memories and lived experiences of the people. They represent Nicaraguan pride and patrimony, but they also convey the duality and multiplicity of shifting tides of national identity formation. Using symbols such as images of Ruben Darío, reflect the mosaic of identity of Nicaraguans and of the nation as a whole. By depicting Darío in his full regalia, representative of his successes while surrounded by indigenous symbolism representative of the status he attempted to transcend, the murals convey at one and the same time that he is a symbol of national pride and a symbol of the dichotomy and duality that is inescapably a part of everyone. While the commissioned murals of this project highlight figures such as Darío and Sandino in a multiplicity of ways, these
symbols themselves reveal the ways in which the mosaic representations are employed by the government.

Further, while the non-commissioned murals brought indigenous symbolism to the forefront, this thesis demonstrates that the generalized symbols used in the murals can also create a non-distinctive indigenous identity. These potentially homogenizing symbols in non-commissioned murals and the dichotomous representations in commissioned murals create an intersubjective arena wherein multiple identities (or at least, their representations) fight for legitimation in a shared public arena. Each aspect of these mosaic identities fights for its own place within the arena of identity formation. It is possible to discern how commissioned murals and non-commissioned murals, their symbolism, and how viewers interpret that symbolism reveal tensions among multiple aspects of Nicaraguan identity in a dynamic fashion.

Past approaches to identity, specifically national identity in Nicaragua reaffirmed and reinscribed traditional mestizaje ideologies of the early twentieth century. Influenced by movements in Cuba and Mexico, the Nicaraguan state began to break away from vanguardismo and sandinismo ideologies shortly after the revolution. Since the mid-1990’s, Nicaraguans began to break away from traditional hegemonic approaches to mestizaje by reaffirming and accepting hybridity in new terms. Through a multicultural approach, hybridity and, in turn, mestizaje, is being redefined in distinction to traditional definitions of mestizo and indian. This shift in approach simultaneously involves working through intersubjective top-down and grassroots approaches, in slightly different ways.
While this multicultural approach is not new in Latin America, the government’s inclusion and encouragement of it through visual means is slightly distinctive because it reflects the lived experiences of the people. By promoting Nicaraguan dichotomy through inherently Nicaraguan symbols in an effort to create a Nicaraguan identity, the state is shifting the terms of *mestizaje* and hybridity. Instead of transcending the resistance solidarity created during the revolution, they are attempting to draw on the symbols and dynamics of hybridity that underlie a shared understanding of the nation to establish a unique Nicaraguan identity. While each Nicaraguan experienced the Somoza dictatorship, U.S. interventions, and violence differently, it was still an inherently Nicaraguan experience. Thus, Nicaraguan identity is being re-formed through solidarity and an acceptance of both sameness and difference. While this has previously been deemed “multicultural” or “pluricultural” in other countries such as Guatemala (Hale), I believe that the use of this term in Nicaragua would be misleading, since the government has not effectively recognized or involved cultural groups within identity discussions to this point. Nicaragua is still at the beginning stages of their nationalization project as they have been struggling for relative stability and how to take account of the most vocal of their indigenous groups, the Miskitu since at least the 1990s. The future of Nicaragua’s national identity projects is uncertain at this point, although it could take a similar path to the multicultural and pluricultural approaches that have unfolded in such countries as Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia.

It is possible that such a path will result in a new acceptance of national “Nicaraguanness” without inscribing or insisting on a loss of personal identity. However,
while this approach may seem to break from hegemonic discourse of *mestizaje*, the continuing exclusion of Atlantic coast populations (the Miskitu, Sumu, Rama, Garifuna, etc.), even in murals, has and will continue to cause problems in terms of identity. Unless there can be an agreement or understanding that does not leave these populations out of the discussion, this nationalization project will likely reinscribe *mestizaje* through the exclusion of these groups. As the country moves forward, this dialogic and multicultural approach must become even more inclusive, and the traditional hegemonic discourse of mestizo-ness must be shattered, recreated, and renegotiated.

What is clear is that images, such as murals, have become a way for indigenous groups and Nicaraguans to challenge hegemonic discourses and redefine national narratives by connecting to the memories of many Nicaraguans through the use of specific symbols, literature, and culturally important figures. As Margaret Randall observed, “Memory is identity,” and through these mural projects, the state and its people are combatting the erasure of all identities and attempting to renegotiate new identities in different terms (Kunzle 1995, XV). As this process continues, it will be interesting to see if the government supports the people’s push for a nationalization project that is at once inclusive and heterogeneous. Nicaragua has an opportunity to learn from the mistakes and pitfalls of others and to create an approach to heterogeneous identity that could be accepted with less contention.

This research shows that the hybrid approach to identity formation that started in the 1990s is built around the idea of “Nicaraguanness” depicted in murals in Managua. By highlighting Nicaraguan symbols, such as Darío, Sandino, Volcán Momotombo, and
indigenous petroglyphs, the murals are a driving force of change because of the emotional and personal connections they establish. Since these symbols are uniquely Nicaraguan, they have the capacity to reaffirm a unique Nicaraguan identity that allows for the inclusion of personal identity and mosaic hybridity. While this constitutes an affirmation of Nicaraguan identity in new terms, the future is uncertain. As the FSLN government continues to implement its creative renewal campaign, including the rebuilding of downtown Managua in order to promote tourism and highlight their patrimony, it will be interesting to see how visual representations such as murals contribute to the ideas of identity that are being promoted. It will be important for the state to be inclusive in their approach in order to alleviate potential tensions with marginalized groups within the country.

The complexity of the term “identity” in anthropological discourse involves many dimensions that were not addressed in this thesis. One of these complexities is the notion of hybridity itself. In anthropological discourse, hybridity has implied an inherent flexibility that may cause problems for this analysis; it is important to note that while identities may shift, change, and be renegotiated, people do not as readily or willingly change identities on a personal or national scale as freely as hybridity may imply. Instead, hybridity allows for a more flexible arena in which to understand and investigate the dynamic processes that are underway, and while these processes may reflect a shift or change in identity, these changes generally happen slowly. In most circumstances, these shifts are more a reflection of processes that have already been long at work in transforming the ways that identities are being perceived, represented, communicated,
and understood. For that reason, Peter Wade approaches identity as a mosaic in which
different identities exist simultaneously within each person and the nation, and instead of
becoming undifferentiated or too flexible, they each have their own distinct space.
Throughout this thesis, it is Wade’s approach and understanding that I have adapted when
I use the term “mosaic hybridity.”

Another significant dimension of identity as represented in Nicaragua’s murals
concerns gender. Given the limitations of this thesis, I could not delve into the role of
gender in the construction of national and personal identity. Future work in this realm
should examine the role of women and “womanhood” within Nicaraguan identity, as they
have played an important role in the revolution and the stability of the country. Future
research will also need to address the role (through inaction/action) that Atlantic coast
populations are playing in identity campaigns, such as investigating the ways in which
they are being included or excluded from national narratives, and the effects their action
or inaction has on sociopolitical processes. It would be interesting to examine and
compare murals found in different cities throughout Nicaragua, such as Estelí, Puerto
Cabezas, or Bluefields, since murals in Managua are likely influenced by differing
political and federal views. This would give researchers greater insight into an
understanding of the differences in the narratives that murals across different regions of
Nicaragua convey and how they shape or affect identity formations. Art, identity, and
politics are fluctuating arenas. Because images, such as these murals, can potentially
transcend national boundaries, it would also be worthwhile to pursue research on the
effects of national identity projects within a global arena.
APPENDIX

Evan Sternberg compiled the following images from GPS points collected in Nicaragua; each point represents a mapped GPS point of a mural I photographed. These maps represent the area around downtown Managua, including the Alcaldía, however, since I coded my photographs I will need to provide an explanation of the image points that were used in this project.

Figure 8: Map of downtown Managua and surrounding areas with GPS points for maps included. Image created by Evan Sternberg through Open Street Maps and GRASS.
Figure 8, above, shows the general areas in which murals were found throughout Managua, and represent the distribution of some of the murals in the area. While these maps are not an exhaustive or complete list of the murals I photographed, they are the images located near my research sites that were GPS tracked. Most of the non-commissioned murals were found in the areas surrounding the Alcaldía. Figure 4 is coded as “100-5318” on this map, and is located roughly two kilometers North of the Alcaldía property. On the bottom right area of the image is figure 7, coded as “100-5445,” which is located near a university.

Figure 9: Detailed map of the Alcaldía mural locations. Maps created by Evan Sternberg through Open Street Maps and GRASS.

While two of the non-commissioned murals are plotted on this map, two were not included in this map or were missing GPS points: Figure 5 and Figure 6. While figure 6 is
not plotted, it is located directly North of the Alcaldia property along the property wall of the square block above image “100-5505,” roughly a block away. Figure 5 was not plotted and no location was noted, however, it was in the vicinity of plotted point “100-5313.”

All of the commissioned murals are found in this detailed section. The conference room images, figure 2, 3, and 3b are all found in the plotted point named “100-5531.” The image of Ruben Darío (figure 1) is on the outside wall of one of the main Alcaldia buildings, and is coded as “100-5473.” From these maps it is possible to see the large amount of murals that are located on the Alcaldia property, and understand how the concentration of these images looks in the grand scheme of the city. As I said before, not every mural was GPS plotted, nor were they put into the maps, but generally where one

Figure 10: Close up of Alcaldia murals. Maps created by Evan Sternberg through Open Street Maps and GRASS.
mural was found there were more with it. The distribution of images across the city landscape adds more of an understanding of the places in which images are used to convey or communicate ideas, and to whom.
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Mariah Trumbull graduated from George Mason University with a Bachelor’s in Anthropology in 2013. After studying in Peru and attending archaeological field school in Nicaragua, her passion for the dynamic cultures and vibrant community inspired her to pursue her Master’s in Anthropology with a focus on Latin American. After studying photography during her bachelor’s degree, her interest in visual representations of culture and identity drew her to visual anthropology and its role in anthropology as a whole. In early 2014, after studying abroad in Peru, she wrote about the visual representations of identity in Quechuan and Aymara cloth, and continued that interest in her thesis on visual representations of culture and heritage through murals in Managua, Nicaragua.