Yo luché!: Uncovering and Interrupting Silencing in an Indigenous and Afro-descendant Community

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Yo luché!: Uncovering and Interrupting Silencing in an Indigenous and Afro-descendant Community

by

Eileen Cecelia DeLuca

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Arts in Applied Anthropology with a concentration in cultural anthropology Department of Anthropology College of Arts and Sciences University of South Florida

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Date of Approval:
June 15, 2020

Keywords: oral history, heritage, critical theory, feminist epistemology, critical discourse, applied anthropology

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to Suhar, Galil, Kalwa, Nata Tiara, Avance, Bolondrina, Tigrilla, and to all the guerrilleras in the world who refuse to be silenced. May the power of your voice always be your greatest weapon, and may you wield it widely and wisely.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank the community of Waspán and especially the aiklakabra mairin who shared their stories with me. My understanding about women’s participation in armed conflict will be forever changed by the time I spent with the members of the community. Thank you for the generous spirit and for being fearless in your rejection of the dominant national narratives about Miskitu women combatants.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Dr. Antoinette Jackson, who served as the committee chair for this project. There are some professors that do more than inspire learning; they completely transform your way of thinking. Through her rigorous course reading list, informative lectures, and challenging assignments, Dr. Jackson compels her students to think critically about the production of heritage narratives, and the voices that may be silenced within them. After each course I completed with her, I felt like another veil had been lifted from the lens through which I view world. I will be forever grateful to have studied under this amazing scholar.

I would also like to thank Dr. Kevin Yelvington who is a fellow disruptor and a Marxist scholar par excellence. I much enjoyed debating and analyzing the readings in his course, and I am a much better scholar for having done so. Dr. Yelvignton’s knowledge of Latin American and Caribbean politics and history led to valuable input for this project. His critical feedback on course assignments and on this thesis compelled
me to engage in a substantial amount of revision that ultimately improved my work vastly.

Thanks also to Dr. Roberta Baer, who is "the woman" when it comes to applied anthropology. In taking her course, I was able to better define and truly understand the purpose of applied anthropology and how it contributes to creating a just society. Dr. Baer’s model of using oral history to better the lives of a refugee community inspired the applied project detailed in this thesis. She also provided valuable feedback about organizing each chapter to provide better clarity to the work.

This project would have never come to be if it were not for an invitation to participate in an oral history project from my colleague, Dr. Bruno Baltodano. That invitation led me seemingly through the looking glass, into the world of the beautiful and complicated country of Nicaragua. During the period of my research, Nicaragua, which for many years had been a relatively peaceful and safe country, became engulfed in a civil conflict that led to a series of documented human rights violations at the hands of the government. While we were trying to make sense of this whirlwind period of chaos and conflict, my colleague suffered an unrelated and unimaginable personal tragedy. I continue to be filled with a profound sadness about all of these events, and recognize that my feelings about these tragedies cannot be disentangled from the research or the writing of this thesis. I want to acknowledge the resilience of all Nicaraguans, and especially my colleague, Bruno. I hope he and his country find peace and redemption in the face of all of life’s challenge.

Finally, I would like to thank my husband, Dan DeLuca, and our three beautiful children, Molly, Jamie, and Lisa for all their love and support during these years I have
spent conducting this research. Thank you for taking an interest in this project that has become so important to me. My daughters proved to be three fierce luchadoras in their own right as they traveled with me through Central America during a period of civil conflict. I was delighted by their desire to learn as much as they could about the region, and humbled by their generous spirit towards the community of La Concepción. We have all grown in our understanding of the world through this project. Thanks as always to Dan for being patient and supportive of all my academic misadventures. My husband and children have all taught me more than they will ever know about love and resilience.
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this applied project is to uncover and interrupt the silencing of memories through the production of public narratives, specifically, the documentation of heritage of members of an indigenous and Afro-descendant community in Waspán, Nicaragua. The project is informed by interviews with seven women ex-combatants in the Contra War (1980-1990). Oral histories, transcribed interviews, and field notes are the source for the content of a book of heritage stories that I produced as one output about the former combatants utilizing their own words. In this thesis, I argue that the values of the “conquering” group of Nicaragua (i.e. the Sandinistas, and specifically the upper class male leadership) are reproduced through the dominant national narratives, which also serve to silence other voices such as the Afro-descendant and indigenous populations, the former Contra Combatants, and the women within the Miskitu ethnic group. I further argue that the ways in which silences are reproduced can be interrupted through this oral history project, which supports the production of alternative narratives that challenge dominant narratives and provide a way for historically silenced groups to “voice” and memorialize their stories. This research project is an effort to support a community in its attempts to give “voice” to narratives that have been “silenced” in official national discourses found in museums, monuments, heritage sites and educational curriculum.
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Entry into the Community

The plane took off from Managua to Waspán on time around 12:00 PM. We flew in a Cessna single-engine plan that had space for nine people plus the pilot and co-pilot. I made sure to sit in a single seat right behind the captain and near his exit door. Since these planes fly closer to the ground, my eyes were riveted out the window for most of the flight watching the landscape change across a period of an hour and a half. At some point, I peeled my eyes from the window, only to find the pilot was reading a paper (full, broadsheet open and blocking his view out the window) and the co-pilot was asleep. I looked back at my travel companions so that we could share a laugh over the scene, only to find that they were asleep as well. I reached into my purse, grabbed a cell phone and snapped a photo of the captain and co-captain. To avoid dwelling on the inherent danger posed by less-than-engaged piloting, I tried to imagine what Waspán would be like. I thought of some of the books I had recently read including Dunbar-Ortiz’s Blood on the Border: Memoirs of the Contra War, Araguti’s Shattered Paradise: Memoirs of a Nicaraguan War Child, and Belli’s The Country Under my Skin, a Memoir of Love and War, as well as Sandinista Revolution leader Humberto Ortega’s La Epopeya de la Insurrección [The Epic of the Insurrection]. The readings had outlined some of the lifeways of the Miskitu people and traced how the people of the region became entangled with the Contra rebels soon after the Sandinistas had overthrown the government and came to power in 1979. I tried to imagine what this town would look like
twenty-eight years after the conflict ended, with some resolution to the question of regional autonomy for the Caribbean Coast within the nation-state of Nicaragua. I wondered what these women would want to say knowing they had spent up to ten years of their lives involved in this conflict. I wondered what they would say about why they picked up arms, what motivated them, and did they think it was all worth it. I wondered how it felt to be a young woman combatant in a time where this was a gender-defying role. [excerpt from my field notes dated July 18, 2017]

In March 2017, I traveled to Nicaragua in my role as an educator at a state college in Florida, and had the opportunity to learn from people of all sectors about their past and present experiences as Nicaraguan citizens. During the trip, I became fascinated with the country, and the way that people, politics, and power intersected through museums, monuments, heritage sites, and popular media. Following the trip, my colleague, Dr. Bruno Baltodano, who is a political scientist and has done extensive studies on political violence in Nicaragua (see Cottman, Baltodano and García 2011; Baltodano 2015; García, Cottman, and Baltodano 2019) asked if I would be interested in conducting oral histories with a group of Nicaraguan women who had fought as teenagers during the conflict commonly referred to as the Contra War. This conflict involved many parties that were in opposition to the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) who took power in a revolutionary overthrow of the dictator Anastasio Somoza Debayle in 1979. The ‘Contras’ were a right-wing coalition, comprised of various groups who opposed the FSLN, backed by the United States. The administration of US President Ronald Regan infamously traded arms for hostages held by Iran and used the proceeds of weapons sales to illegally and clandestinely arm the Contras. The Contras
fought against the Soviet-backed FSLN regime for nearly 10 years. Baltodano and his colleagues had interviewed some of the women as part of a larger political science research project (García, Cottman, and Baltodano 2019). Initially, I was hesitant about the idea as I am opposed to all forms of armed conflict and did not want to do work that might serve to glorify or justify political violence. Hearing the stories of ex-combatant women, whom I had assumed had been unwillingly conscripted into battle, I feared, would be a somber task. I thought it might be best to put my research efforts elsewhere. My colleague persisted, sharing that in some ways he felt he owed it to the women to find someone who could help them tell their stories beyond what would be shared with solely an academic audience. He thought that as a woman and an anthropologist, I might be able to bring a different approach to the interview process that may help the women be more responsive.

In order to determine if the project would be a good fit for the community and for me, I asked to be put in touch with a Miskitu female leader and ex-combatant in the community. To protect her identity, I will refer to her here by her war name (nom de guerre or nombre de la guerra) “Suhar.” The initial conversation enhanced my understanding of what challenges aíklakabra mairin (“women fighters” in Miskitu) face in the present day and how passionate they are about having their stories made public. It was clear that Suhar was a woman who had a story to tell, but like her comrades, her participation in the conflict had effectively been “silenced” in the community and in the country at large. She was passionate in explaining how aíklakabra mairin continue to fight for recognition and for benefits since the end of the war. I left the conversation inspired to learn more about these women and to employ my training to support their
cause. In July 2017, I traveled to Waspán to meet Suhar and other members of the
community and conduct oral histories of women that participated in the Contra War
(1980-1990). At that time, I was able to interview 13 members of the community of
Waspán,¹ both women and men.

Waspán is a remote area, accessible by a small plane leaving from Managua
(which lands you in a cow patch about 90 minutes later) a few days each week. Waspán
is a municipality located in the Región Autónoma Atlántico Norte (North Atlantic
Autonomous Region, RAAN) of Nicaragua. According to the Instituto Nacional de
Información de Desarrollo, the 2012 population estimate for Nicaragua was 6,071,045.
The population estimate within the Región Autónoma Atlántico Norte was 453,541. The
municipality of Waspán was 57,320. The municipality is located along the Río Coco,
which demarcates the border between Nicaragua and Honduras. The main languages
spoken in the region are Spanish and Miskitu, with monolingual and bilingual speakers.
Brenzinger (2015) notes that the Miskitu language is one of the more secure indigenous
languages in Nicaragua due to the high volume of speakers (around 150,000), and the
efforts by groups such as the Moravian church to codify and develop materials in the
language for use in the community.

Since their participation in the Contra War, aiklakabra mairin have had various
levels of participation in projects to seek benefits for former combatants or to engage in
general support of women’s issues. Most of these women do not have access to or use
computers, and there is limited internet access in the municipality, so much of their

¹ The Spanish spelling is Waspám. The Miskitu spelling is Waspán. The people I interviewed in the Caribbean Coast recognize both spellings.
ability to network is based on travelling to one another’s dwellings. For many, travel is by foot.

My fieldwork and oral history research was supplemented by contact (by phone and through Facebook Messenger) with Suhar after conducting the initial interviews. I also travelled to Nicaragua four additional times (November 2017, March 2018, July 2018, and March 2019) focusing on visiting museums, monuments, heritage sites, and educational institutions as well as conducting additional interviews with the Miskitu women and other combatants and survivors of the Nicaraguan Revolution (1978-1979) and the Contra War (1980-1990).

Purpose and Goals

The purpose of this applied project is to document and interpret previously silenced narratives and better contextualize the heritage of members of an indigenous community in Waspán, Nicaragua. Additionally, this work facilitates heritage preservation efforts within an underrepresented community in Nicaragua that has been marginalized for myriad intersecting factors (i.e., systematic and structural due to the intersection of race/ethnicity, political affiliation, and gender) in the story of the Contra War and the history of the country. It has been argued (Foucault 1991, Bourdieu 1980) that language is set within power relationships and power is reproduced in societies through dominant narratives and discourses. This is consistent with what I observed and heard in Nicaragua and in Waspán. I recognize that in the production of a country’s heritage narratives, conscious choices are made as to which story will be told, and what time period will be celebrated (Porter & Salazar 2005; Bruner 2001, 2003, 2004; Jackson 2008, 2011, 2012). I also recognize that throughout history, various groups have been marginalized, silenced, or erased from the dominant narratives across the
globe by numerous means (Flores, 2012; Trouillot, 1995). In this thesis, I argue that the values of the “conquering” group of Nicaragua (i.e. the Sandinistas, and specifically the upper-class male leadership) are reproduced through the dominant national narratives, which also serve to silence other voices such as the Afro-descendant and Indigenous populations, the former Contra combatants, and the females within the Miskitu ethnic group. I further argue that the ways in which silences are reproduced can be interrupted through this oral history project, which supports the production of alternative narratives that challenge dominant narratives and provide a way for historically silenced groups to “voice” and memorialize their stories. This is important because lessons learned about historical events reside in the multiplicity of voices and in the processes of heritage preservation and meaning making within and across cultures.

In chapter two, I provide some relevant history of the field site to support the argument that the silencing of the interviewees is structural in nature and is borne of a legacy of colonialism. Thus, silencing due to race/ethnicity, political affiliation, and gender have long standing roots in Nicaragua. This will also provide context for the analysis of the narratives of the museums, monuments, heritage sites, and curriculum presented in chapter five, as well as the content of the women’s interviews as shared in chapter six.

Chapter three includes a theoretical framework for the study. I chose Critical Theory with a feminist epistemic stance as the primary methodology guiding the inquiry. Trouillot’s anthropological theory of “Silencing” (1995) is the specific theoretical lens I employ to analyze the women’s experiences. Trouillot’s framework is useful as it offers a critique of the production of dominant national narratives, and the places where
silences may enter the historical production. His framework is also relevant because it focuses on the relationship between power and the ability of groups to have their stories “voiced” in retrospective significance. Finally, Trouillot’s work demonstrates how alternative narratives can expand the available history, especially in relation to histories of conflict. Trouillot’s theory is then applied to heritage production in Nicaragua to demonstrate how political parties utilize museums, monuments, heritage sites, and curriculum to give voice to certain narratives and silence others.

Chapter four describes the methods of data collection and analysis used in the study. In this chapter, I explain how I chose to visit nationally sanctioned museums, monuments, and heritage sites and review nationally produced curriculum materials to analyze the dominant heritage narratives in Nicaragua. I also provide details about how I used an oral history method in the community of Waspán with Miskitu women who are ex-combatants in order to uncover silencing in the national and local narratives and produce materials that challenge master narratives. The chapter describes how I categorized the data and how decisions were made about how to represent the data in the applied product (heritage book created for the community).

In chapter five, I provide examples from my visits to museums, monuments, heritage sites, and educational institutions that support the argument that the dominant narratives of Nicaragua favor the mestizo, male, Sandinistas. The examples show how heritage narratives are employed by the current Sandinista government to legitimize and reproduce the power of the current administration. They also demonstrate that the dominant heritage narratives follow a linear sequence beginning with the rebellion led Augusto César Sandino leading Nicaragua down a pre-destined path of armed
resistance to imperialism, justifying the “righteous” rule of the current Sandinista administration. The examples also show how the heritage of the Contra War interrupts that heritage story and therefore, the Miskitu women combatants have been silenced in the dominant national narratives.

In chapter six, I describe the overall themes discovered across the interviews with the women in Waspán and include excerpts from the oral histories to illuminate each theme. I present excerpts of the women’s narratives of the persecution of the Miskitu people, which reproduces the colonial legacies of racism. The women’s narratives also demonstrate that political affiliation as a Contra has led to silencing at both the local and national level. I also include excerpts of the women’s narratives that challenges patriarchal views of the women’s role in war and conflict. Finally, I include excerpts from the interviews where the women share their experiences of marginalization in the present-day and directly confront the issue of silencing and demonstrate how they resist silencing through “voicing” their stories and their pride as indigenous, female former combatants.

Finally, in chapter seven, I argue that the oral history interviews interrupt silencing that occurs at both the national and local level in Nicaragua. To reproduce the dominant national narratives of mestizo rebellion against imperialism and foreign oppressors, stories such as those shared by the women are counter to the current administration’s attempts to create a national heritage. The women’s stories, though marginalized due to their race/ethnicity, political affiliation/participation in counterrevolution, and gender, add nuance and retrospective significance of conflict
narratives in Nicaragua, and the effects on the community. The chapter ends with recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER 2: STRUCTURAL ROOTS OF SILENCING—RELEVANT HISTORY OF THE FIELDWORK SITE

There are many reasons that the story of the Miskitu people receives little recognition in Nicaragua’s national curriculum and heritage sites. Waspán is a municipality in the Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua, which is constitutionally recognized as an autonomous indigenous region. Understanding the political designation of this autonomous region and the related marginalization of its peoples requires a review of the historical trajectory of human settlement in the area now known as Nicaragua and a critical examination of the historical development of racial categories, political affiliations, and gender relations. I will look at three areas of silencing—historical, political, and women’s stories in conflict narratives.

*Silencing of Indigenous and Afro-Descendant Groups in Nicaragua*²

It has been well documented that indigenous peoples were present in Central America before European contact, with evidence of human occupation in the land now called Nicaragua as early as the 9th century BCE (Fagan and Durrani 2016). One group encountered by the Spanish and the English upon arrival in the 15th century were the Miskitu³ people who have inhabited the eastern seaboard of present-day Nicaragua

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² The history of the geographic area and the various groups governing and controlling the area is more extensive than can be covered here. I only highlight key historical information to contextualize the structural roots of silencing of the peoples of the Caribbean Coast. This section is not intended to be exhaustive, nor is it complete or inclusive to all peoples who have historical ties to the region.

³ In the literature, the indigenous people associated with the Caribbean Coast are referred to as Mosquito, Mosquito, Miskito, or Miskitu. I choose the term “Miskitu” as that is how the people I have interviewed refer to themselves and their language. Other spellings appear only when part of a direct quote from the literature.
(as well as the southeastern seaboard of present-day Honduras) since the pre-
Columbian period. It is also well documented that African descended peoples were
present in what is now known as the Caribbean Coast, Atlantic Coast, or Mosquito
Coast of Nicaragua and interacted with the native Miskitu people by the end of the 16th
century (Offen 2010, Baracco 2011).

While Spain had colonized the central and Pacific portions of what is now
Nicaragua, it was unable in the 15th century to conquer and colonize the Caribbean
Coast and subsequent efforts of Catholic missionaries also failed to enact mass
conversion. The British and the Dutch began visiting and engaging in trade in the
Caribbean Coast in the 1600s, and then Great Britain initially began to colonize the area
in the 1630s. British colonizers were involved in a strategic alliance with Miskitu Indians;
they would protect the Miskitu from the nearby Spanish colony and from other
competing indigenous groups. In turn, Great Britain would be allowed to settle and
engage in commerce in the area, as well as pass safely through trade routes. In 1687,
through the Anglo-Miskitu alliance, the Kingdom of Mosquitia was formed and a Miskitu
King was crowned by an English governor. For almost 100 years, the British benefited
from being the “protectors” of the Kingdom of Mosquitia as they set up profitable
plantations that were supported by enslaved Africans and enslaved indigenous peoples.
In 1783, the British withdrew, and the land was ceded to Spain. By 1821, the Spanish
Empire had begun to collapse and Nicaragua was established as an independent,
sovereign nation. Claim to the Kingdom of Mosquitia was contested and the area was
left without a clear designation of colonial intervention or support. In 1844, the British
returned and established a protectorate for the Kingdom of Mosquitia but there was
tension between the emerging nation of Nicaragua and this foreign (colonial) presence in geographic proximity. The Treaty of Managua, signed by Great Britain and Nicaragua in 1860, established a “Mosquito Reserve” autonomous region to replace Kingdom of Mosquitia. This treaty was to the benefit of Nicaragua and to Great Britain as it provided that while Mosquitia would co-exist in sovereignty with Nicaragua (i.e. become recognized as “part” of Nicaragua, yet simultaneously “apart” and self-governing), Great Britain (and other foreign governments such as the United States) could maintain profitable business ventures in the area without threat of aggression from Nicaragua. In 1894, the Caribbean Coast was forcibly reincorporated into the sovereign state of Nicaragua, effectively putting an end to the question of the Caribbean Coast’s ownership (Baracco 2011).

According to Baracco (2011), “prior to contact with Europeans, Miskitu society was essentially egalitarian and acephalous” (18). There were, at times, contentious relations between the Miskitu and other indigenous groups even before the arrival of the Europeans, but these conflicts were based on group affiliation and not phenotype or imagined “race.” Thus, hierarchical structures based on race were a European import to the Caribbean Coast. Analogous to the history of colonization and establishment of the United States of America, the development of racial categories was essential to reproducing power and social order during Nicaragua’s colonial period. “In the early seventeenth century English settlers in the West Indies fashioned notions of race to explain difference, justify slavery, and advance white privilege” (Offen 2010, 92). The people of Caribbean Coast, as in other “New World” settlements were ascribed categories by the Europeans that were not necessarily employed or distinguished prior
to colonization. This classification largely relied on phenotype or physical features, and cultural traits. Thus, the Europeans imported the idea that “heritable difference” was ‘hierarchically meaningful’” (Offen 2010, 92). In colonizing the Americas, there was a purposeful effort by the Europeans to subjugate both indigenous people and Africans. Indigenous people were targeted because they provided a threat to land rights. Thus, Europeans used racist tropes to support the social order. “The conquest of the Americas produced an ideological system that, in order to justify European domination, posed Indians as savage, premodern foils to European progress, civilization, and modernity. Europeans placed Indians in the primitive half of an ontological dichotomy between civilization and savagery, man and nature” (Pineda 2006, 220-221). Enslaved African peoples needed to be cast even further down the racial hierarchy, as even though indigenous people were in some cases enslaved by the Europeans, the majority of the physical labor was assigned to enslaved Africans. Justification for enslavement meant the idea of “Blacks” as “savage,” “inferior,” or even as a separate species from “White” humans needed to be accepted and constantly (re)produced through discourse.

As they established colonial strongholds in the Caribbean Coast, the British superintendents began to establish racial categories within the inhabitants of Mosquitia by calling those with mixed Miskitu and African descent “Zambos” (or the English “Sambos”) and the “full-blooded” Miskitu “Tawira” (Offen 2002, 2010; Hooker 2010). The Zambo Miskitu reportedly have genetic ties to a group of Africans that were shipwrecked in the northeastern Caribbean Coast area circa 1641. These formerly enslaved people intermarried and procreated with the Miskitu, adopting the Miskitu language and traditions (Offen 2002). It has been noted (e.g. Offen 2002) that there is
little evidence that the Miskitu distinguished between themselves on racial grounds, and in fact saw themselves culturally and linguistically as one. However, they did recognize the differential categories imposed by the British (Offen 2002).

During the colonial period, the British recognized the Miskitu as the dominant group and installed a Miskitu King or chief, which positioned Miskitus above other indigenous groups in the area, as well as positioning them above Creoles and Negroes. However, Miskitu power was largely in name, with the British superintendents wielding power. After the war of independence in North America and subsequent treaties (i.e. the Peace of Versailles, 1783; the Anglo-Spanish Convention of London, 1786) British planters began to leave the Caribbean Coast and, “a new local elite, mostly people with some Afro-American ancestors, were able to rise to a level of economic and political importance unknown in other parts of the Caribbean” (Gabbert 2011, 14). Thus, the sociopolitical dominance on the Caribbean Coast was divided between two mixed-race groups of mostly Afro-Amerindian descent. The Miskitu, who became coded as indigenous, held power in name and high office and were viewed as the native peoples (i.e. those with claim to the land). The English-speaking Creole, “who came to be seen largely as of African descent-led to the racialization of the region as black, and to a lesser extent as Indian” (Hooker 2010, 247) held regional and local political positions and were in general better positioned economically than the Miskitu, but not considered “native.” In part, the Creole social position was supported by their ability to speak English, and because, culturally, they behaved more like the Europeans than did the Miskitu. At the same time, this position was problematic for the nearby Spanish colony that eventually became the sovereign state of Nicaragua. “The racialization of Creoles
as ‘African’ and their simultaneous association with internationally prestigious “Anglo” cultures make them ‘non-national’ and therefore more alien and threatening than the ‘subnational,’ ‘Indian’ Miskitu” (Gordon 1998, 121).

After Nicaragua became an independent, sovereign state in 1821, it was important for those in power to build a “national” identity as well as to position the nascent nation as a viable global player. At this precarious time, Nicaragua was also engaged in a dispute with Great Britain over control of the Caribbean Coast.

The dispute was extremely troubling for elites because it underscored the fragility of Nicaragua’s claim to nationhood and brought to the fore anxieties about the country’s racial composition (Was it a white, black, indigenous, or mixed-race nation?), which was crucial to its standing in the international hierarchy of nations (Hooker 2010, 251).

Understanding that global recognition was dependent on the level of “Whiteness” of the people, Nicaragua (like other Latin American countries) needed to forge a myth of racial mixing that was predicated upon the idea that the majority of the population was a “mix” of European descended (i.e. White) and indigenous peoples. “In the Nicaraguan case, this process of assimilation has commonly been referred to as ‘mestizaje’ a miscegenation between the indigenous population and Iberian settlers that established the dominance of white, Spanish-speaking mestizos” (Baracco 2011, 137). The inhabitants of the Caribbean Coast did not “neatly” fit into this category, as both Miskitus and Creoles belied the “mestizo” racial identity through ostensible phenotypic traits associated with Africans and/or “full-blooded” indigeneity. At the same time, this racial difference provided (and still provides) the Nicaraguan government with justification for
disenfranchising these groups from political authority. Thus, the Nicaraguan government and elites employed racist discourses that were racially coded to position themselves as an authority over the Caribbean Coast and its peoples. “In the national narratives, the Mosquito Coast was consistently portrayed as savage in contrast to civilized Nicaragua and to black and indigenous inhabitants as incapable of self-government or political agency” (Hooker 2010, 251). The discourse on the Caribbean Coast was key to creating what Hooker (2010) calls a “racialized space,” which was “seen as part of the national territory, but they were also treated as if they existed outside of it insofar as their black and indigenous inhabitants were deemed unfit for citizenship” (258).

The Treaty of Managua signed by Great Britain and Nicaragua in 1860 outlined Great Britain’s recognition of the sovereignty of the national territory, but provided that the former Kingdom of Mosquitia be allowed to be self-governing. This document recognized “Miskitu” and “Miskitu Rights” but did not discuss Creoles or Negroes. “By officially recognizing only Miskitu rights to self-government, despite Creoles’ involvement and indeed dominance in the politics of the Mosquito Kingdom, the Treaty of Managua thus provided Nicaraguan officials seeking to bring the Mosquito Coast entirely under Nicaragua’s control with a powerful weapon to discredit the autonomous political structures established in the region” (Hooker 2010, 256). That is, the established power structures of the Mosquito Reserve (Creole politicians and business people) were not recognized as “native” or having land rights; therefore, their governmental positions were suspect, and the entire self-governance was placed in peril. “For Nicaraguan officials, the mere fact of Creole political power on the Reserve justified the end of self-government in the region, since blacks neither had the right nor
the capacity to govern themselves, much less others” (Hooker 2010, 257). Thus, the Afro-descendant groups that were coded as “Black” rather than “indigenous” began to be disenfranchised politically and in regards to claiming land rights.

However, all non-white racial groups in the Caribbean suffered (and continue to suffer) from racism and its effects. During the period leading to the Treaty of Managua, racialized tropes were employed by the European-descended Nicaraguans to make a case that the Kingdom of Mosquitia was not fit to be a sovereign state. Their case was based on arguments that the non-white peoples of the Caribbean Coast were politically backwards due to their uncivilized (i.e. un-European, un-White) lifeways. This was also supported by other nations dominated by Whites, such as the United States. Gabbert (2011) documents the writings of E.G. Squier, the US chargé d’affaires in Central America from 1849 to 1850, who denied Mosquitia’s sovereignty in numerous writings in the 1850s. Squier “also characterized the Miskitu and the kings as savages, drunkards and British puppets in order to delegitimize any claim to autonomy” (Gabbert 2011, 31). Additionally, Squier argued that the Miskitu “were predominantly Africans rather than genuine Indians and thus ‘intruders’ with no right to Nicaraguan territory” (Gabbert 2011, 31). Even the so-called British protectors documented their racist assessment of the peoples of the Caribbean Coast such as in 1853 when the British magistrate of San Juan del Norte, Henry Grant Foote, reported the following to the Foreign Office: “The Mosquito Indians, my lord, are totally unfit to manage their own affairs; the creoles and negroes on the coast enslave them and treat them like beasts of burden” (Foote to FO, June 2, 1853, BL, OPC, Confidential Print 308: 420, as reported in Gabbert, 2011, 21).
Ultimately, it was important for the British to protect their economic interests by supporting the Kingdom of Mosquitia as “autonomous” by ensuring other “would-be-colonizing” nations that the highly cultured “pure-blood” Miskitu were assigned as kings/hereditary chiefs and capable of self-rule. Thus, racial categorizations and meanings were constantly shifting and being redefined by those in power depending on specific contexts and specific purposes. In any case, it is clear that defining race (with “White” positioned above other races) and creating and reinforcing racial categorizations were key factors in controlling the area. “The idea of Nicaragua as a ‘civilized’ nation in contrast to the ‘savage’ Mosquito Coast that emerged in the nineteenth century was thus racially coded. It also served to legitimize the notion, which persisted well into the twentieth century, that citizens of western regions of the country were peculiarly entitled to exercise political power in the state as a whole, and over ‘uncivilized’ regions in particular” (Hooker 2010, 247).

After the establishment of the Mosquito Reserve, the reservation governments were led by the upper class residents of the former Kingdom of Mosquitia and/or by Nicaraguans who saw the benefit of assimilating the people into the “high” culture of the Europeans. The Reservation’s constitution and laws were written in such a way that led to the exclusion of most indigenous peoples as well as the Afro-American lower classes from political participation through requirements such as owning a minimal amount of property, and being able to establish three years’ worth of residency, in addition to being able to prove they were “native” Miskitu, which discriminated specifically against Africans and Creoles (Gabbert 2011).
The members of the reservation governments held “an attitude of benevolent paternalism” towards the Afro-American lower classes and the Indians, all of whom needed ‘civilizing’ with the help of the government” (Gabbert 2011, 32). This included efforts to suppress native and folk culture. Further pressure to assimilate at this time came from the Protestant Moravian missions, who were more successful in engaging religious conversion than the Catholic missionaries had been previously. The Moravian missionaries were “accepted and viewed as helpful by the Miskitu, but internal documents from the missionaries show that they described [Miskitu] as ‘heathens’ and ‘child-like’” giving rise to “evangelization that strongly condemned almost every aspect of the Miskitu’s traditional way of life” (Baracco 2011, 134-135).

Nicaraguan (nationalist) retellings of official military annexation of the Mosquito Reserve refer to it as ‘the Reincorporation,’ but the Creoles call the event ‘the Overthrow” (Gordon 1998, 61). Access to means of production after reincorporation varied for the Miskitu and the Creoles/Negroes. The Miskitus in the northern region mostly retained access to arable land, boats, and fishing equipment. Because reincorporation was coupled with opening the doors to foreign investors, the Creole elite in the southern region lost control of businesses with the North American companies entering and taking over the market. Thus, the Creoles and Negroes were given the opportunities to become workers in the foreign companies but were barred from high-ranking positions. Hale (1994) describes how Miskitus in this time period “contended with the opportunities, demands, and constraints of two masters” (45), i.e. the US and Nicaraguan governments. Pineda (2006) supports Hale’s contention that “US companies exercised a de facto governmental role” in the Caribbean Coast “until well
into the twentieth century” (9). Hale describes how the US maintained hegemonic influence in the region.

The Nicaraguan state made vigorous, if inept and largely ineffectual, attempts to exert sovereign control over the newly annexed territory. State officials imposed taxes, usurped Indian lands, established local structures of political rule, and imposed strict prohibitions on education in languages other than Spanish. Simultaneously, “Anglo” institutions penetrated the Coast economy, polity, and civil society to an astounding degree (Hale 1994, 46).

The 1920s to the 1970s (referred to retrospectively as “Company Time”) was a period in the Caribbean Coast when “US and Canadian banana, lumber, and mining industries operated on a large scale in the region” (Pineda 2006, 1). This period introduced a new group of Afro-descendant people who were brought in by the lumber and banana companies. Hailing from the West Indies and the US South, these Afro-descendants like the Creoles “were perceived by the agents of the Nicaraguan state as a foreign and alien threat to the Nicaraguan nation-building process, which was predicated on Mestizo nationalism” (Pineda 2006, 68).

The ability for these groups to assimilate was limited by the phenotypic difference between the Afro-descendant population and the imagined “mestizo” population. While Nicaraguans recognized racial mixing, it was a specific European/Indigenous mixing that was based of their imagined national origins. Coastal Indigenous did not largely procreate with Europeans thus, not viewed as mestizo, and were seen as politically backwards (Baracco 2011). “By the 1920s a variant of official mestizo nationalism had emerged in Nicaragua that portrayed the country as an overwhelmingly mestizo nation
and that described mestizaje as a mixing process between Spaniards and Indians in which Spanish contributions were determinant and African participation was minimized or erased outright” (Hooker 2010, 265).

The conflict between Nicaragua and the “autonomous” Caribbean Coast region (and the associated racism) continues into the present day. Goett reports that “political cartoons in Nicaraguan newspapers in the early 2000s depicted how Nicaraguans viewed drug trafficking on the Atlantic Coast as a problem rooted in blackness, cultural difference, and regional separatism” (142). Further, the indigenous groups continue to suffer from structural inequalities as compared to Nicaraguan mestizos (Goett 2017). Finally, Pineda (2011) argues that the “issue of whether Miskitu Indians are “really” Negros or Indios [Indians] is very much unresolved if not consciously debated” (94). Such debates are reflective of the meaningfulness of racial categorizations in assessing the level of civilization and/or the character of these groups. As their phenotype continues to challenge the myth of mestizaje, the Miskitu are not fully recognized as “Nicaraguans.”

*Silencing and Political Affiliation*

In addition to the marginalization of the Miskitu people due to racial difference, there are other political reasons why their stories are not heralded in the authorized discourses. Pineda (2011) reports that the “United States occupied Nicaragua militarily from 1910 to 1924, propping up unpopular Conservative governments, which of course were friendly to US interests” (106). With corporate investments in Nicaragua, and a request from then Nicaraguan President Adolfo Díaz, in 1912 US Marines were deployed ostensibly to protect US citizens living in the country and quell the efforts of
insurgent groups. After containing the rebellion and with a continued relationship with the Nicaraguan administration, most of the troops were withdrawn leaving a small standing US military presence. US military control of customs and Nicaraguan police forces in some areas continued and the Nicaraguan government gave exclusive right to the construction of a trans-isthmian canal, as well as control of certain Nicaraguan territories to include the Corn Islands and their Afro-descendant and indigenous populations (Pineda 2011). In 1926, dissatisfaction with conditions under the US corporate interest and a series of administrators presumed to be acting as US puppets, insurgencies and civil strife increased, leading to the return of large forces of US Marines. In 1927, Nicaraguan mestizo, Augusto César Sandino (1895–1934) led a rebellion against United States imperialism. His widely publicized exploits of guerrilla tactics against the US Marines and the Nicaraguan Guardia Nacional (National Guard), and the eventual withdrawal of the US Marines made him a hero in Nicaragua and throughout Latin America. Following the withdrawal of the US Marines, Sandino was assassinated by National Guard forces of General Anastasio Somoza García (1896–1956) in 1934. Somoza García went on to become elected president in 1936, resumed control of the National Guard, and established a dynasty of Somoza family rule for more than 40 years. Somoza García served as president from 1937–1947, and again from 1950–1956. His presidency was followed by that of his son, Luis Somoza Debayle (1922–1967) who served from 1956–1963. Later, another son of Somoza García, Anastasio Somoza Debayle (1925–1980), served as president from 1967–1972 and then from 1974–1979.
In response to dictatorial conditions under Nicaraguan President Anastasio Somoza Debayle, a university student and youth opposition group known as the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) began a campaign in the 1960s to radicalize the working class. The founders of the FSLN, Carlos Fonseca Amador (1936-1976), Tomás Borge Martínez (1930-2012), and Silvio Mayorga Delgado (1936-1967) among others led an intellectual and social movement that eventually manifested in guerrilla activities aimed at deposing the Nicaraguan government. “The 1979 overthrow of the Somoza dictatorship and the subsequent ascension to power of the FSLN abruptly marked the end of ‘company time’” (Pineda 2006, 153). After the overthrow, the Sandinistas assumed control over the Nicaraguan government. The stated objectives of the party were memorialized in a document written by three of the military movement’s leaders, Daniel Ortega Saavedra (born 1945, leader of Nicaragua from 1979 to 1990, first as Coordinator of the Junta of National Reconstruction (1979–1985) and then as President (1985–1990), re-elected in 2006, and serves as current President of Nicaragua), Victor Tirado López (born 1940, served as a Sandinista revolutionary commander), and Humberto Ortega Saavedra (born 1947, served as the Minister of Defense of Nicaragua from 1979-1995 and who is the brother of the current President). In the preamble to the document entitled “Why the FSLN Struggles in Unity with the People,” they offer that “The Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (FSLN - Sandinista National Liberation Front) struggles forth from the people and with the people to over-throw the Somoza tyranny and to bring into power a popular and democratic government, the first independent and patriotic government in the history of Nicaragua; a government composed of all of us…” (Ortega Saavedra, Tirado López, &
Ortega Saavedra, 1978). They go on to list 25 objectives associated with liberating various groups and improving conditions in Nicaragua. One of the objectives speaks directly about “incorporating and developing the Atlantic Coast” and speaks about the indigenous groups, but does not mention Creoles, Africans, or Negros. Thus, once again, the official discourses provided some (though limited) citizenship privileges to indigenous groups, there continued to be erasure for those groups racially coded as “Black.”

Even under the socialist leaning Sandinista government, the preference for the mestizo national identity remained. Baracco suggests that from “its inception in 1961, the FSLN was a class-based mestizo dominated organization with little ideological awareness of ethnic issues” (Baracco 2011, 120). Deposing the Somoza administration did little to change the discourses on indigenous peoples. Hale (1994) argues that the Somoza government viewed the Miskitu as passive and lacking political interest. This perspective, imbued with racism, provided little motivation for the Nicaraguan government to make meaningful efforts to fully embrace the people of the Caribbean Coast and attend to their needs. “In the first months after coming to power,” Hale contends, “some Sandinista cadres were apparently of a similar mind” (117) to the Somoza assessment of the costeños (people of the Caribbean Coast). “Despite their newly developed emphasis on democratic participation and empowerment, Sandinistas did not dispense with a deeply ingrained association of Miskitu consciousness, identity, and demands with cultural backwardness” (35).

The Miskitu largely did not take part in the Sandinista insurrection leading to the victory of Somoza, and therefore, Hale argues, the Sandinistas would “portray costeños
of having been ‘asleep (adormecidos) during the Somoza era and as having suffered from a ‘backward’ (atrasado) political consciousness” (117). Hale argues, however, that the rise of ethnopolitical organization among the Miskitu began in the early 1960’s, before the Sandinista revolution, and in response, state-driven political and economic development, increased contact with Mestizo enacting development, and increasing uneven distribution of benefits favoring the Mestizos. Thus, the Miskitu were organizing and developing a consciousness in response to their own experience with racism and access to resources that did not mirror the class-based Sandinista struggle.

The silences present in the official discourses of the Sandinista revolutionaries and later the Sandinista government reproduced the colonial order established by the Europeans. Even the fact that the Atlantic Coast was described as an “indigenous” area (without acknowledging racial groups in central and pacific regions of Nicaragua) continued to support the myth of mestizaje and reproduce social order. “The marking of the Mosquito Coast as the only place where racial others were present in the nation in turn facilitated the erasure of blackness and indigeneity in western and central Nicaragua despite the presence of black and indigenous people in those areas of the country as well” (Hooker 2010, 247).

In the current Nicaraguan Constitution, written under the Sandinista government in 1987, and still recognized under the current Sandinista government, recognition of “indigenous peoples” is memorialized as follows:

The State recognizes the existence of indigenous peoples who enjoy the rights, duties and guarantees designated in the Constitution, and especially those to maintain and develop their identity and culture, to have their own forms of social organization and administer their local affairs, as well as to preserve the
communal forms of land property and their exploitation, use, and enjoyment, all in accordance with the law. For the communities of the Atlantic Coast, an autonomous regime is established in the present Constitution.

The constitution also provides that the Atlantic Coast is given a certain level of autonomy to self-govern. The use of the word “indigenous” rather than “Miskitu” or other groups coded as indigenous (such as the native Sumu and Rama peoples) may at first seem to be inclusive, but as has been documented in this thesis, Creoles have been racially coded as “Black” not indigenous, and therefore may not be fully recognized under this section. Despite this, the constitution does provide that all native-born persons become “citizens” upon reaching the age of 16.

Hale (1994) contends that the newly formed Sandinista government attempted to draw the Miskitu into the revolutionary alliance, but after eighteen months of “conciliatory policies,” in February 1981, the state enacted a swift and radical change in policy. Security forces arrested Indian leaders and disbanded their organization” (29). Around the same time, in the early stage of the Sandinista government, right-wing opposition groups such as those loyal to Somoza Debayle, former members of the National Guard, farmers, and indigenous peoples (including Miskitu) engaged in an insurgency against the Sandinista government that is now commonly known as Contra War. The counter revolutionary efforts were funded and supported by the US government.

US intervention in Central America precedes the Contra War by several decades. “US administrations had supported right-wing governments in the region in an effort to stop what they viewed as the spread of communism near US borders, and also to
safeguard their economic interests in the region” (UNHCR 2000, 121). When Ronald Reagan took office in 1981, he did so with an aim to stamp out “communist” insurgencies in Latin America. In 1981, Reagan signed National Security Directive 17, “approving a new $19.95 million program to organize anti-Sandinista rebels against ‘the Cuban presence and Cuban-Sandinista support structure in Nicaragua and elsewhere in Central America’” (Scott 1997, 243). This allowed the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to provide aid, support, and training to Contra groups. However, the support was contested, and in 1983 Congress voted in measures that limited the ability of the Executive Branch to directly support a group attempting to overthrow the Nicaraguan government. Through resolutions brought forward by Congress and the Senate, in 1985, no funds were made available to the CIA or the Department of Defense to aid military or paramilitary operations in Nicaragua (Scott 1997). It is now known that in 1984, the White House began a secret effort to secure alternative sources of aid, and the US continued to secretly support the Contras through 1986, at which time the clandestine support was revealed due to the Sandinista’s shooting down a supply plane piloted by American, Eugene Hasenfus. His capture by the Sandinistas was widely publicized and provided evidence of a link between the Contras and the US government.

It is debatable whether the Sandinistas came to be at odds with the Miskitu because they were aligned with US imperial forces, or if the Miskitu aligned with US military forces in response to aggressive persecution from the Sandinistas. Hale notes that both the Sandinistas and the Miskitu were “cultures of resistance, imbued with premises that limited their liberating potential and brought them squarely into conflict”
On the part of the Sandinistas, Hale proposes, the party justified its actions towards the Miskitu people within the framework that indigenous peoples provided a threat to state security. He outlines two premises that positioned the Miskitu people as being somehow outside of the emergent Sandinista nation-state:

The first was related to the great sociocultural heterogeneity of the movement’s composition, a problem relevant, but by no means limited, to the ethnic diversity on Nicaragua’s Atlantic Coast. The second contradiction arose specifically from the dominant culture’s premises toward Indians, which many Sandinistas continued to espouse and which remained presented in their ideology and guided their political practice” (Hale 1994, 30).

The Sandinista Revolution had largely been a mestizo effort supported by (but not solely aligned with) a Communist ideology. The ideas to put an end to a dictatorship, redistribute wealth improve working conditions and public services, and eliminate (or at least decrease the levels of) US imperialism were important concerns of the Sandinistas. This focus did little to consider the indigenous land rights issues and Anglo affinity (developed historically through political alliances with British imperialists, economic interdependency with the US, and widespread Miskitu participation in the Moravian Church) that were the concerns of the Miskitu people. As shared earlier in this thesis, of the 25 objectives listed by Sandinista leadership, the only one that focuses on the Atlantic Coast says that it will be “incorporated and developed “(Ortega Saavedra, Tirado López, and Ortega Saavedra 1978, 111). This discourse frames the objectives from an urban mestizo perspective and not from the costeño indigenous perspective, and may in fact have incited fears about further loss to land rights. “Put bluntly, the
FSLN forged a counterhegemonic ideology that invalidated central facets of Miskitu Indian’s deeply rooted ethnic militancy” (35).

Hale’s research suggests that the ethnopolitical organization of the pan-indigenous group that attempted to form an alliance with the Sandinistas, MISURASATA (Miskitu, Sumo, Rama, Sandinista All Together) ultimately failed to bridge an effective alliance between the Miskitu people and the Nicaraguan national government. The group’s failure to achieve the goals of establishing indigenous autonomy, as well as the charismatic indigenous leadership of Stedman Fagoth played contributing factors to large-scale Miskitu participation in the Contra conflict. However, Hale asserts that cultural pride, land rights, and orientations toward the United States were also key issues that may have engendered a Miskitu consciousness of rebellion against the Sandinistas. This ethnopolitical stance also allowed rumors of Nicaraguan government atrocities and rumors of Americans sending arms and support for an insurrection, along with the support from the Moravian Church for the Contra to fuel a call to action. The motivations for both sides of the aggression are complex, but what is clear is that participation as Contra combatants, and continued participation in political parties associated with counterrevolution, marked the Miskitu the enemy of the Sandinista political party.

The incarceration of the Miskitu leaders by the Nicaraguan government, and the exodus of the Miskitu people was documented in the new media at the time and is recounted in other outsiders’ accounts such Hale (1994); Dunbar-Ortiz (2005); and García, Cottman, and Baltodano (2019). The journalistic and academic analyses of the movement of the Miskitu people involve complex political motivations and suggests that
the Miskitu people were coaxed or manipulated by groups including the Moravian church, the US Government, the Nicaraguan Central Government, and/or the Miskitu rebel organization, *Kus Indian Sut Asla Nicaragua* (Nicaraguan Coast Indian Unity or KISAN).

The accounts of the number of Miskitus who left Nicaragua to become refugees and or combatants based in Honduras varies. The CIA Directorate of Intelligence (1982, 2006) reports that upwards of 10,000 Miskitu left Nicaragua to cross into Honduras during the Contra War. The United Nations High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR) reports that 14,000 Nicaraguan Miskitu refugees lived in UNHCR refugee camps. Although UNHCR policy was to maintain a division between the camps and with Contra military bases, even by their own reports, it “was well known,” that “contras were operating out of camps administered by UNHCR and the International Committee of the Red Cross” (UNHCR 2000, 128).

It has been documented that training was provided to the Miskitu combatants by the *Fuerza Democrática Nicaragüense* (Nicaraguan Democratic Force or FDN) led by Somoza’s former National Guard, as well as from groups funded by the US (Scott 1997; Dunbar-Ortiz 2016; Baracco 2018; García, Cottman, and Baltodano 2019). During the years of the conflict, many attempts were made on both sides to negotiate an accord. In 1987, the Sandinistas enacted both law 28, the Autonomy statute for the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua, and the 1987 Amendments to the Constitution that recognized various rights to language, cultural practices and local governing. While this was the beginning of peaceful accords between the national government and the peoples of the Caribbean Coast, by all accounts the conflict officially ended at the beginning of the 1990’s after a
period of negotiations, and the election of a right-wing, neoliberal, US-supported
President, Violeta Chamorro (born 1929). During the early stages of the Chamorro
administration, she officially declared the end of the war, and put an end to military
conscription. With support from the United States, the Contras were disbanded and the
Sandinistas stood down. Weapons were collected from both Contras and Sandinistas.
Many of the Miskitu refugees and ex-combatants returned home. In 2003, the
Nicaraguan government began to more formally recognize Miskitu and other indigenous
groups’ rights to a certain level of political autonomy and control over their land through
the adoption of Law 445. Nicaragua spent sixteen years under neoliberal administrators,
until Daniel Ortega (the first Sandinista President, and current President of Nicaragua)
was re-elected in 2006. While the Nicaraguan Constitution, allows the Caribbean
Coast to retain a certain degree of political autonomy, the heritage narrative (available
in museums, monuments, heritage sites, and curriculum) positions the Sandinistas as
the victors. As will be discussed and analyzed in chapter five, throughout Nicaragua, the
heritage of the Sandinista Revolutionary group is memorialized and celebrated.
Leaders of the Contra (opposing) forces are not.

Silencing of Women’s Stories in Nicaraguan Conflict Narratives

As demonstrated in the previous sections of this thesis, Nicaragua has a long
history of armed conflict. The related national narratives as presented in curriculum,
museums, and heritage sites are dominated by males and masculine aggression,
despite significant participation by women in the conflicts. The silencing of women’s
participation in global conflicts has entered historical production across time and
locations. “Women are often considered victims of war-related violence: civilians killed
as collateral damage, victims of war-rape, mothers and sisters losing male relatives to combat” (García, Cottman, and Baltodano 2019, 1). Globally, narratives of female heroines, and/or significant contributors to conflicts are few and far between, and Nicaraguan narratives are no different.

There are no national museums, monuments or heritage sites that memorialize the decade the country spent in the Contra War. According to the interviewees, it is prohibited for schoolchildren to be taught about this war, as it challenges the overall narrative of the Sandinista party as the chosen path for the country’s leadership. As will be demonstrated in chapter five, the stories and monuments focus on male, mestizo, Sandinista revolutionary heroes and their “predecessor” Sandino. In Waspán, further silencing occurs as the women struggle to have their stories recognized within the Miskitu community because of the dominant role men hold in the culture. “Nicaragua society has a long history of machismo. Its traditional family structure is both patriarchal and brittle, and under such conditions, women and children suffer the brunt of economic inequalities” (Lancaster 1994, 13).

At the national level, and within the confines of the Miskitu community, machismo plays a role in which stories are told and how male dominance is reproduced in national narratives to include the narratives of armed conflict. As demonstrated in women’s interviews presented in chapter six, these narratives may have real effects on the present day lives of women, creating barriers to access to employment, power in the domestic sphere, political positions, and appropriate healthcare. “Machismo, no less than capitalism, is a system. Like racism, homophobia, and other forms of arbitrary power, arbitrary stigma, machismo is resilient because it constitutes not simply a form of
‘consciousness,’ not ‘ideology’ in the classical understanding of the concept, but a field of productive relations” (Lancaster 1994, 20).

Based on her work with the Miskitu of the Caribbean Coast, Herilhy (2011) documents the role of the Moravian and Catholic churches in reproducing male-dominated ideas about gender and power and promoting machista ideologies (while noting that the Moravian church provides women some opportunities for professional advancement). She also notes that the Miskitu gender ideology since the 1990’s has viewed women as mothers and caregivers, and therefore not good candidates for public positions such as public office. She notes that while the Miskitu are traditionally a matrifocal group where language and culture are passed from women, and “women have high status living in female-centered domestic groups,” they also live in a region that “is positioned within the patriarchal Latin American nation-state.”

It may be argued that women have held high political office in Nicaragua, as demonstrated by the election of Violeta Chamorro to the presidency, or Rosario Murillo to the Vice Presidency, and therefore, women have an equal opportunity in Nicaragua’s political realm. However, Kampwirth (2006) argues that “doña Violeta” as she was known, ran on a platform of promoting traditional values for women and through her political discourse and choice of dress, positioned herself as a “Virgin Mary” figure. Chamorro was, at the time of her election, the widow to Pedro Joaquín Chamorro, who had led his family’s news organization as editor of the Managua based newspaper, La Prensa. As editor, he publicly opposed the Somoza Debayle government and also was accused in attempts to overthrow Luis Somoza Debayle, and was imprisoned several times for his anti-government actions. He was murdered in 1978, and it is widely
believed that the execution was carried out by a member of the Somoza family, which positioned him to be recognized as a martyr in the Sandinista struggle. Following his death, doña Violeta took over as editor and the paper continued to openly criticize the government. When the Sandinistas overthrew the government of Anastasio Somoza Debayle, Violeta and La Prensa supported the Sandinistas, and she served as a right wing member of the provisional government, (Junta of National Reconstruction) led by Daniel Ortega in 1980. She resigned shortly after, as it became clear that she would have little power in the emergent government that was heavily left-leaning. She returned to leading La Prensa and which continued its tradition of offering critique of the government.

With little political experience, arguably it was doña Violeta husband's fame that provided an avenue for public support in the 1990 election. Kampwirth (2006) suggests that doña Violeta’s platform was actually anti-feminist in nature, playing towards a conservative Catholic base and traditional values such as female subservience to men in the household. Kampwirth notes that throughout her campaign, “doña Violeta reminded the public that she is the widow of a heroic figure, Pedro Joaquín, and that she had been a good traditional wife to him” (78). Further, Kampwirth suggests that instead of “formal political experiences, doña Violeta promised to draw on her experiences as a wife, widow, and mother” (78) in order to end war and rebuild Nicaraguan families. During her administration, Chamorro reversed many Sandinista policies that had related in gains for women including those related to childcare and reproductive rights.
Rosario Murillo (born 1951) became involved in supporting the FSLN revolutionary acts in 1969 through providing shelter to revolutionaries and also participating in anti-Somoza communication (print and radio). She met Daniel Ortega during the revolutionary period and through her marriage participated in various governmental communications functions before appearing on his Presidential ticket in 2016 as the Vice Presidential candidate. While she had some political experience, most certainly her marriage to revolutionary hero and long-time leader Daniel Ortega provided a platform to rise to the high political position. Murillo, like Chamorro, has also engaged in anti-feminist actions, most notably, supporting the Catholic Church’s position on abortion and publicly defending her husband President Daniel Ortega, against her daughter Zoilamérica’s accusation in 1998 that Ortega had molested her from 1978-1990.

Some may also argue that as many women participated as combatants and, in some cases, in leadership roles in the FSLN revolution, women would now find themselves empowered in the current Sandinista politics. However, in their extensive interviews with former women who served as combatants in the Revolution, García, Cottman, and Baltodano (2019) found that

…some of the women who participated in the revolution suggest that nationalism was mainly a patriarchal creation in which males are the primary beneficiaries in which the symbolism that is generated serves to amplify, memorialize, and immortalize the image of men, allowing them to maintain a structure of domination in which women play subordinated roles (107).
Participation in the conflict, therefore may not have created a new space for female leadership, but conversely, reproduced patriarchal values. Romero (2012) suggests that war politics and subsequent efforts for legitimacy with the Nicaraguan central government have led to “masculinization of the public space” (Romero 2012, 450).

This has implications in the indigenous communities as well. Sexism is evident in the current leadership structure of the indigenous political party, Yapti Tasba Masraka Nanih Aslatakanka (Miskitu for “Sons of Mother Earth) or YATAMA, and in the local politics. “Despite women’s involvement in many different spaces of indigenous politics (wars, rallies, popular uprisings, assemblies, participation in electoral processes, and so on) their leadership has not been recognized and valued as equally important as the leadership of indigenous men” (Romero 2012, 448). Although there have been Miskitu females elected to regional office, the political field remains male-dominated. Romero (2012) discusses how even some of the domestic power held in the homes before the conflict has had a cultural shift. “The politics of the war enhanced the destructive elements of masculine power to the detriment of women’s role in maintaining communitarian forms of life as the war disrupted families and tore at long-lasting kin-related bonds” (451). Preference for male leadership by the central Nicaraguan state (for example, in the political realm) may influence the power structure within the Miskitu community. However, Herlihy notes that it is not the Nicaraguan state alone that serves to subjugate women. “Oppressive patriarchal ideologies revolving around perceptions of motherhood and womanhood also arise at the local and regional level” (237).

In conclusion, this chapter provides a framework for the structural roots of silencing in Nicaragua and in the Miskitu community due to race, political affiliation, and
gender. This overview of the historical trajectory of the Miskitu people is necessary to understanding how silences have entered the historical production of Contra War narratives, and why the stories of these women are not widely known or celebrated at the national or local level in retrospective significance. In the following chapter, I summarize the relevant literature to provide a theoretical framework for analyzing discourse and power. I also present a definition of “heritage” and establish the role of heritage in transmitting national and local values. Finally, I explain why I utilize the specific lens of “silencing” in heritage discourse as an act that (re)produces power. This analytical lens highlights the women’s experiences with heritage discourses and their struggle for representation within them.
CHAPTER 3: RELEVANT LITERATURE AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A major focus of this research project and thesis is the relationship between discourse and power. Critical Theory (with attention to Feminist Critical Theory) provides an overall theory that guides the data analysis for this project. Within this framework, the anthropological concepts of “heritage production,” and “silencing,” inform the specific focus on how citizens experience representation within discourse in their local community and nation-state. Finally, the literature on oral history provides a background for this project to discover and help render visible counter-hegemonic discourses in the production of heritage.

Critical Theory

LeCompte and Schensul (2010) relate that critical theory is concerned with “how the history and political economy of a nation, state, or other system exerts direct or indirect domination over the political, economic, social, and cultural expressions of citizens or residents, including ethnic minority groups and others who are marginalized without power” (63). They add that critical theorists “view their task as uncovering and describing relationships of power so as to change inequities inherent in them” (63). With gender being a key factor in the experiences of these women, I chose to focus on feminist critical theory, which falls under an umbrella epistemic stance of critique or critical theory. Davis and Craven (2016) suggest that feminist thinking “is organized around supporting the struggles of people whose lives are marked and marred by structural inequalities” (8). This project is one aimed at responding to the request of a
group suffering from structural inequalities. While an analysis of gender did in fact, provide a relevant framework for the project, gender only tells part of the story of the marginalization of these people. The “silencing” of the Miskitu as described earlier involves a complex interplay of race, and politics. For the females, gender is an additional category that may lead the women to face structural barriers to being recognized in heritage narratives. Davis and Craven suggest that feminist ethnography “attends to the dynamics of power in social interaction that starts from a gender analysis” (Davis and Craven 2016, 9).

Critical Theory and Heritage Production

One way that power is represented in communities and nation-states is through heritage production. Jackson (2012) defines “heritage” as “anything a community, a nation, a stakeholder, or a family wants to save, make active, and continue in the present” (23). This definition makes it clear that the production of “heritage” involve conscious “choices.” Not all memories or events will be rendered visible in heritage production. Likewise, Lowenthal (1996) defines heritage in a way that is narrower than all available history, and involves the work of editing and interpreting. He suggests that heritage “departs from history in what it sees, what it stresses, and what it changes. From the same past, history and heritage carve out unlike and often competing insights” (167).

To understand the choices made in heritage production within a nation-state, it is useful to consider the concept of “nationalism.” Anderson (2006) poses nations as “imagined” political communities that are inherently limited and sovereign. He suggests that the concept of nationalism emerged in the 18th century as Enlightenment thinking...
began to eclipse religious modes of thought. Anderson argues that the adoption of “nationalism” marks a “secular transformation” (12) from a world organized into religious communities and dynastic realms into one organized into nation-states. Building off the previous religious/dynastic models, these emerging nation-states attempted to engender nationalism as a form of “religion” and the concept of nations as “eternal.” At the same time, the people(s) represented in a nation’s heritage discourse would be viewed as “divine” and/or righteous.

Through a framework of “nationalism,” heritage discourses would create fellowship among the members of a nation-state, superseding any ethnic or linguistic difference. Nationally supported heritage production is a means to create a common “ancestry” for diverse groups of people within its boundaries. “It is not an easy thing to convince people who might not even recognize each other’s existence to form common purpose with a state” (Chambers 2006, 16). If citizens can buy into that common ancestry, then visible products of heritage production may provide “a glimmer of hope that all the members of the state might aspire to that heritage—an implied promise that, in terms of inheritance, the state might indeed become the estate of its constituencies” (Chambers 2006, 16). Such an estate increases in value if it is competitive on the global stage. For example, preserving evidence of the ingenuity of ancient civilizations geographically tied to the nation-state or collecting and displaying a region’s great works of art can position a nation as worthy and as a formidable entity vis-à-vis arbitrary conceptions of the “great empires” of the past. “Whether one accepts that as a starting-point of the whole heritage enterprise or not, there is little doubt that a vast amount of heritage is recognized, designated and conserved by governments for a variety of
purposes, though they are usually closely concerned with prestige and legitimation” (Howard 2003, 131).

For narratives to gain retrospective significance at the local and national level, they must become visible in the authorized heritage discourse (Smith 2006). The authorized discourses are those that are produced and reproduced by people in power, and found in museums, monuments, heritage sites, national parks, governmental publications, and national curriculum. Through these means, national values are transmitted and the stories and accomplishments of those in power are celebrated and made highly visible. Smith (2006) contends that heritage management is never objective. “The meanings subsequently created,” she explains, “speak to the cultural and social needs of the present, but these meanings will be linked to the past so that they in turn are given authority and validity” (88). Smith suggests that the discourse of heritage around the globe may both represent and maintain selected values. “Some of the central values re-created and rehearsed in this process relate to narratives of nation, national identity and the social and historical identities of Western elites” (88). Likewise, Lowenthal (1996) suggests that through heritage production, the past can tell us who we are in the present. “In domesticating the past,” Lowenthal reports, “we enlist it for present causes. Legends of origin and endurance, of victory or calamity, project the present back, the past forward, they align us with forbearers whose virtues we share and whose vices we shun” (xi). Harrison (2013) also suggests that heritage production is a way of engaging with the past to govern our present purposes. “Heritage is not a passive process of simply preserving things from the past that remain, but an active process of assembling a series of objects, places and practices that we choose to hold
up as a mirror to the present, associated with a particular set of values we wish to take with us into the future” (Harrison 2013, 4).

Heritage production can serve to (re)produce power of certain groups over others. “Heritage has largely become an instrument that defines the disturbances, irregularities, and uncertainties of the present much more than it truly represents the past” (Chamber 2006, 2). There is therefore a benefit to groups in power to create national myths that glorify figures from the past but also connect them to ruling parties in the present day. If the heritage discourses are nationalistic in nature and they are framed in a way that equates certain values, ideals, and practices of certain groups with the concept of the “nation,” then controlling such narratives may be an important strategy for those wishing to gain or retain power. "Nationalism as an ideology is by definition both inclusive and exclusive. It sets boundaries between nationals and foreigners, but it may also be used to legitimize the privileged access of certain groups within the state to political power” (Hooker 2010, 248).

In Nicaragua (as in many countries), these efforts result in myriad efforts to include the creation (or revision) of museums, monuments and heritage sites. Howard (2003) discusses how governments “conserve and restore the monuments of another in order to give credence and legitimacy to their own existence” (132). The choice of these monuments may create a set of national fictions. Many of Nicaragua’s monuments relate to armed resistance. Abousnouga and Machin (2010) argue that monuments can be employed both in fostering nationalism and legitimizing militarism. They analyze how the height and size of monuments create meaning for the viewer, to include creating a metaphorical connection to the importance of the person(s). When
military figures are included in the monuments, it creates a sense of the divine. “We often kneel before royalty, or sit lower than those of higher status. We also associate height and loftiness of ideals…” (234).

Pretes (2003) reports that heritage sites of significance “help to create a common identity or “imagined community” among a diverse population. Museums give the nation “a history and sense of common heritage, present the defining characteristics of nationhood, and display historical evidence of its existence. They also manifest the foundation myth of the nation…” (127). Museums, therefore are an “authorizing” body, which may serve as a source of the origin story that is requisite to forming a religious-type devotion to the idea of a nation. Pretes argues that the “creation of a national identity operates through the use of “guiding fictions”, which are commonly held beliefs that shape people’s attachment to the nation…when produced by an elite, they reflect a hegemonic discourse of power” (128). Likewise, Lavine and Karp (1991) suggests that museums reflect values and choices of those in power.

Every museum exhibition, whatever its overt subject, inevitably draws on the cultural assumptions and resources of the people who make it. Decisions are made to emphasize one element and downplay others. The assumptions underpinning these decisions vary according to culture over time, place, and type of museum or exhibit (Lavine and Karp 1991, 1).

As in many nation-states, heritage is contested in Nicaragua and the discourses reproduce the values of those in power. The importance of controlling the heritage narrative can be exemplified in the way they have been “rewritten” across various presidential administrations. Finney (2015) outlines the history of the destruction and
production of heritage cultural material in Nicaragua. She notes that upon the triumph of the Sandinista Revolution, monuments to the Somoza family were “vehemently sought out and destroyed” (6). With an understanding that authorized heritage discourse is representative of power, this act can be viewed as both a symbolic end to the Somoza regime, but also as a way for the Sandinista/Ortega administration to demonstrate its power over the dictatorial past. During the first period of Sandinista rule (1979-1990) there was an effort to memorialize the success of the revolution through murals, monuments, and the naming of streets and sites to honor revolutionary heroes, to include left-wing revolutionary and/or political figures throughout Latin America (e.g. Simón Bolívar, Ernesto "Che" Guevara and Salvador Allende). In this way the Sandinistas were able to reproduce power in the nation-state by legitimate revolutionary heroes as righteous, while also framing the revolution in the larger discourse of Latin American opposition to imperialism.

Finney notes that the election of the neoliberal administrator Violeta Chamorro in 1990 began "a systematic destruction of murals created during the revolutionary period" (6). With a focus strengthening the economy and perhaps disavowing the legitimacy of the Sandinista party, the governmental focus on heritage production decreased, and names of buildings and streets were changed to decrease the focus on revolutionary heroes. Finney notes that the return of the Sandinistas to power (and the return of Daniel Ortega to the presidency) in 2006 “brought with it a revival of revolutionary imagery with new attempts to synchronize old images with the FSLN’s current agenda” (5). The importance of naming to political ends is evident in the revision of the name of the national airport that opened in 1968 as Las Mercedes, renamed Aeropuerto
*Internacional Augusto C. Sandino* (Augusto C. Sandino International Airport) in the 1980’s under Sandinista rule, changed to *Aeropuerto Internacional de Managua* (Managua International Airport) under neoliberal President Arnoldo Alemán in 2001, and then changed back to Augusto C. Sandino International Airport in 2007 after the Sandinistas returned to the presidential office. This type of pendulum swing of power represented in revising the message in heritage sites echoes Lowenthal’s (1996) pronouncement: “What heritage does not highlight it often hides (156).

Palmer (1988) analyzes the construction of “Sandinismo” in Nicaragua. Sandinismo at its heart is that Sandino began a revolutionary (and/or anti-imperialist) path that should be followed by future generations when threatened by foreign or domestic dictatorial conditions. Palmer shows that through the essays of Carlos Fonseca Amador, the FSLN “formally integrated Sandino the historical figure into the ideology of their revolutionary struggle” (91-92). He suggests that once Fonseca Amador died in combat “his writings guided the FSLN’s resurrecting and reconstructing the image of Sandino in order to reshape it into the dominant symbol of a powerful revolutionary ideology (92). Palmer argues that during Fonseca’s most intensive period of FSLN ideological writing, his use of Sandino discourse provided “a justification of the primacy and moral authority of the FSLN as the revolutionary vanguard, and a captivating and symbolic national narrative intended to provide the popular classes of Nicaragua with meaning, purpose, and an entrée into their country’s historic currents of armed opposition to tyranny” (97). He argues that Fonseca Amador created a discourse around Sandino that made him analogous to a Christ figure, and further “succeeded in constructing a philosophy of Nicaraguan history of which the FSLN is the only legitimate
Inheritor” (101). In this sense, Sandino is divine and his “progeny,” the FSLN revolutionaries and the Sandinista political party, are righteous and evidence that the country remain on the divine path. This myth and the genealogical connection from Sandino to President Daniel Ortega are ripe sources for heritage production. As Domingo (2015) reports, it is “un triángulo cerrado: Sandino es la nación y al mismo tiempo es el partido, por lo tanto, el partido es la nación” (a closed triangle: Sandino is the nation, and at the same time is the party, thus, the party is the nation) (para. 59).

Heritage narratives promoting nationalism or legitimizing the rule of those in power are also found in the curriculum and education materials in many nations. In 1980, the Ministerio de Educación (Ministry of Education, MINED) in Nicaragua created curriculum materials of 23 lessons for the Cruzada Nacional de Alfabetización (National Literacy Crusade) entitled El Amanecer del Pueblo (The Dawn of the People), with a section entitled “Héroes y Mártires por la Liberación de Nicaragua” (Heroes and Martyrs for Liberation of Nicaragua). Father Fernando Cardenal was appointed national coordinator of the literacy campaign in August 1979. He oversaw the “brigadistas,” the volunteers, who were secondary and university students as well as teachers, who in 1980 went for five months to the mountains and rural areas. Hanemann (2005) reports that in those five months, 95,582 brigadistas engaged in literacy development with 406,056 citizens. In a follow-up campaign in 1981, 12,644 people in the Atlantic were reported as becoming literate.

The design of the Literacy Campaign curriculum followed the critical pedagogy method espoused by Brazilian educator and philosopher Paolo Freire. “In the Nicaraguan adaptation of Freire’s method, a national textbook provided a standard set
of words and exercises. The lessons were based on recent Nicaraguan history and the incidents of the Nicaraguan Revolution” (Deiner 1981, 124). Critics of the curriculum “accuse the Sandinistas of using the campaign as a tool for ‘political indoctrination’ (Hanemann 2005, 1). Even the title of the literacy materials, “The Dawn of the People,” suggests that the content within may tell the people about their beginnings. With the content focusing on Sandino and the FSLN Revolution, there is a suggestion that these figures and their rebellious acts “awakened” an otherwise dormant nation, reminiscent of Marxist ideologies of “proletariat” awakenings. Deiner (1981) offers the critique that “the drive for literacy was only a cover for building partisan support for the Sandinistas and their policies, and that the Literacy text gives a picture of a Sandinista revolution than a Nicaragua revolution” (123). In any case, these materials demonstrate that attempts to create a heritage narrative beginning with Sandino leading to the FSLN victory found its way into Nicaragua’s curriculum from the earliest days of the Sandinista government.

Critical Theory and “Silencing”

This thesis looks at power in the form of the representation of the voices of citizens within their community and their nation-state. As this is an important anthropological issue, the work of anthropologist Michel Rolph-Trouillot (1995) and his analysis of power and the production of history is a useful critical framework. Trouillot’s anthropological theory of “silencing” is useful considering the representation of groups in Nicaragua in that it illuminates the various reasons there may be omissions in national narratives. Trouillot (1995) argues that silences “enter the process of historical production at four crucial moments: the moment of fact creation (the making of
sources); the moment of fact assembly (the making of archives), the moment of fact retrieval (the making of narratives); and the moment of retrospective significance (the making of history in the final instance)” (1995, 26). His framework allows the researcher to distinguish instances where omission is simply due to circumstances at a given historical moment preventing the creation or maintenance of a record from conscious acts of omission where only selected facts are retrieved or published (such as those facts that support the dominance of the male, mestizo, Sandinista). “The augmentation and erasure that take place in the production of heritage are sometimes inadvertent and other times carefully considered and particularly so where contentious or disturbing aspects of heritage are concerned” (Dearborn & Stallmeyer 2010, 33-34). It may be argued that mission of a heritage site or heritage materials would rightly call for certain omissions as a way to protect or shield audiences from aspects that may lead to disengagement. However, images of violence are ubiquitous in Nicaraguan national museums and memorials, and there are many monuments and images of revolutionary fighters.

Trouillot (1995) argues that “any historical narrative is a particular bundle of silences, the result of a unique process, and the operation required to deconstruct these silences will vary accordingly” (27). His framework opens the door to interrogate the available Contra War narratives (both within and outside of Nicaragua) and to assume there are methods to unlock or unveil previously silenced narrative. Trouillot also contends that silences are inevitable, and not all silences are representative of aggressive action against a group. “Silences,” Trouillot explains, “are inherent in history because any single event enters history with some of its constituting parts missing.
Something is always left out while something else is recorded” (49). Armed with the assumption that omissions are inevitable (but may also be representative of power with a society), I entered this project in search of that which is silenced and worked with the community to find a way to expand the available heritage narratives. My work is inspired by Trouillot’s assertion that

…the continuous enlargement of the physical boundaries of historical production is useful and necessary. The turn toward hitherto neglected sources (e.g. diaries, images, bodies) and the emphasis of unused facts (e.g. facts of gender, race, and class, facts of the life cycle, facts of resistance) are path-breaking developments (Trouillot 1995, 49).

Trouillot (1995) provides three cases that inform the unveiling and deconstruction of silencing. In one case, he sketches an alternative image of a former enslaved person who became a colonel in the Haitian Revolution. Trouillot’s narrative “reveals the silences that buried” (27) the story of Colonel Jean-Baptiste Sans-Souci. He then utilizes infrequently retrieved (but available) facts to construct an alternative narrative that challenges assumptions about the power of formerly enslaved peoples. Trouillot’s second case reveals silencing of the Haitian Revolution as a historical event “due to uneven power in the production of sources, archives and narratives” (27). In this case, he demonstrates that the Haitian Revolution was “unthinkable” even at the moment it was occurring due to deeply held racist ideologies and a worldview of white hegemony within and outside Saint-Domingue. Finally, he focuses on the narrative of the “discovery” of the Americas and the appropriated personas of Columbus that “masks a history of conflicts” (28) and has had a global impact on the retrospective significance of
Columbus and white, European global hegemony. These cases are resonant with historical production in Nicaragua as conflict is at the heart of national narratives, and omissions, like those in the narratives of Haitian Revolution and the European encounter with the Americas, are representative of power.

Silencing in Nicaragua is evident in which groups are represented in national narratives, and which groups are not. In a lecture entitled “Anthropology and the Analysis of Ideology,” Asad (1979) discusses “authoritative discourse” which he defines as “materially founded discourse which seeks continually to pre-empt the space of radically opposed utterances and so to prevent them from being uttered” (621). Similarly, Smith (2006) suggests that national heritage stories may be a vehicle to disseminate a mission, values, or an “authorized discourse” (Smith 2006) representing the views of empowered groups. As documented in chapter 5, these authoritative or authorized discourses are omnipresent in Nicaragua with propaganda posters supporting the ruling Sandinista party and the male, mestizo administration can be found littering even the most remote mountain villages. They are also carried in national curriculum materials that share a history favoring the Sandinista group and which all contain the Sandinista party slogans on the front cover, thereby “authorizing” the information contained within. The silencing of the Contra War, the Miskitu people, and the contribution of the Miskitu women to the conflict gives further “voice” to the narrative that supports the current administration in Nicaragua, and the hegemony of the male, mestizo, Sandinista.

Trouillot’s theory of silencing supports this research by providing a framework to discover omissions in the production of national heritage narratives and omissions in the
authoritative or authorized discourses of those in power in Nicaragua who represent racial categories, political affiliations, and gender that are different from the interviewees. These differences, as voiced by the women in chapter six, leave them vulnerable to silencing. Trouillot’s theory further assumes that what is considered “history in the final instance” is open to revision through diligent research, which may allow alternative narratives to interrupt silencing and gain retrospective significance.

**Critical Theory and Oral history**

I chose oral history as the method for uncovering silencing and as well as to create a project that unveils and addresses the power structure in Nicaragua. Fisher (2016) reports that oral histories “can disrupt master narratives while at the same time serve as important sources of knowledge” and “illuminate people’s every day experiences shaped by race, class, gender, and sexuality” (88). Oral history is well suited to “voicing” as it involves a dynamic relationship between a researcher and members of a community, to record and document the lived experiences of people that can help illuminate previously silenced aspects of the historical record, and at times challenge master narratives. Oral history can be transformative in terms of the production of history. Angrosino (2008) suggests that much of the available history “consists of records that history’s winners - groups that hold some sort of elite status in society - have thought worth preserving. As a result, the experiences of women, minorities, the poor, those marginalized for whatever reason have rarely made it into the official record” (1-2). In some ways, oral history challenges established ideas of what history is, and what academic research is, and who has the authority to engage in the work of producing history. “Oral history operates on the assumption that history is all
around us and that we all have access to it. It is not the exclusive preserve of the wealthy and the powerful. We can, in fact, find it in the living memories and experiences of those still among us” (Angrosino, 2008, 3).

Despite any challenges the oral history method may present to the established methods of the history discipline, oral history is an academic method in its own right and lends itself to the work of all the social sciences. It is useful in applied anthropology as it is amenable to the study of the lifeways of people, but also to effect positive change for people. Oral history “is above all the systematic collection of living people’s testimony about their own experiences or the experiences of those who have passed remembrances along to them” (Angrosino 2008, 6). Thus, applied anthropologists may learn about the lifeways of people through the oral history that they choose to share.

As part of the pilot project, I visited with the USF Oral History Project staff to learn about best practices, and learn about oral history methods resources to include the Oral History Associations Principles and Best Practices, Society for Applied Anthropology (SFAA) Oral History Project, the Oral History Interview Guidelines from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, the US Army Guide to Oral History, and USF Professor Michael Angrosino’s book *Exploring Oral History: A Window on the Past*. These resources provide guidelines for engaging in oral history as an academic endeavor, with ethical and “do no harm/do some good” actions. “Oral history,” Angrosino (2008) explains, “involves use of structured interview format, recording under controlled circumstances with high quality sound or video equipment, careful processing of the recordings, provisions to make available to a scholarly audience, attention to copyright and other legal scholarly issues” (6).
As the theoretical framework of the project focuses on silencing, the oral history method is appropriate to advance this applied project. Angrosino notes “history is written by the victors” (2008, 1). It may be the case that oral history provides a method of documenting voices beyond the victors/conquered binary. From a critical perspective, applied anthropology can be employed to reduce inequality. In the case of heritage production, “Oral history by contrast makes a much fairer trial possible: witnesses can now be called from the under-classes, the unprivileged, and the defeated” (Thompson 2016, 36). In the case of Nicaragua, governmental restrictions have rendered the authorized history of the nation to not just be in favor of the victors (i.e. the Sandinistas) but also effectively erase any other narratives that even suggest opposition to that party. Thus, oral history focused on these narratives that have been erased not only provides a window into the life experiences of a marginalized group, but its publication may also serve to defy the reproduction of the assumption of Sandinista hegemony in national leadership. Oral history gives us “a more realistic and fair reconstruction of the past, a challenge to the established account. In doing so, oral history has radical implications for the social message of history as a whole” (Thompson 2016, 36).

Oral history is always a co-creation between the interviewer and the interviewees. The final product of this project, a book of the women’s stories told in the voices of the participants, is likewise a co-creation. “Oral history sources are narrative sources” (Portelli 2016, 51), and thus, the use of a narrative style within the heritage storybook can preserve the nature of the storytelling of the participants. The book of stories can be used in the classroom to celebrate the heritage of the community, as defined by the community. Most certainly, there is available “history” and archive data.
about the Caribbean Coast and the people’s participation in the Contra War. However, much of the literature is documented by journalists, activists, and social scientists that are outsiders to the community. For this project, the written product is a heritage book with stories as the community remembers and understands the events. Thompson (2016) reports that oral history can be transformative for communities.

It can be used to change the focus of history itself, and open up new areas of inquiry; it can break down barriers between teachers and students, between generations, between educational institutions and the world outside; and in the writing of history—whether in books, or museums or radio and film—it can give back to the people who made and experienced history, through their own words, a central place (24).

In oral history, the “organization of the narrative reveals a great deal about the speaker’s relationship to their history” (Portelli 2016, 52). The participants’ stories both complement and challenge the extant narratives of the Contra War. At the same time, oral history illuminates how the community engages the past for present purposes, and the sense they make of their participation. “Oral sources tell us not just what people did, but what they wanted to do, and what they believed they were doing, and what they now think they did” (Portelli 2016, 51). This method also is particularly well suited to voicing marginalized stories. Anderson and Jack (2016) note that oral interviews “are particularly valuable for uncovering women’s perspectives” (179), and a Maori indigenous researcher, Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2013) suggests that oral history is aligned with indigenous empowerment. “Telling our stories from the past, reclaiming the past, giving testimony to the injustices of the past,” Smith asserts, “are all strategies which are commonly employed by indigenous people struggling for justice” (36). She contends that silencing is an issue in relation to indigenous groups, but storytelling is a form of
empowerment. “On the international scene it is extremely rare and unusual when
indigenous accounts are accepted and acknowledged as valid interpretations of what
has taken place. And yet, the need to tell our stories remains the powerful and
imperative of a powerful form of resistance” (36).

In an effort to support the empowerment of communities, the applied
anthropologist provides a framework for the interview to support the interviewees in
sharing significant memories from the time period/place under study. “The final result of
the interview is the product of both the narrator and the researcher” (Portelli 2016, 55).
Thus, before publication, the Miskitu women, through what they did and did not
volunteer in their oral history, determined the content of the heritage book, and
endorsed the design and layout of the stories and photos. In oral history, both the
interviewer and the interviewees come into the project with their own agendas.

In conclusion, this chapter outlined how critical theory provides a lens to analyze
discourse and power in Nicaragua. I chose Critical Theory as a lens to analyze the
dominant national narrative in Nicaragua as transmitted through museums, monuments,
heritage sites, and curriculum. I utilized Critical Theory coupled with Trouillot’s theory of
how silencing enter historical production in order to identify silences in the dominant
national narratives in Nicaragua. Finally, Critical Theory is applied to oral history in
order to interrupt silences (specifically those that silence the women of Waspán) and
provide voice to alternative narratives. In the following chapter, I explain the methods of
data collection to analyze heritage production and to interrupt silencing.
CHAPTER 4: METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Data Collection-Dominant National Narratives

To gain an understanding of the dominant heritage narratives in Nicaragua, I traveled to the country in March 2017, July 2017, November 2017, March 2018, July 2018, and March 2019, with each trip lasting between a week and 10 days. During these trips, I spent time in the three major cities, Managua, León, Granada, as well as several municipalities throughout the pacific coast (both urban and rural). I also spent time in the indigenous areas of Mozonte and Waspán. During these visits, I recorded 180 pages (5"X 7" journal) of field notes plus 79 pages of typed, double-spaced summaries of visits and interviews.

I set out to get a broad understanding of national heritage production by visiting museums, monuments, and heritage sites supported or promoted by the government. The Instituto Nicaragüense de Cultura (Nicaraguan Institute of Culture) is an arm of the government that preserves and maintains cultural heritage, museums and historical sites. Its Website (http://www.inc.gob.ni/museos/) lists the national, regional and local museums and heritage sites with Managua, Masaya, and León being the municipalities with the most listings for cultural and historical sites.

Managua is the capital and largest city in the country, the site of many historical revolutionary events, and the political center of the country. Before Managua was named the capital in 1852, both León and Granada were alternately considered the country’s capital. León is the second largest city in Nicaragua and known for being the
intellectual birthplace of the revolution, as the FSLN was borne out of student groups at
the University of Léon and National Autonomous University of Nicaragua at León
UNAN- León in the 1950’s and 1960’s. Masaya is known for being the “cradle of
Nicaraguan Folklore” and was the site of historical revolutionary events. In addition to
museums in Managua and León, I visited a national park/museum in Masaya, and
locally owned and curated museums in Diriamba and Waspán. At two of the museums, I
recorded videos of the tour for a total of 71 minutes and 43 seconds (Museo de la
Revolución, 33:10 and Museo Auka Tangni, 38:33). Table 1 lists the museums I visited
and the manner in which I recorded data during the visits.

Table 1. Visits to Museums

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Date(s) of Visit</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Record</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Museo de la Revolución (Revolution Museum) Tour led by Ricardo</td>
<td>July 16, 2017*, March 3, 2018</td>
<td>León, Nicaragua</td>
<td>Fieldnotes and Photography</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Museo Rubén Darío (Rubén Darío Museum)</td>
<td>July 16, 2017, March 3, 2018</td>
<td>León, Nicaragua</td>
<td>Fieldnotes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Galería de Héroes y Mártires (Gallery of Heroes and Martyrs) Discussion led by Luisa Amanda</td>
<td>March 3, 2018*</td>
<td>León, Nicaragua</td>
<td>Fieldnotes and Photography</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Huellas de Acahualinca Museo (Museum of the Footprints of Acahualinca) Tour led by Humberto Leon</td>
<td>July 17, 2017*, March 8, 2018*</td>
<td>Managua, Nicaragua</td>
<td>Fieldnotes and Photography</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Most of the monuments and heritage sites I visited were located in Managua and León where public spaces are replete with revolutionary imagery. I also provide an example of a monument and heritage site related to revolution in Masaya and Granada.

Table 2 lists the monuments and heritage sites I visited and the manner in which I recorded data during the visits.

Table 2. Visits to Nicaraguan Monuments and Heritage Sites

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Date(s) of Visit</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Record</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Plaza Hugo Chávez (Hugo Chávez Plaza)</td>
<td>March 5, 2017</td>
<td>Managua, Nicaragua</td>
<td>Fieldnotes and Photography</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puerto Salvador Allende (Port Salvador Allende)</td>
<td>March 4 and 5, 2017</td>
<td>Managua, Nicaragua</td>
<td>Fieldnotes and Photography</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El Guerrillero sin Nombre (The Unknown Guerrilla Soldier)</td>
<td>March 5, 2017 and March 4, 2018</td>
<td>Managua, Nicaragua</td>
<td>Fieldnotes and Photography</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Date(s)</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Notes</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Plaza de la Revolución (Revolution Square)</td>
<td>March 4, 2017</td>
<td>Managua, Nicaragua</td>
<td>Fieldnotes and Photography</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>July 16, 2017</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>March 2, 2018</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casa Presidencial (President’s House)</td>
<td>March 4, 2017</td>
<td>Managua, Nicaragua</td>
<td>Fieldnotes and Photography</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>July 16, 2017</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>March 2, 2018</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parque Central (Central Park with Tombs of FSLN Founders and the El Templo de la Música frieze)</td>
<td>March 4, 2017</td>
<td>Managua, Nicaragua</td>
<td>Fieldnotes and Photography</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>July 16, 2017</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>March 2, 2018</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fortaleza El Coyotepe (The Coyotepe Fort)</td>
<td>March 5, 2017</td>
<td>Masaya, Nicaragua</td>
<td>Fieldnotes and Photography</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tour led by Alberto</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>March 4, 2018*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asamblea Nacional de Nicaragua (National Assembly of Nicaragua, the legislative branch of the Nicaraguan government)</td>
<td>March 7, 2017*</td>
<td>Managua, Nicaragua</td>
<td>Fieldnotes and Photography</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tour led by Asamblea staff</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>March 2, 2018</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Árboles de la Vida (Trees of Life) at El Malecón (The Pier)</td>
<td>March 4, 2019</td>
<td>Managua, Nicaragua</td>
<td>Fieldnotes and Photography</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Augusto César Sandino Statue, Estadio Nacional Dennis Martínez (Dennis Martínez National Stadium)</td>
<td>March 4, 2019</td>
<td>Managua, Nicaragua</td>
<td>Fieldnotes and Photography</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carlos Fonseca Amador Monument</td>
<td>July 16, 2017</td>
<td>León, Nicaragua</td>
<td>Fieldnotes and Photography</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>March 3, 2018</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Augusto César Sandino Monument</td>
<td>July 16, 2017</td>
<td>León, Nicaragua</td>
<td>Fieldnotes and Photography</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>March 3, 2018</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homenaje a Los Héroes y Mártires de Granada (Tribute to the Heroes and Martyrs of Granada)</td>
<td>July 16, 2017</td>
<td>Granada, Nicaragua</td>
<td>Fieldnotes and Photography</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>March 3, 2019</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To understand heritage production as transmitted through curriculum, I reviewed nationally sanctioned curricular materials available through the Nicaraguan government’s Ministerio de Educación (Ministry of Education, MINED). The MINED website https://www.mined.gob.ni/ includes access to view the textbooks for each grade level, and the entirety of each textbook is available to review online. To discover heritage narratives and the production of history, I looked at social studies textbooks. The third grade and seventh grade social studies texts focus on Nicaraguan history, so I focused on these levels. I also visited educational institutions during my trips to Nicaragua. I have visited four elementary schools, and talked with elementary teachers about curriculum. I also have been involved in an educational institution exchange with the Universidad Politécnica de Nicaragua (UPOLI), visited their Managua campus several times, and remain in close contact with UPOLI professors and administrators. I also had the opportunity to meet with Virginia Vijil, who served as a brigadista as a teenager, and who gave a talk and let me review curriculum materials from the FSLN literacy campaign. I analyzed materials from El Amanecer del Pueblo (1980), but also reviewed literacy materials from the time period 2016-2019 to see how the heritage narrative in literacy materials changed over time. Table 3 lists the interactions with Nicaraguan educational institutions and the manner in which I recorded data during the visits.

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4 In 2018, a series of events in Nicaragua led to an outbreak of student protests in Nicaragua now referred to as the El Movimiento "Estudiantil 19 de abril" (The April 19 Student Movement). UPOLI was at the epicenter of the conflict that originated between students and the Ortega administration. I have visited UPOLI both before and after the period of conflict. Because there is still fear and suspicion between the government and the university system, I will not refer to UPOLI professors by their names in the results section.
Table 3. Interactions with Nicaraguan Educational Institutions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Date(s) of Visit</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Record</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discussion on the Literacy Campaign and review of curriculum materials led by Virginia Vijil, former <em>Brigadista</em> (Volunteer Member of the Literacy Brigade)</td>
<td>March 8, 2017</td>
<td>Managua, Nicaragua</td>
<td>Fieldnotes and Photography</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visit to <em>Universidad Politécnica de Nicaragua</em> (Nicaragua Polytechnic University)</td>
<td>March 6, 9, 2017 November 17, 2017 March 7, 2018 March 1, 2019</td>
<td>Managua, Nicaragua</td>
<td>Fieldnotes and Photography</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visit to Santa Julia Community elementary school</td>
<td>March 9, 2017</td>
<td>El Crucero, Nicaragua</td>
<td>Fieldnotes and Photography</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visit to Los Fierros Community elementary school</td>
<td>March 5, 2018</td>
<td>El Cucero, Nicaragua</td>
<td>Fieldnotes and Photography</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visit to <em>Los Cuentos Rincón</em> (The Corner Stories) elementary school</td>
<td>July 9, 11, 2018 March 2, 2019</td>
<td>Masaya, Nicaragua</td>
<td>Fieldnotes and Photography</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visit to <em>Colegio Morava Primaria</em> (Moravian Elementary School) led by “Galil”</td>
<td>March 7, 2019</td>
<td>Waspán, Nicaragua</td>
<td>Fieldnotes and Photography</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In chapter five, I share examples of museum panels, monuments, and pages from curriculum materials to illuminate how the dominant heritage narratives of rebellion in Nicaragua have silenced the Miskitu women who were ex-combatants. Using a Critical Theory and Trouillot’s framework for silencing in the historical production helped me
organize the data in terms of “representing” and “silencing.” I looked for persistent themes in which groups were represented in the heritage narratives, and which groups were silenced. In their analysis of discourses of nations and soldiery, Abousnnouga and Machin (2010) provide a two-level framework for analysis of heritage: denotation and connotation. In the results section, I use this framework to describe what museum panels, monuments, curricular materials, and other governmental publications depict or denote. I describe who or what appears in the heritage product and what it says. For any excerpts from the heritage products that I include for the purpose of examples, I follow each with a translation in English, set aside in brackets. The translation to English is my own. I also provide an analysis of what ideas each heritage product brings across to me a viewer. This may involve descriptions of the size, spatial placement, colors and other features that may have symbolic meaning. Together, the description of the denotation and connotation of Nicaragua’s heritage production provides an overall picture of representation and silencing in the country in regards to the dominant national narrative.

*Date Collection-Interrupting Silences through an Oral History Project*

During the July 2017 pilot study and the March 2019 visit, I stayed in the home of a Miskitu family. The family patriarch, whose nom de guerre was Pipli, was a Miskitu Contra fighter who like many others in the municipality, lived as a refugee in Honduras during the conflict. His daughter, Mayga, who helps her mother run the home-based hotel, was born in the refugee camp during the Contra War. After the war, Pipli became connected with an American NGO and rose to political prominence in the community. The family is well known and the home was chosen as the site to conduct the oral
history interviews in July 2017. Based on an analysis of the oral history data and the field notes, and in discussion with Suhar, it was agreed that the follow-up interviews could be conducted in alternate locations. The decision was made because I had the feeling that some of the women were not fully at ease in Mayga’s home and I was sensitive to the fact that for many, travel to the home was inconvenient. I suggested that it might be less inconvenient for some of the women who lived further away if I traveled to their homes. Suhar agreed. Therefore, in March 2019, Suhar invited me to visit her home and I was invited into the homes of some of the women and men I already interviewed. Visiting their homes and workplaces provided another dimension to the interviews. The experience was altogether less “clinical” than the initial interviews, and the women seemed much more at ease. Some of the interviewees had photos and mementos that informed their narratives. In general, meeting the women in their homes provided a level of comfort to the storytelling that may not have been available in the space where they were interviewed previously.

Building rapport within the community was in part facilitated my colleague, Dr. Bruno Baltodano, who had conducted previous research with the group, was born in Nicaragua, and had developed a longstanding relationship with Suhar. His introductions offered some assurance to the women that I could be trusted. From there, I spent a great deal of time talking to the women about their expectations and sharing with them what I might be able to do to help them with their desire to tell their stories and have them memorialized in a meaningful way. During the first visit, Suhar was present at the interview site during all interviews, so there was an opportunity to discuss how things were going and make course corrections in the interview approach. We also met at
length at the conclusion of the interviews to discuss the next steps. Staying in Mayga’s home created a situation where I was able to know her and her family very well. We both have children, and so we have connected as mothers and even after my fieldwork was completed were able to converse quite regularly, share joys and sorrows as well as encouragement through WhatsApp. This friendship became something I valued deeply and was an unexpected but welcome outcome of this research.

I recognize that like the anthropologist Charles Hale, who has conducted extensive research with the Miskitu, being an American visitor to the community comes with privilege. Hale described how he was categorized by the Miskitu as a “Miriki” (a term some of the women also used to describe me):

Translated literally as “American,” the term was packed with politically charged meanings. Missionaries, company bosses and workers, participants in the University of Wisconsin’s Health Promotion program funded by the US Agency for International Development (USAID), and other North American fieldworkers all had a part of shaping the content of this term in community members’ minds, thereby contributing to their preformed image of me (1994, 11).

Based on my interactions of the women and what I have learned from their interviews, I would add that Miskitu interactions with various Americans that had provided specific military support during the Contra War and/or the common understanding that the United States was providing food, supplies, and weapons during their time in the war had given the Miskitu the general sense that “visitors” from the United States are sympathetic to their cause, and may bring support (financial or otherwise). I recognize that these assumptions allowed me access that may not be available even to
Nicaraguan researchers that are not part of the Miskitu community. As my own political stance is at odds with armed conflict and with the motivation for the United States to provide backing to the Contra conflict, in some ways being the recipient of this privilege is disconcerting. I attempted to reconcile this consternation by being honest with the women, telling them during fieldwork what I could and could not do for them (i.e. I could record their oral histories and create a record of them, I could not fight the current administration to win benefits for the combatants), and by committing to “do no harm,” and “do some good” for this community within this dynamic of privilege.

As a researcher, my agenda was to learn about the women and their experience through oral history, and to help them voice their narratives. I was also motivated to locate and complete an applied project as a requirement of a Master’s Degree. Whether or not I was able to successfully complete my degree was not a concern of the women, and thus the project largely was completed due to their generous sharing of their time with me. I believe that while my agenda was not the same as theirs, they did want to be interviewed, some simply to tell their story to another human being, and others who were vocal about the necessity to have their stories told publicly. They all also expressed interest in the creation of a book that would render their stories public. Through collaboration, I believe I have honored and supported the agendas of the interviewees.

Shopes (2016) provides a framework for editing oral history that includes creating a structure, cutting extraneous material, refining the text, and intervening the text. Shopes suggests when editing, researchers should “do so in a manner that remains faithful to the oral, to the narrator’s words and word order, speech patterns and rhythm,
as well as to the sense of what she is trying to say and the way that sense unfolds” (Shopes 2016, 473). After transcribing the women’s interviews, I sought to create a predictable story structure that would follow a temporal sequence, representing each woman’s life before, during and after participation in the Contra conflict. I recognize that this temporal sequence may be largely predictable to a “Western” audience and not necessarily to all persons. As literacy in Waspán is in large part through the Spanish language, I am assuming that those who would read the text should find such a sequence familiar. A large percentage of what appears in the book is directly cut and pasted from the transcripts (except in the cases of the two women who spoke mostly Miskitu during the interview; in these cases, I needed to change the third person response of the translator to first person). Though largely the oral history interviews themselves followed a “before, during, and after” structure, the dynamics of interviewing provide that interviewees might jump back and forth between past and present, and thus, their responses as organized in the book may not necessarily fall in the exact same order as they did during the interview.

Good (2016) reports that “editorial intervention, at any level, only becomes problematic when the reader is not given information that explains the process and the source of changes” (466). Light editing was also involved to (at times) replace pronouns with actual names, or to delete repeated words when they did not appear to be repeated for the purpose of emphasis of a key point. In contrast, some phrases appear in the book repetitively in ways that are unusual in academic writing, but are typical in spoken language to emphasize a point. I made editorial decisions about when to leave these phrases in; when the context suggested that the women were repeating themselves for
emphasis. For the sake of readability, I deleted (where meaning was not changed) “filler” words such as “sí,” “de,” “este,” and “pues.” Rarely tense of a verb was changed, and in fact, in most cases I kept the tense of the verbs spoken by the women even when they were speaking about the past in present tense. Leaving this in place gives the reader more of the impression that they are reading words as they were spoken, rather than as rendered into an academic rhetorical structure associated with a textbook. In that vein, some of the phrases used by the women may appear to be colloquial or conversational, giving some level of fidelity to the oral history method. The women’s’ use of diminutives with the –ito, and –ita morphemes (such as in discussing their armas (weapons) as armitas) were left intact. This thesis project honors the community of Waspán as inspired by other collaborative oral history projects such as “The Neighborhood Story Project” founded in 2004 by Rachel Breunlin and Abram Himelstein, as well as and the applied anthropology project led Dr. Roberta Baer which involved oral history work with refugees from Afghanistan, Bosnia, Burma, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Cuba, Haiti and Somalia and that resulted in the creation “American Stories,” which is used as curriculum in ESL classes.

Within this thesis, I have chosen excerpts of the interviews to illuminate the themes I discovered. I chose to analyze the data analysis based on the model presented by LeCompte and Schensul (2010). While transcribing the interviews I kept a log of key ideas that emerged especially as related to silencing. After all interviews were transcribed I read over them several times as part of a “a systematic process involving comparing, contrasting, looking for linkages, similarities, and differences, and finding sequences, co-occurrences, and absences” (199). I began to sort excerpts of the
interview transcripts into “conceptual chunks” as I saw relationships among what the women shared. After reading, re-reading and re-sorting relevant transcript excerpts, I was ready to reconsider the categories based on the excerpts under them, adding to some, deleting from others as themes emerged. Through this process I became more and more familiar with the data, and the final themes presented in chapter six speaks to the issue of silencing, and represent ideas that were present across multiple (and in most cases) all interviews. As the interviews were conducted in Spanish, I follow each interview excerpt with a translation in English, set aside in brackets. The translation to English is my own.

Jesse (2016) writes about the ethics and methodology of oral history amid highly politicized research settings. She describes how she remained reluctant to publish her research: “not because I feared personal reproach from the Rwandan and Bosnian governments…but because I worried about the repercussions of my findings for my participants” (675). During the years of doing this research, I have had similar trepidations. By request of the women, the heritage book (applied project) contains their names and photos. Such a publication (that outlines the Miskitu women’s participation in the Contra conflict, and their critique of the Sandinistas) even if only distributed by them within their own community, puts the women at risk with pro-Sandinista party loyalists, and with the Nicaraguan national government. For this reason, I asked each woman several times to confirm that they agreed to have their identifying information in the book, in addition to having them understand and sign the informed consent document. All were adamant that they wanted their stories told. Even with their approval, I struggled with the idea that the creation of the heritage book (applied project)
could put the women at risk. At the same time, I had to decide whether to use their real names in any academic publications. Dahl notes, “a clear downside of anonymity is that it also serves to reproduce the hierarchy of a named author and the unnamed ‘informant’” (13). Upon reflection, I decided that for the purpose of the heritage book (which they themselves will have control over distribution), I would honor their request to have their names and faces be made public. For the purpose of this thesis, I will refer to the women by their war names (nom de guerre), which allows for some level of anonymity, but also is a name that is meaningful to each of them. “Ethnographers are trained to assume that rendering ‘informants’ anonymous is simultaneously a technology of objectivity and the way to avoid potential negative consequences for the research participant, especially for those who are marginalized and who may experience a very clear and present danger of being subjected to discrimination and even hate crimes…” (Dahl 2016, 13). The women are proud of their war names for several reasons and still use them to refer to one another today. In some ways, having a nom de guerre at all is evidence of their history of ex-combatants and demonstrates that they engaged in activities analogous to the male ex-combatants. The women who shared stories about their war names did so with pride and laughter, explaining why their peers or troop leaders chose the name for them whether it be due to their ability, personality, or physical traits. Should the women read this thesis, they would recognize themselves and each other by these war names, but at the same time, the names do not appear in official documents in Nicaragua, and therefore, would not easily identify them to anyone in the national government. I hope that the choice of the war names serves to respond to their wishes and to decrease the level of embedded hierarchy
between “researcher” and “subjects.” As Dahl points out “rendering interview subjects anonymous actively reproduces the idea of the author as “theorist” and the interviewee as providing “illustrations” of the author’s theoretical points” (Dahl 2013, 13). Use of the war names and direct quotations from their interviews may in some small way demonstrate that any analysis is heavily dependent on what the women share, not solely on my attempts to interpret what they share.

During the July 2017, I video and audio recorded interviews with 12 Miskitu participants in Waspán (including six men), and took notes on an interview with one Miskitu woman who chose not to be recorded. Most of the men and women I have interviewed speak Miskitu and Spanish. I speak Spanish as a second language, and the interviews were conducted in Spanish. Some of the women required supplementary translation at times into Miskitu, which was facilitated by Suhar or Mayga. During the July 2017 visit, I also interviewed a mestiza woman living in Managua who had participated in the conflict as a Sandinista supporter. In March 2018, I took field notes on a group interview with one female Contra ex-combatant and one male Sandinista ex-combatant in Managua. During the March 2019 visit, I interviewed nine Miskitu participants in Waspán (seven women and two men), to include four of the female ex-combatants I had interviewed previously. I also brought the mock-ups of the heritage book (applied project) pages to the community for comment. I explained that the mock-ups would be the format of the book that would include each of their stories as gleaned from the oral history interviews. The pages would include photos, and narratives that they shared with me about participation the Contra War.
The people of the community were supportive of the style of the heritage book and indicated that they thought the finished product would help memorialize stories that were otherwise unavailable in schools and museums. For the purpose of the applied project, I limited the scope of the book to seven of the interviewees that were female Miskitu ex-combatants, as this was the specific request of Suhar and the original intended focus of the project. While the interviews with the male ex-combatants, the two Miskitu women who had lived in the refugee camp in Honduras during the conflict, the female ex-Contra fighter in Managua, the male Sandinista ex-combatant, and the mestiza woman who participated as a Sandinista were informative to the overall context of the time period (and may later be included in a future applied project), I did not analyze these data for the purpose of this project.

Table 4 provides information about the interview data from the female ex-combatants consulted for the production of the heritage book (applied project) and for the analysis in this thesis. In cases where two interviews were conducted with the same participant, the second interview was fully transcribed. In cases where there was a single interview, that interview was fully transcribed. See Appendix A for the interview question set.

Table 4. Interview Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nom de guerre</th>
<th>Age at time of most recent interview</th>
<th>Interview date(s)</th>
<th>Interview location</th>
<th>Recording Length</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kalwa</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>7/18/2017</td>
<td>Mayga’s house</td>
<td>39:04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3/7/2019</td>
<td>Kalwa’s house</td>
<td>27:40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In conclusion, this chapter provides an overview of the methods of data collection I employed to analyze the dominant heritage narratives in Nicaragua, specifically those related to armed conflict. With the assumption that authorized discourses represent power, I focused on visiting nationally supported museums, monuments, and heritage sites, and reviewing nationally produced curriculum and other political materials. Recognizing that the certain narratives in Nicaragua have been silenced, I built rapport with and interviewed seven women to discover silenced narratives and to empower a community to interrupt silencing in the national heritage narratives. In the following chapters, I will share the findings of the analysis of the dominant heritage narratives, and the analysis of the oral history interviews.
CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS—HERITAGE NARRATIVES OF NICARAGUA

In chapter one, I set the purpose and goals for this study, to document and interpret previously silenced narratives and better contextualize the heritage of members of an indigenous community in Waspán, Nicaragua. I also posed two related arguments. This chapter supports the first argument that the values of the “conquering” group of Nicaragua (i.e. the Sandinistas, and specifically the upper-class male leadership) are reproduced through the dominant national narratives which also serve to silence other voices such as the Afro-descendant and Indigenous populations, the former Contra combatants, and the females within the Miskitu ethnic group. In this chapter, I provide examples from my visits to museums, monuments, heritage sites, and educational institutions that support this argument.

Analysis of Heritage Production—Sandino Vive! and so do his Sandinista “Descendants”
Museums, Monuments, and Heritage Sites

Preserving the image of the Sandinistas as victorious is a very important and visible process in Nicaragua. This message is everywhere from the moment one lands at Augusto C. Sandino airport in Managua and Sandino's image is visible throughout the airport (Figure 5.1), through your journey on highways replete with pro-Sandinista billboards, to the various heritage sites and museums celebrating revolutionary leaders, to the most remote mountain villages where you find pro-Sandinista imagery on the edifices of space offering public services, and flyers covering the walls of many buildings, as well as in the national curriculum materials provided by the government. In
the following section, I will provide examples that demonstrate that the Sandinista party has carefully constructed a national myth through its museums, monuments, and heritage sites that legitimizes its rule. The examples show how the Sandinista government establishes a genealogical connection from the deified figure of Sandino, to the FSLN revolutionaries (and other anti-imperialist Latin American revolutionaries) to the current Sandinista administration of Nicaragua.

![Figure 5.1. Sandino painting at Aeropuerto Internacional Augusto C. Sandino. Photograph by Eileen DeLuca, November 19, 2017.](image)

The image of Augusto César Sandino (1895-1934), the mestizo Nicaraguan revolutionary viewed as the leader of a successful rebellion (1927-1933) against United States imperialism, is ubiquitous throughout current day Nicaragua⁵. During the current administrative reign of the Sandinistas, two highly visible Sandino monuments were commissioned and strategically positioned within the capital city of Managua. One of these being a 59-foot high black silhouette of Sandino (steel statue) standing on top of Tiscapa, a hill overlooking the city of Managua (Figure 5.2). This image, located in the

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⁵ In the sections that follow, I provide several examples of nationally sanctioned statues and images of Augusto César Sandino. The number of statues and images that I have photographed in Nicaragua far exceeds the amount I am able to share and analyze in this paper. As a visitor to Nicaragua, I have found that it is almost impossible to avoid encountering statues, paintings, drawings and memorabilia of Sandino in any given location.
Parque Histórico Nacional Loma de Tiscapa can be seen from many vantage points in Managua. Upon my visits to the monument and my travels through Managua, I have also found it gives the viewer the impression that Sandino is watching over the metropolis and perhaps the country, a symbol of both state and perhaps the divine. This is notably placed outside the former Presidential Palace of Anastasio Somoza Debayle, and the grounds that were used as a political prison by Somoza Debayle. The former dungeon used to incarcerate the prisoners is now a museum, with the first half containing panels celebrating the life of Sandino, and the second half memorializing the atrocities of Somoza Debayle.

Figure 5.2. Statue of Sandino’s silhouette, Parque Histórico Nacional Loma de Tiscapa. Photograph by Eileen DeLuca, March 7, 2017.

The Ortega administration (during its second incarnation beginning in 2006), also commissioned a bronze statue of Sandino riding on the back of a donkey (Figure 5.3) which was placed in front of the Estadio Nacional Dennis Martínez (Dennis Martínez National Stadium) in Managua, surrounded by the FSLN flag and the Nicaraguan flag in the very spot where the former statue of Somoza García once stood. The old heritage narrative supporting the divine right of the Somoza dynasty was rewritten in this act to create a new heritage narrative for me the viewer, which begins with Sandino, thereby legitimizing any and all administrations representative of the Sandinista party.
Today’s Managua is filled with Sandinista revolutionary imagery, often coupled with the Sandino narrative. The *Plaza de la Revolución, Palacio Nacional de la Cultura, Casa Presidencial, and Parque Central* include monuments and images focusing on Augusto César Sandino, FSLN founder Carlos Fonseca, and others deemed to be revolutionary heroes. In addition, two large banners frame and hang down from the roof of the *Palacio Nacional de la Cultura* (Figure 5.4). The banner on the left includes a photo of Augusto César Sandino with the caption “*Sandino: estamos cumpliendo!*” (Sandino: We are following through!”) The banner on the right side of the entrance contains an image of Carlos Fonseca with the caption “*Avanzamos en la Revolución!*” (We advance in the Revolution!). In both of the banners, the slogans are followed by the reproduction of the current President’s signature, “Daniel.” The building itself is a national monument as it was once a government building under the Somoza Debayle administration and the FSLN notably took him and some legislators hostage during the Revolutionary War. With the ostentation of the images in the same plaza that includes the most impressive heritage sites in the country, as a visitor, I see three main figures in highly visible representations in the heritage narrative of Nicaragua: Sandino, Fonseca and Ortega. The legitimacy of President Ortega and the Sandinistas is thereby, through
the heritage discourse, supported by the revolutionary genealogy that beginning in the mythological figure, Sandino, followed by Fonseca and the FSLN revolutionaries, and finally realized in the Sandinista administration of Daniel Ortega as he literally “signs” off on the authorized imagery.

Figure 5.4. Palacio Nacional de la Cultura. Photograph by Eileen DeLuca, March 2, 2018.

This Sandino story is also represented in panels of artwork inside the Palacio Nacional de la Cultura (with the entire first salon dedicated to Sandino). Figure 5.5 is a photograph at the entrance to Palacio Nacional de la Cultura where one can view a statue of Sandino “guarding” the entrance to the salon. With the rest of the museum dedicated to natural history and art, it seems to me as a visitor, that a salon dedicated to Sandino is an unlikely fit, other than to have another opportunity to place Sandino in a founding “father” role and to suggest that the available national culture (or at least the ability to display Nicaraguan cultural artifacts in the palatial space) is somehow a product of the rebellious path he forged.
Figure 5.5. Entrance to the Sandino Salon in the _Palacio Nacional de la Cultura_. Photograph by Eileen DeLuca, March 4, 2018.

In the _Plaza de la Revolución_ (Revolutionary Square) and the nearby _Parque Central_ (Central Park), Sandino statues serve as focal points (Figures 5.6 and 5.7). The only other statue in these sites is one of the revered Nicaraguan poet (associated with the Spanish-American modernism movement), Rubén Darío (1867-1916). The position of the two men in Nicaraguan society is made evident in a nearby panel (Figure 5.8) that is stamped with a pro-Sandinista party slogan, _SOMOS HIJOS DE DARIO Y SANDINO_ (WE ARE THE SONS/CHILDREN OF DARÍO AND SANDINO). The use of the party slogans “_Tiempos de Victorias_!” (“Victorious times!”) and “_Por Gracia de Dios_,” (By the grace of God) link Sandino to the FSLN revolutionaries, and further to the current Sandinista administration.

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6 The attempts to co-opt the work of Rubén Darío by both the Somoza Debayle government and later the Sandinista government provide a lens into how nation-states deify cultural figures in order to demonstrate legitimacy on the global stage. This subject is too complex to analyze in this thesis, other than to note that the Darío figure is important in the dominant narrative of Nicaragua and is sometimes included in the “mythological” genealogy of the Sandinista party. See Whisnant (1992) for an extended analysis of the contested politics of Rubén Darío and ideological uses of cultural capital in Nicaragua.
Figure 5.6. Statue of Sandino in the Plaza de la Revolución. Photograph by Eileen DeLuca, March 2, 2018.

Figure 5.7. Statue of Sandino in the Parque Central. Photograph by Eileen DeLuca, July 16, 2017.

Figure 5.8. Interpretive panel featuring Sandino and pro-Sandinista logos in the Parque Central. Photograph by Eileen DeLuca, July 16, 2017.

The Sandino statue in the Parque Central looks over the ostensible stone monuments representing tombs of FSLN founders Carlos Fonseca Amador (1936-
1976), Tomás Borge Martínez (1930-2012), and Silvio Mayorga Delgado (1936-1967). There is also an “eternal flame” poised near Fonseca’s tomb (Figure 5.9), sealing the immortality of the FSLN victory as does the inscription, “CARLOS ES DE LOS MUERTOS QUE NUNCA MUERAN” (“CARLOS IS ONE OF THE DEAD WHO NEVER DIE”). As the viewer, I interpret the message to be that Fonseca and the FSLN (like Sandino and Sandinismo) live on through heritage production.

![Tomb of FSLN Founder, Carlos Fonseca Amador in the Parque Central. Photograph by Eileen DeLuca, March 2, 2018.](image)

Similarly, the genealogical connection among Sandino, the Sandinista revolutionaries, and the current Sandinista administration is visually represented through *El Guerrillero sin Nombre* (The Unknown Soldier) a metal statue in Managua of a muscular man holding a pickaxe and an AK-47 tribute to the Sandinista revolutionary fighters (Figure 5.10). The base of the statue includes a quote from Sandino, “Sólo los obreros y campesinos irán hasta el fin” (“Only the workers and peasants will fight to the finish”) which, by its placement underneath the figure, suggests to me as the viewer that Sandino or Sandinismo is the ideology upon which the Sandinista revolution stands. The statue sits between a Nicaraguan flag and the FSLN flag, again visibly connecting
Sandino, Sandinista revolutionaries, the current Sandinista political party, and the nation-state of Nicaragua.

Figure 5.10. *El Guerrilero sin Nombre.* Photograph by Eileen DeLuca, March 5, 2017.

The reproduction of the Sandino narrative also occurs in buildings where governing is conducted, like the *Asamblea Nacional de Nicaragua* (National Assembly of Nicaragua), the legislative branch of the Nicaraguan government. This site includes “La Avenida Peatonal General Augusto C. Sandino” (General Augusto C. Sandino Pedestrian Avenue) which is a walkway lined with interpretive panels with images and narratives about his life. The first panel (Figure 5.11) has an image of Sandino with the phrase “*Patria y Libertad*” (Homeland and Liberty) followed by a reproduction of his signature. The series of panels recount the story of his life and rebellious activities. The final panel in the series (Figure 5.12) includes a quote from Sandino, *Yo quiero patria libre o morir… No viviré mucho. Pero aquí están estos muchachos que continuaron la lucha emprendida: ellos podrán hacer grandes cosas.* (I want a free homeland or death… I will not live long. But here are these boys who will continue the fight undertaken: they will be able to do great things.) This quote appears *not* above an image from Sandino’s rebellion (1927-1933) but rather above a photograph taken of the FSLN celebration in Managua upon the victory of the Revolution (July 19, 1979). The
quote and its placement above the image suggests to me, the viewer that the Sandinista Revolution is to be viewed as a continuation of the anti-imperialist rebellion led by Sandino. Further, each of the panels appears between two Nicaraguan flags running through the grounds of the Asamblea Nacional, authorizing the veracity of this genealogical tie while simultaneously connecting the story to the current Sandinista party, with the majority of legislative seats (70 of 91 total in 2017) held by Sandinista party members.

Figure 5.11. First of a series of Sandino narrative panels at Asamblea Nacional de Nicaragua. Photograph by Eileen DeLuca, March 7, 2017.

Figure 5.12. Final of a series of Sandino narrative panels at Asamblea Nacional de Nicaragua. Photograph by Eileen DeLuca, March 7, 2017.

At the end of the series of interpretive panels, there is a monument erected memorializing the anniversary of the death of Sandino (February 21, 1934) and two of his military aides that were slain alongside him, Francisco Estrada and Juan Pablo
Umanzor (Figure 5.13). Diputados (legislators) of the Asamblea Nacional pay homage in an annual commemoration of the birth and death of Sandino with an address in front of the monument. The statue notably sits surrounded by the FSLN revolutionary colors, black and red, once again suggesting to me, the viewer, a relationship among Sandino and the FSLN revolutionary efforts.

Figure 5.13. Sandino monument at Asamblea Nacional de Nicaragua. Photograph by Eileen DeLuca, March 7, 2017.

The Museo de la Revolución (Museum of the Revolution) in León includes an entire room dedicated to panels and photos of the life of Sandino, followed by a room dedicated to Fonseca and the heroes of the FSLN Revolution. The panels are numbered in order and the volunteer docent begins the tour in the first room, with panel number one featuring an image of Sandino and naming him, “General Augusto César Sandino, Padre de la Revolución Popular Anti-imperialista” (“General Augusto César Sandino, Father of the Popular Anti-Imperialist Revolution”) (Figure 5.14). The story of the revolution begins, then, not with the founders of the FSLN, but rather their ideological “father,” Sandino. As with many of the museums and heritage sites I visited, the images of the current administration, President Daniel Ortega and Vice President
Rosario Murillo litter the walls of the building both inside and out. Figure 5.15 shows a pro-Sandinista poster featuring Rosario Murillo on the wall nearby the entrance to the Sandino display.

![Poster featuring Rosario Murillo](image)

Figure 5.14. Panel 1 in the Museo de la Revolución, featuring Sandino. Photograph by Eileen DeLuca, July 16, 2017.

![Panel 1 and 2 in Museo de la Revolución](image)

Figure 5.15. Panel 1 and 2 in the Museo de la Revolución, with flyer of current Sandinista administration in the background. Photograph by Eileen DeLuca, July 16, 2017.

In the second room, which is dedicated to the Nicaraguan Revolution, the narrative on the interpretive panels continues to establish the genealogical connection between Sandino and the FSLN. For example, panel number 20 (Figure 5.16) includes
an image of Sandino at the top and images of FSLN revolutionaries at the bottom. The text clarifies the connection:

*Sin embargo, aquellos que creyeron que con el asesinato de Sandino, perecía una línea política militar e ideológica, estaban equivocados, el Sandinismo se hallaba arraigado en la conciencia de nuestro pueblo, buscando completar la obra iniciada por el padre de la Revolución Popular y Antimperialista. Es así que el FSLN surge como heredero y continuador del programa popular y antimperialista del General Sandino.*

[However, those who believed that with the murder of Sandino a military and ideological political line perished, were wrong, Sandinismo was rooted in the consciousness of our people, seeking to complete the work initiated by the father of the Popular Anti-Imperialist Revolution. Thus, the FSLN emerges as heir and continuator of the popular and anti-imperialist program of General Sandino.]

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Figure 5.16. Panel in the *Museo de la Revolución*, with images of Sandino and Fonseca. Photograph by Eileen DeLuca, July 16, 2017.

Further along in the same room, an image of Sandino on the wall sits above an image of FSLN founder, Carlos Fonseca, with pro-Sandinista/pro-Ortega flyers on the
wall and lining the shutters (Figure 5.17), providing another visual connection between Sandino, the FSLN revolutionaries, and the current Sandinista administration.

Figure 5.17. Salon in Museo de la Revolución. Photograph by Eileen DeLuca, July 16, 2017.

The tour of the Museo de la Revolución ends in a courtyard featuring a mural (Figure 5.18) that begins with the *Libretadores de Latinoamerica* (Liberators of Latin America) with images of Augusto César Sandino, Cuban poet and revolutionary philosopher, José Martí (1853-1895), leading figure of the Mexican Revolution, Emiliano Zapata (1879-1919), Venezuelan military and political leader of independence from Spain for much of South American, Simón Bolívar (1738-1830), and the brother of Augusto César Sandino and anti-imperialist, Sócrates Sandino (d. 1934) positioned at the beginning of a rainbow. In the middle of the mural is a large image of the visage of Argentine Marxist revolutionary and major figure of the Cuban Revolution, Ernesto “Che” Guevara (1928-1967) positioned in a stream consisting of the colors of the Nicaraguan flag. At the end of the rainbow are the *Fundadores de la Revolución* (Founders of the Revolution). This visual representation once again posits the FSLN Revolution as part of a larger anti-imperialist movement, with Sandino at the beginning
and the Sandinista revolutionaries found at the end of the rainbow, where I, the viewer, expect to find the mythical “pot of gold.”

Figure 5.18. Mural in Museo de la Revolución with the “Liberators of Latin America” and the “Founders of the FSLN.” photograph by Eileen DeLuca, March 3, 2018.

The same wall includes a mural (Figure 5.19) dedicated to the Héroes de León (Heroes of León). The names of citizens of León that perished in the conflict are listed by barrio (neighborhood). During the July 2017 visit, my colleague pointed out to me that there was one neighborhood, Subtiava (a historically indigenous neighborhood) that was not included on the mural. We asked the tour guide about the names of the heroes from Subtiava. The guide initially responded that “there was no space on the wall.” When my colleague pointed out that there was, in fact some empty space on the bottom right, the guide said that they have brought it to the attention of the leadership and they were working on it. During my visit in March 2018, I asked the same question to the guide and was given the same answer, that the leadership was working on it.
Figure 5.19. Mural in the Museo de la Revolución honoring heroes from León. Photograph by Eileen DeLuca, March 3, 2018.

A couple of blocks away, at the Galería de Héroes y Mártires (Gallery of Heroes and Martyrs), Sandinista revolutionary fighters are memorialized through a series of panels that include photos of the fallen citizens of León organized by the year they were killed. Figure 5.20 displays one of the panels that include the fallen of 1979.

Figure 5.20. Panel in Galería de Héroes y Mártires. Photograph by Eileen DeLuca, March 3, 2018.

The Galería de Héroes y Mártires reproduces the genealogy of Sandino, FSLN revolutionaries and the current Sandinista party by including a quote from Sandino in the entrance, “…DEFENDER LA SOBERANIA DE MI PATRIA. AUNQUE PARA ELLO TENGAMOS QUE OFRENDAR NUESTRAS VIDAS EN ARAS DE LA LIBERTAD.”
("DEFEND THE SOVEREIGNTY OF MY HOMELAND. ALTHOUGH FOR THIS WE HAVE TO OFFER OUR LIVES FOR THE SAKE OF FREEDOM.")

Figure 5.21. Quote from Sandino in entrance to Galería de Héroes y Mártires. Photograph by Eileen DeLuca, March 3, 2018.

Visually, the Sandino quote sits nearby a quote from Fonseca (Figure 5.22) that echoes Sandino’s pronouncement about sacrifice for the greater good, thereby creating a visual and narrative relationship between Sandino and the sacrifice of the FSLN revolutionaries:

"LA VICTORIA TIENE UN PRECIO ELEVADO Y TRISTE. LA ALEGRIA TOTAL, POR ESO MISMO, ES PATRIMONIO DE LAS GENERACIONES FUTURAS. ES POR ELLAS QUE HACEMOS LA GUERRA."

["VICTORY HAS A HIGH AND SAD PRICE. TOTAL JOY, FOR THAT VERY REASON, IS THE HERITAGE OF FUTURE GENERATIONS. IT'S FOR THEM THAT WE MAKE WAR."]
León, like Managua, celebrates revolutionary heritage within public spaces. Murals and images of both Sandino and Fonseca abound. Figure 5.23 demonstrates a plaque on a stone monument near the central place of the city. It features an image of Sandino, referred to here as A.C.S. surrounded by FSLN colors and then is overlaid onto the Nicaraguan flag colors and has the title, “General de Hombres Libres” (“General of Free Men”) under his image.

Using the same color scheme, a monument featuring the visage of Fonseca sits near the central plaza, featuring the same quote utilized in the Galería de Héroes y Mártires. 
While Fonseca’s image is the most common FSLN combatant I have seen appearing in heritage production, memorializing and honoring the rank and file fighters of the FSLN revolution manifests in monuments big and small throughout Nicaragua. Outside of Fortaleza El Coyotepe, one such inscription (Figure 5.25) demonstrates how the timeline between the Sandino rebellion and the FSLN revolution are blurred in heritage production. The inscription (on a plaque surrounded by FSLN colors red and black) poses the FSLN revolution as a realization of the “Sandino dream” and further connects the FSLN revolution to Sandino and his ideology by including the well-known quote attributed to him, “Yo Quiero Patria Libre o Morir” (I Want a Free Homeland or Death).

EN MEMORIA DE TODOS LOS JOVENES IDEALISTAS Y SOÑADORES, QUE OFRENDARON SUS VIDAS POR UNA NICARAGUA MEJOR COMO LA SOÑO SANDINO. AQUÍ DONDE BRILLO EL FUEGO DE LAS ARMAS Y CORRIÓ LA SANGRE DE LOS HEROES, “Yo Quiero Patria Libre o Morir” A.C.S.

[IN MEMORY OF ALL THE YOUNG IDEALISTS AND DREAMERS, WHO OFFERED THEIR LIVES FOR A BETTER NICARAGUA LIKE THE SANDINO DREAM. HERE WHERE THE FIRE OF WEAPONS GLOWED AND THE
On a heavily traveled road entering Granada, a monument (Figure 5.26) entitled “Homenaje a Los Héroes y Mártires de Granada” (Tribute to the Heroes and Martyrs of Grenada) greets travelers as they enter and exit the city. The monument includes a male figure holding a revolutionary weapon aimed in the air and is accompanied by FSLN colors and a plaque that includes an abbreviated form of Sandino’s quote, “Patria Libre or Morir” (Free homeland or Death).

Recognizing the fallen FSLN combatants can be found in parks or heritage sites in many neighborhoods throughout Nicaragua, with plaques memorializing and often
naming the fallen. Figure 5.27 displays a plaque commemorating fallen FSLN fighters from a neighborhood in Diriamba.

Figure 5.27. Plaque commemorating fallen FSLN combatants from a neighborhood in Diriamba. Photograph by Eileen DeLuca, February 28, 2019.

Many individual households have professionally produced plaques in the front edifice naming the fallen family member or person who lived there. Figure 5.28 displays one such memorial outside a house in Diriamba. Above the name and dates of birth and death of the fighter reads *EN RECUERDO DEL COMANDANTE CAIDO EN LA FRONTERA SUR EN LUCHA CONTRA LA TIRANIA SOMOCISTA POR LA LIBERACION DE NICARAGUA* (IN MEMORY OF THE COMMANDER, FALLEN IN THE SOUTHERN BORDER IN THE WAR AGAINST THE SOMOZA TYRANNY FOR THE LIBERATION OF NICARAGUA).

Figure 5.28. Memorial plaque of an FSLN Commander. Photograph by Eileen DeLuca, July 17, 2017.
Heritage Production and Political Party

Through observations during my visits, I have found that the production of national heritage in Nicaragua involves a complex relationship between museums, monuments, heritage sites, and the ubiquitous Sandinista party messaging found in even the most remote areas. Pro-Sandinista party slogans are accompanied by a recognizable color schemes: a fuchsia hue complemented by turquoise and other bright, pastel colors that Vice President Rosario Murillo chose to rebrand the Sandinista party (whose traditional colors as appearing in FSLN flags are black and red). The color scheme is so widely recognized that even without accompanying image of President Ortega and his wife, Vice President Murillo, it is clear that items containing the colors are endorsed and supported by the party. Figures 5.29-5.41 are examples of the pro-Sandinista messages visible throughout the country between 2017-2019. Figure 5.29 is one of several billboards that include the current president and vice president with the party slogan, “Vamos Adelante!” (Let’s go ahead!) and CRISTIANA, SOCIALISTA, SOLIDARIA! (CHRISTIAN, SOCIALIST, SOLIDARITY) representing the alliance Ortega made with the Catholic Church during his bid for the 2006 Presidency.

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7 The role of religion and religious institutions in galvanizing the revolutions across Latin America heavily examined in the literature (see Tombs, 2003 for a thorough examination of liberation theology and its legacies in Latin America). Throughout its history, the Catholic Church has engaged in both alliances and critique of Nicaragua’s administration. Daniel Ortega notably began embracing Catholicism in his bid for presidency in the 2006 election. During this period, the Sandinista party endorsed a strict law banning all abortions in Nicaragua. This, in part, may have appealed to the devout, and helped Ortega win the popular vote.
Figure 5.29. Pro-Sandinista Billboard, Managua. Photograph by Eileen DeLuca, March 5, 2017.

The use of variations of the word “victory” often appear in these materials hearkening to the FSLN victory over Somoza Debayle and reminding the viewer that the current President, Daniel Ortega Saavedra (along with his brother Humberto Ortega Saavedra), led the Tercerista faction of the FSLN that successfully deposed Anastasio Somoza Debayle. In this way, party messages/propaganda become a method of transmitting heritage as well as reproducing the dominant heritage narrative that genealogically connects the current administration all the way back to the divine figure of Sandino. Figure 5.30 is an example of a billboard with another popular image and slogan appearing throughout the country with the president and vice president and the slogans, “Tiempo de Victorias!” (“Victorious times!”) and “Por Gracia de Dios,” (By the grace of God).
As discussed earlier, these slogans also appear in heritage sites dedicated to Sandino, linking the current administration to the national hero. This type of political branding occurs across various heritage sites; for example, Figure 5.31 shows the bottom of a panel in an archaeological site, *Huellas de Acahualinca Museo* (Museum of the Footprints of Acahualinca) that includes a party slogan.

Likewise, museums and heritage sites are assumed by me the viewer to be “authorized” and associated with the current Sandinista administration by the placement of party flyers outside and throughout these sites. Such placement makes the heritage story of Sandino, and later the FSLN revolutionary victory somewhat indistinguishable from the President Ortega and his administration. Figure 5.32 displays the front
entrance to the *Museo de la Revolución* in León. Several posters of President Daniel Ortega, the authorized color scheme of the Sandinista party, and the slogan specifically referencing the revolutionary victory, “*TIEMPOS DE VICTORIAS*” (VICTORIOUS TIMES!).

Figure 5.32. Entrance to *Museo de la Revolución*. Photograph by Eileen DeLuca, July 16, 2017.

The Sandinista party positions the righteousness of their leadership by framing Nicaragua’s acts of rebellion within the heritage of Latin American revolutionary and anti-imperialist causes. For example, the return of Ortega and the Sandinistas to power in 2006 brought the commissioning of the Plaza Hugo Chávez, a left-wing Venezuelan politician who served as president of Venezuela from 1999 until his death in 2013. The plaza is highly visible with a 33-foot tall image bearing the visage and upper torso of Chávez that sits in a heavily traveled roundabout in Managua (Figure 5.33). Other parks and memorials to Chávez (and other left-wing Latin American “heroes”) throughout the country provide a framework for viewing the Sandinista victory as part of a larger global political movement against imperialism. The large, looming Chávez image is surrounded with even larger, looming *Árboles de la Vida* (“Trees of Life”) which were commissioned by Vice President Rosario Murillo and associated with the Sandinista administration.
The Árboles de la Vida appear in many public parks and notably El Malecón (The Pier) in Managua (Figure 5.34), where the approximately 56 foot tall trees are set between equally large installations featuring both the FSLN flag colors and the Nicaraguan flag colors. Having viewed the Árboles de la Vida and the Chávez monument several times (it is located in a main thruway in Managua), I view the reification of Chávez and the pairing with the Sandinista Árboles de la Vida (Trees of Life) as “authorizing” this narrative of left wing (and perhaps mestizo) solidarity.

![Figure 5.33. Plaza Hugo Chávez surrounded with Trees of Life. Photograph by Eileen DeLuca, March 5, 2017.](image)

![Figure 5.34. Árboles de la Vida at El Malecón. Photograph by Eileen DeLuca, March 4, 2019.](image)

Positioning the FSLN revolutionary victory within the larger Latin American anti-imperialist heritage narrative is found in the naming of many streets or neighborhoods. The current administration of Nicaragua revitalized a waterfront area in Managua to become Puerto Salvador Allende, named after the Marxist politician Salvador Allende.
(1908-2008) who served as President of Chile from 1970 until 1973. As commemoration to the site, a large, highly visible board with a quote from Allende greets visitors in the authorized color scheme of the current administration. The quotation carries the revolutionary spirit connecting the FSLN revolution to Allende’s ideology

*Sigan ustedes, sabiendo que mucho temprano que tarde, de nuevo se abrirán las grandes alamedas, por donde pasa el hombre libre, para construir una sociedad mejor.* [Keep going, knowing that much sooner than later, the great paths will open again, where the free man passes, to build a better society.]

Figure 5.35. Billboard at *Puerto Salvador Allende*. Photograph by Eileen DeLuca, March 5, 2017.

Even in the most remote regions in Nicaragua, pro-Sandinista posters are found on walls, signposts and other structures. Figure 5.36 shows two pro-Sandinista posters found on a community building in the remote mountain village of Santa Julia, El Crucero (one with President Daniel Ortega and the other with Vice President Rosario Murillo) both featuring the slogan reminding the reader of Daniel’s revolutionary history, *Adelante con Daniel! EN VICTORIAS!* (Forward with Daniel! IN VICTORIES!).
Use of the Ortega administration’s fuchsia and turquoise color scheme as a brand may effectively separate “Orteguista” politics from the “Sandinista” roots. However, in many spaces the colors are paired with the traditional FSLN flag and/or the black and red colors of the revolutionary flag. The local Sandinista Party house in Diriamba (Figure 5.37) shows how the two color schemes intersect to connect the current administration with the heritage of the FSLN revolution.

Even in the indigenous regions of Mozonte and Waspán, the authorized color scheme and Sandinista party slogans are present in municipal buildings and structures. Figure 5.38 displays the edifice of the Alcadia de Mozonte (Mayor’s Office of Mozonte).
Figure 5.39 demonstrates how the authorized color scheme, party slogan, and images of the President and Vice President appear on a mobile unit provided by the Ministry of Health. Figure 5.40 shows how the authorized color scheme is utilized on the Mayor’s Office billboard signifying arrival to the Municipality of Waspán upon landing in the airfield.

Figure 5.38. Mayor’s Office in Mozonte. Photograph by Eileen DeLuca, March 9, 2018.

Figure 5.39. MINSA mobile health clinic unit in Mozonte. Photograph by Eileen DeLuca, March 9, 2018.

Figure 5.40. Municipal Billboard of the Mayor’s Office in Waspán. Photograph by Eileen DeLuca, March 9, 2018.
The color scheme and messaging is so ubiquitous that the “authorization” of the current administration/incarnation of the Ortega administration voices itself without specific reference to the party or to the President. Figure 5.41 and 5.42 demonstrate how the authorized color scheme is utilized throughout parks and public places to promote the current administration and the Sandinista party, and connect the party to the revolutionary heritage.

Figure 5.41. Park bench in Managua. Photograph by Eileen DeLuca, March 5, 2017.

Figure 5.42. Basketball hoop in León. Photograph by Eileen DeLuca, July 16, 2017.

The color scheme in some ways replaces the Nicaraguan flag or other traditional colors to give the visitor the sense of party over nation. These colors have even found their way into rewriting cultural heritage. During two visits (March 2017 at UPOLI and July 2017 in front of the Palacio Nacional de la Cultura) I observed performance of ballet folklórico (traditional dance) (Figure 5.43). The dancers were dressed in the Sandinista
party color scheme. To clarify, I asked a UPOLI professor if these colors had any ties to the tradition of Nicaragua. She shook her head “no,” and frowned.

Figure 5.43. Ballet Folklórico performance at UPOLI. Photograph by Eileen DeLuca, March 6, 2017.

Heritage Production and Indigeneity

Across all of the municipalities I have visited in Nicaragua, to include two indigenous areas Mozonte (Pacific Coast) and Waspán (Caribbean Coast), there are no museums or heritage sites dedicated to the Contra War, no visible memorials for the fallen Contras and no public heritage products of any indigenous rebellion since the 16th century. When there is attention to indigeneity in these sites, indigenous peoples are represented and celebrated as people of the past, mostly through images, artifacts and museum panel narratives of the pre-Columbian peoples that inhabited Nicaragua and/or the interactions (both good and bad) with Europeans during the Colonial period. Such representations are present in the Palacio Nacional de la Cultura, where art and natural history are displayed in temporal sequence beginning in the pre-Colombian period. Figure 5.44 displays part of an exhibit focusing on indigenous peoples in the 1500’s enacting a religious ritual, in the Palacio Nacional de la Cultura.
Figure 5.44. Exhibit Depicting indigenous peoples in the 1500’s enacting a religious ritual, in the Palacio Nacional de la Cultura Photograph by Eileen DeLuca, March 4, 2018.

Also, there is representation of indigenous peoples on the highly visible frieze, El Templo de la Música, an art deco concert space in the Parque Central which has five panels made of concrete depicting the history of Nicaragua beginning with images representing pre-Hispanic period (indigenous peoples), the arrival of Columbus, the indigenous resistance against Spanish colonization (Figure 5.45), followed by evangelization of the indigenous (Figure 5.46), followed by a depiction of Battle for the Río San Juan de Nicaragua, where Spanish colonists fought against the British and Miskitu in 1786, followed by the signing of the Nicaraguan declaration of independence, followed by the battle of San Jacinto which involved the notable defeat of American William Walker and usurpation of the Nicaraguan presidency, and finally ending with a frieze representing 20th century “modernity” with no visible images of the large indigenous population and their culture.

Figure 5.45. Frieze in El Templo de la Música depicting European conquistadors overpowering the indigenous peoples. Photograph by Eileen DeLuca, March 3, 2018.
Figure 5.46. Frieze in El Templo de la Música, Depicting the evangelization of the indigenous peoples by Friar Bartolomé de las Casas. Photograph by Eileen DeLuca, March 3, 2018.

Across Managua, there are a few statues or heritage sites that reference 16th Century indigenous caciques (chieftains) Diriangén, and Macuilmiquiztli (commonly known as Nicarao). For example, in a visual panel display in Managua (Figure 5.47) the images of Diriangén and Nicarao are found among other Latin American revolutionaries. On either side of Diriangén are panels with Puerto Rican independence movement leader Don Pedro Albizu Campos (1891-1965) whose image appears above that of Cuban revolutionary Camilo Cienfuegos (1932-1959), Che Guevara, and Cuban revolutionary Fidel Castro (1926-2016). On the other side is a panel featuring an image of Sandino that includes the traditional FSLN colors at the bottom, and the colors of the Nicaraguan flag in the middle. The placement of the two caciques among the other revolutionary figures may appear to be acknowledgment of indigenous agency. However, as a viewer, I note that the indigenous peoples represented next to modern figures suggests that the indigenous peoples celebrated in Nicaragua are specifically those who fought a foreign oppressor. There are no visible heritage product representations of when the indigenous rebellion (such as that of the Miskitu Contra) was posed against the ruling Sandinista party.
The colonial era rebellion of indigenous people is also celebrated through representations of *El Güegüense* (The Wise Man), a satire written by an unknown 16th century artist, which is enacted as a drama with music and dance. It was originally written in Nahuatl and Spanish and the plot centers around indigenous and mestizo rejection of Spanish colonial domination. This satire has been performed since the 16th century and continues to be performed annually during the feast of San Sebastián (January 17-27) in Diriamba. Of note, UNESCO proclaimed *El Güegüense* a "Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity" in 2005. The masks and costumes associated with the performance are well known and appear in artwork and monuments in various places throughout Nicaragua. Figure 5.48 displays a museum panel with a photo from a performance of *El Güegüense* housed in Palacio Nacional de la Cultura.
Figure 5.48. Panel with a photo from a performance of *El Güegüense* in the Palacio Nacional de la Cultura. Photograph by Eileen DeLuca, March 2018.

In addition, the Museo de Historia y Cultura (Museum of History and Culture) in Diriamba is almost exclusively dedicated to representing the story of *El Güegüense*, and its traditional costumes through a series of displays. Figure 5.49 shows one of the salons in the Museo de Historia y Cultura that represents a scene from *El Güegüense*.

Figure 5.49. Display in Museo de Historia y Cultura. Photograph by Eileen DeLuca, July 17, 2017.

Across all of the municipalities, I have visited in Nicaragua, to include two indigenous areas Mozonte (Pacific Coast) and Waspán (Caribbean Coast), there are no museums or heritage sites dedicated to indigenous rebellion since the 16th century. In Mozonte, the single heritage museums focuses on the life of Nicolás Antonio Madrigal (1898-1977), a Catholic Monsignor who was influential in the region. In Waspán, the
*Museo Auka Tangni* (Museum of the Flor de Cortez-Cortex Flower) includes a collection of various archaeological and cultural artifacts (Figure 5.50), as well as a celebration of the codification of the Miskitu language with dictionaries and versions of the Holy Bible translated into Miskitu by the museum’s owner and curator, Dioniso Melgara Brown, a Miskitu resident and local historian.

![Display in Museo Auka Tangni, Waspán. Photograph by Eileen DeLuca, July 20, 2017.](image)

**Figure 5.50.** Displays in *Museo Auka Tangni*, Waspán. Photograph by Eileen DeLuca, July 20, 2017.

*Heritage Production in Institutions of Education*

As discussed in chapter three, one of the first efforts of the victorious FSLN in the educational sphere was the National Literacy Campaign in 1980. The presence of both the Nicaraguan flag and the FSLN flag side by side on the literacy books (Figure 5.51) serve to both legitimize the content but also suggest that country (Nicaragua) and party (Sandinista) are one. The materials were designed to teach reading and writing with content that specifically deifies the Sandinista heroes. For example, a literacy activity (Figure 5.52) within the materials asks the participants to write the name of the founder of the FSLN, and then gives space to trace the name “Carlos” (i.e. Carlos Fonseca) over and over. In another section, students are asked to read a sentence outlining the revolutionary genealogy of Nicaragua, “*Carlos Fonseca dijo: Sandino vive.*" (Carlos Fonseca said: Sandino lives.)
Fonseca says: Sandino lives), this is followed by exercises where the learner sounds out the names of the revolutionary heroes and practices writing out the names. The discourse of Sandino being the “paternal” figure “begetting” the revolution is also reproduced in an exercises (Figure 5.53) where students read “Sandino: guía de la revolución” (Sandino: guide of the revolution), and practice reading and writing vowels based on the phrase.

Figure 5.51. Introduction page to FSLN Literacy Campaign curriculum. Published in 1980.

Figure 5.52. Page 7 of El Amanecer del Pueblo. Published in 1980.
In the reading section, the learner is asked to read sentences such as “Los guerrilleros vencen a la guardia genocida” (The guerrillas defeat the genocidal guard), in reference to the Sandinistas’ victory over Somoza’s National Guard. Other longer passages talk about the victory of Somoza and the efficacy of the Sandinista army. Learners also read quotes from Augusto Cesar Sandino, and Carlos Fonseca Amador.
While most of the content focuses on Sandino, Fonseca, and the successes of the FSLN revolutionaries, there is one exercise that refers to indigeneity, where learners read the sentence “Los Miskitos son un grupo indígena muy importante” (The Miskitu are an important indigenous group”). This is followed by a telling exercise where learners practice writing the phrase “Los Miskitos se integran” (The Miskitus are integrated). The Miskitu, therefore are positioned as a passive group that is “integrated” into the Nicaragua of mestizo Sandinista champions.

As of 2018, the Nicaraguan Ministry of Education was still producing curriculum materials for the country. In a visit to an elementary school in Los Fierros, I found that the students were utilizing reading (Figure 5.58) and writing (Figure 5.59) elementary school textbooks are covered with party slogans, “Tiempos de victorias, por gracia de
“Dios!” (Victorious times, by the grace of God!”) and “Gobierno de reconciliación y unidad nacional. El pueblo, presidente!” (“Government of reconciliation and national unity. The people are the president.”) They also utilize the color scheme (fuchsia and turquoise) associated with the Ortega administration and present in all its propaganda to include the ubiquitous billboards, posters and flyers throughout the country featuring images of President Daniel Ortega and his wife and Vice President, Rosario Murillo.

Figure 5.58. Elementary Reading Book. Published in 2018. Photograph by Eileen DeLuca, March 5, 2018.

Figure 5.59. Elementary Writing Book. Published in 2018. Photograph by Eileen DeLuca, March 5, 2018.

All of the curriculum materials published by the Nicaraguan government’s Ministerio de Educación (Ministry of Education, MINED) can be found on the government website (https://www.mined.gob.ni/). Figure 5.60 is the cover of a MINED third grade text, originally published in 2017, Cuaderno Caligrafía Ortografía 3
(Calligraphy and Spelling Notebook 3). As with the books I encountered in schools in 2018 and 2019, the cover continues to include party slogans and the authorized color scheme.

Figure 5.60. Front Cover of *Cuaderno Caligrafía Ortografía* 3. 2020 Edition.

Similar to the exercises in *El Amanecer del Pueblo*, exercises within the book contain references to Sandino, Fonseca, and the FSLN revolution. Page 21 (Figure 5.61) asks students to copy the sentence, *Nuestro presidente se llama Daniel Ortega.* (Our President is Daniel Ortega.)

Figure 5.61. Page 21 of *Cuaderno Caligrafía Ortografía* 3. 2020 Edition.

On page 26 of the text (Figure 5.62), students practice copying the sentence, *El comandante Carlos Fonseca es un héroe nacional. Es uno de los fundadores del FSLN.*
Entregó su vida para la paz y la libertad del pueblo nicaragüense. (“Commander Carlos Fonseca is a national hero. He is one of the founders of the FSLN. He gave his life for the peace and freedom of the Nicaraguan people.”)

Figure 5.62. Page 26 of Cuaderno Caligrafía Ortografía 3. 2020 Edition.

Page 62 (Figure 5.63) asks students to copy the following sentences: En julio los nicaragüenses celebramos el triunfo de la Revolución Popular Sandinista. ¡Viva Nicaragua! ¡Viva la Revolución! (In July, Nicaraguans celebrate the triumph of the Popular Sandinista Revolution. Long live Nicaragua! Long live the revolution!)

Figure 5.63. Page 62 of Cuaderno Caligrafía Ortografía 3. 2020 Edition.

On page 63 of the text (Figure 5.64), the students practice writing the sentence Sandino es un héroes nacional. (Sandino is a national hero.)
There are no references in the text to the Miskitu people. The only exercise that can be directly tied to indigenous people, is one sentence on page 73 (Figure 5.65), “El jefe indio se allegro mucho y preparo una fiesta donde los niños y los indios se convirtieron en muy buenos amigos.” (The Indian chief was very happy and prepared a party where the children and the Indians became very good friends.)

MINED also published a third grade book (originally published in 2016) entitled Estudios Sociales 3 (Social Studies 3). Figure 5.66 is an excerpt from the table of contents that includes Part VIII, CELEBRACIONES HISTÓRICAS Y CULTURALES DE MI DEPARTAMENTO. (HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL CELEBRATIONS OF MY STATE).
The first section is entitled, *Celebraciones de hechos históricos.* (Celebration of historical events) which begins with the “discovery” of Nicaragua by the Europeans and ends with the *Aniversario de la Revolución Popular Sandinista* (Anniversary of the Sandinista Popular Revolution). There are two subsections that specifically refer to indigenous people. The section entitled “12 de Octubre: Día de la resistencia indígena” (“October 12: Day of indigenous resistance”). (Figure 5.67) outlines the resistance of 16th century *caciques* (chieftains) Diriangén, and Nicara, (referred to in the text as “Nicaragua”) against the Spanish colonial regime.
The other section (Figure 5.68) is entitled “Sistema de la Autonomía de la Costa Caribe” (The system of autonomy in the Caribbean Coast). This section of the text names the indigenous groups (Miskitu, Rama, Mayangna, and Ulwa), Afro-descendants (Creole and Garifuna) and mixed race peoples of the Caribbean Coast and describes how the Sandinista party granted (through legislative decree) autonomy to the northern and southern sections of the Caribbean Coast.

![Figure 5.68. Pages 98-99 of Estudios Sociales 3. 2020 Edition.](image)

The Celebration of Cultural Facts section ends with Aniversario de la Revolución Popular Sandinista (Anniversary of the Sandinista Popular Revolution). The section includes a photo from Managua on July 19, 1979 when the FSLN declared victory. The rest of the section describes the social programs and infrastructure put in place by the Sandinista government.
The second section covers Personajes históricos, Héroes, Héroinas y Mártires (Historical figures, Heroes, Heroines and Martyrs) (Figure 5.70-5.72). Included in this section are Emmanuel Mongalo (1834-1872), a Nicaraguan teacher known for heroic acts against the imperialist efforts of William Walker; Benjamín Zeledón (1879-1912) Nicaraguan lawyer politician that help lead rebel forces against US Marines in 1912 and died in battle; Augusto C. Sandino; Rigoberto López Pérez (1929-1956), a Nicaraguan poet who assassinated Anastasio Somoza García, and was instantly killed by his guards; Carlos Fonseca; Arlen Siu (1955-1975), a Chinese Nicaraguan woman who became one of the first female martyrs of the FSLN Revolution; and Rubén Darío.
Figure 5.70. Page 105 of *Estudios Sociales 3. 2020 Edition.*

Figure 5.71. Pages 106-107 of *Estudios Sociales 3. 2020 Edition.*

Figure 5.72. Page 108-109 of *Estudios Sociales 3. 2020 Edition.*
A seventh grade social studies textbook, “Orgullo de mi País!” (“Pride of my country!”), published by MINED (Figure 5.73) is covered with party slogans and the authorized color scheme of the current administration.

![Cover of Orgullo de mi País!](image)

Figure 5.73. Front cover of Orgullo de mi País! Published in 2016.

The table of contents (Figure 5.74) shows that the last three chapters of the book focus on the history of the country from 1857 until the present. Unit X, LA DEFENSA DE LA SOBERANÍA NACIONAL (THE DEFENSE OF NATIONAL SOVEREIGNTY) focuses on the Sandino rebellion and its historical context. Unit XI, TRIUNFO DE LA REVOLUCIÓN POPULAR SANDINISTA (Triumph of the Popular Sandinista Revolution) focuses on the FSLN Revolution and the aftermath.

![Table of Contents](image)

Figure 5.74. Table of Contents. Orgullo de mi País! Published in 2016.
The learning objective and interdisciplinary connections of Unit XI is coupled with a photo of what appears to be a recent FSLN rally or celebration (Figure 5.75). To demonstrate the purpose of this section and how the text connects the heritage of the FSLN revolution to the concepts of “patriotism,” “heritage,” and “heroism,” I have translated the text on the page below.

**Desempeño de aprendizaje** (Learning Objective)

*Interpreta y valora el impacto socioeconómico, Político y cultural de la Revolución Popular Sandinista en el desarrollo histórico de Nicaragua de 1979 a la actualidad.*

(Interpret and assess the socio-economic, political and cultural impact of the Sandinista Popular Revolution on the historical development of Nicaragua from 1979 to the present day.)

**Ejes Transversales** (Fundamental Axes/Interdisciplinary Connections)

*Manifesta amor y respeto a la Patria y sus símbolos, conociendo su historia y demostrando valores cívicos y patrióticos.* (Show love and respect for the Homeland and its symbols, knowing its history and demonstrating civic and patriotic values.)

*Practica y promueve conductas de patriotism, al interesarse por conocer, respetar, disfrutar y cuidar y conservar los bienes naturales, artisticos, culturales, y históricos del patrimonio nacional.* (Practice and promote patriotism, to be interested in knowing, respecting, enjoying and caring for and conserving the natural, artistic, cultural, and historical assets of the national heritage.)

*Reflexiona sobre la historia, las y los héroes nacionales, sus aportes en la lucha por la soberanía nacional y toma una actitud beligerante y de compromiso para mantener las conquistas del pueblo.* (Reflect on history, national heroes, and their contributions in the...
fight for national sovereignty and take a belligerent and committed attitude to maintain
the conquests of the people.)

On page 206 (Figure 5.76), there is a photo taken in Managua on the day of the
final victory of the revolution, July 19, 1979. The main idea is encapsulated in the first
paragraph:

*El 19 de julio de 1979 se registró en América Latina un hecho político que conmovió a
todo el mundo. La Revolución Popular Sandinista había derrocado a la dictadura más
brutal que se tiene memoria, la dictadura somocista, que mantuvo sojuzgada al pueblo
nicaragüense por más de 40 años. (On July 19, 1979, a political event was recorded in
Latin America that shocked everyone. The Sandinista Popular Revolution had
overthrown the most brutal dictatorship in memory, the Somoza dictatorship, which kept
the Nicaraguan people subjugated for more than 40 years.)*
On pages 214-215 (Figure 5.77) there is some attention to the conflict commonly known as the Contra War. The title for the section is La lucha armada y los acuerdos de paz (The armed struggle and peace agreements). The first main header demonstrates how the heritage narrative is framed: Estados Unidos en constante acoso contra Nicaragua (The United States in constant harassment/bullying against Nicaragua). The narrative that follows firmly poses the conflict as a conflict between the Nicaraguan nation-state against the imperialist efforts of the US. The passage lists a number of ways the conflict threatened the progress of the FSLN. The passage explains that “todas estas acciones encabezadas, dirigidas y financiadas por el gobierno norteamericano,” (all these actions led, directed and financed by the American government). This narrative poses the conflict as an effort by the US (and specifically Ronald Reagan, who is called out by name six times in the text) to overthrow the revolutionary government (Sandinistas). There is no specific reference to the people of Nicaragua who fought against the Sandinistas, and those who did fight are loosely referred to as las fuerza contrarevolucionarias “the counterrevolutionary forces” with no leaders named, and no reference to indigenous combatants. The text is accompanied by three images, on page 214 of Sandinista fighters with the American pilot Eugene
Hasenfus as they took him prisoner. The photo on the top of page 215 is captioned as “Counterrevolutionary Military Base in Honduras,” and shows an American aircraft and US soldiers. The photo on the bottom of page 215 shows a photo of American engineer Benjamin Linder who was working in Nicaragua leading a hydroelectric dam project when he was killed by Contra forces. None of the images includes Contras fighters, Miskitus or female combatants.

In conclusion, my travels through Nicaragua from 2017-2019 have provided me with a visitor’s perspective on dominant heritage narratives in Nicaragua. From my observation, the dominant heritage narratives heavily favor the legendary character Augusto César Sandino, the patriarch of a “free” nation-state of Nicaragua, along with the ideology of rebelling against foreign oppressors and dictatorial conditions. In museums, monuments, heritage sites, and educational materials, the victory of the mestizo FSLN revolutionaries (with a special focus on FSLN founder Carlos Fonseca Amador) is also voiced. Through heritage production, the Sandino rebellion is linked genealogically to the FSLN Revolution and positioned within a larger narrative of Latin American anti-imperialist movements. This story, with words and images, is focused on
mestizo males with the exception of a young woman who was killed supporting the FSLN Revolutionary cause. Any indigenous rebellions, outside of 16th century rebellions against foreign oppressors, are not voiced in national heritage production. My observations also show that the current Sandinista administration of President Daniel Ortega, through careful placement of an authorized color scheme, party slogans and images of the current administration, positions itself as the current day descendant of the Sandino progenitor, and thereby the rightful ruler of the nation-state of Nicaragua. The Contra War narrative is not available in museums and heritage sites. There is reference to the “armed struggle” in the national curriculum, but the narrative focuses on forces loyal to Somoza Debayle and US intervention. The curriculum does not refer to Contra leaders or heroes, does not indicate that indigenous groups engaged in the resistance, and does not make visible that women were part of the armed resistance against the Sandinista forces. In the next chapter, I will share the results of the oral history project where Miskitu women interrupt the silencing of indigenous resistance against the Sandinistas.
CHAPTER 6: FINDINGS—ORAL HISTORY THEMES AND ANALYSIS

In the previous chapter, I demonstrated that the values of the “conquering” group of Nicaragua (i.e. the Sandinistas, and specifically the upper-class male leadership) are reproduced through the dominant national narratives, which also serve to silence other voices such as the Afro-descendant and Indigenous populations, the former Contra combatants, and the females within the Miskitu ethnic group. In this chapter, I present findings related to the second argument I stated in chapter one, that the ways in which silences are reproduced can be interrupted through this oral history project, which supports the production of alternative narratives that challenge dominant narratives, provide a way for historically silenced groups to “voice”, and memorialize their stories. In this chapter, I provide excerpts from the oral history interviews that illuminate how the dominant national narratives silence other voices such as the Afro-descendant and Indigenous populations, the former Contra combatants, and the females within the Miskitu ethnic group. I also provide excerpts that demonstrate how the women, through their narratives actively interrupt the silences present in the national discourses.

In the sections that follow, I present excerpts from the interviews organized under the following themes: Persecution of Miskitu People as Motivation to Become a Combatant, Descriptions of life in the Refugee Camp/Military Base, and Marginalization of Miskitu, Contra, Females after the War. Following each theme, I discuss the relationship between the women’s stories and the argument that the silencing
experienced by the interviewees is systematic and structural due to the intersection of race/ethnicity, political affiliation, and gender.

*Persecution of Miskitu People as Motivation to Become a Combatant*

All of the women interviewed shared that the reason they left Nicaragua for Honduras and subsequently became combatants was due to mistreatment of Miskitu people by the Sandinistas/Nicaraguan national government. The way the women recount the events that precipitated the Miskitu exodus suggests that this is a story they have told before, and the similarity to the retelling suggests that this may be a shared community memory; that is, their retelling is the generally accepted version of events among the community. The story involves Sandinistas bringing conflict into the community, to include setting fires to homes and churches, incarcerating community leaders, and assassinating civilians. In their narratives, these attacks pre-dated (and led to) the community’s decision to leave Nicaragua and become combatants. Each woman’s story eventually includes reference to the incarceration of Stedman Fagoth (some women also name one or two of the other Miskitu leaders, Brooklyn River and Hazel Lau), the protests that followed, and then leaving for Honduras upon Fagoth’s release. Unlike the political analysis found in the literature summarized in chapter two, the women’s narratives focus strictly on the persecution of their people by the Sandinistas as the cause of the Miskitu individual and/or Miskitu community decision to leave Nicaragua. According to their stories, it was the Miskitu leader, Stedman Fagoth, who led the people to Honduras. None of the women includes the Moravian Church, the US government or any other groups as providing motivation to flee their villages. None of the women discusses “forced relocation” (Foran and Goodwin 1993) by the
Sandinistas (an ostensible measure to protect Miskitus) as motivation. Suhar’s story exemplifies the persecution-based narrative.

*Lo tuvo detenido, por eso organizaron. Y cuando sacó de cárcel, Fagoth hizo una reunión en Waspán, aquí. Y en ese tiempo, fue Fagoth decidió ir a Honduras y armarnos, y pelear contra los Sandinista. (Suhar)*

[He was arrested, that is why they organized. And when he got out of jail, Fagoth held a meeting in Waspán, here. And at that time, it was Fagoth that decided to go to Honduras and arm us, and fight against the Sandinistas.]

She also voices a sentiment that was omnipresent across my interviews and interactions with Miskitu people: Miskitu people fought to protect ownership of their land.

*Cuando yo tenía trece años pues formaron los grupos, los guerrilleros allí, las Contra, los Miskitus, los indígenas formaron para, sobre los derechos de los indígenas porque los sandinistas no nos daban los derechos de nuestra tierra. Y Fagoth entró en Honduras y formaron. (Suhar)*

[When I was thirteen, they formed the groups, the guerrillas there, the Contra, the Miskitus, the indigenous formed for the rights of the indigenous because the Sandinistas did not give us the rights to our land. And Fagoth entered Honduras and they formed.]

Similarly, Bolondrina reports Sandinista aggression in its relation to land rights. Like many members of the community, she discusses both past and present conflict as related to Miskitu rights to their land.

*Ella entró en la guerra por el derecho de la tierra. Sí. Porque del otro lado, no respetaban los riquezas de los indígenas, por eso, entró en la guerra dice por el*
derecho de nuestras riquezas de la tierra. Dice que nunca les este dando el derecho de los indígenas. (Bolondrina as translated from Miskitu by Suhar)

[She entered the war for land rights. Yes. Because on the other side, they did not respect the riches of the indigenous people, that is why she entered the war she says for the right of our riches of the land. She says that they are never giving indigenous rights.]

Tigrilla confirms that fighting was a form of resistance to the mistreatment from the Sandinistas (also referred to as “Sandinos”) and an attempt to recover Miskitu territory.

...la decisión que tenía dice, pelear juntos y triunfar y regresar a nuestra tierra...

Los Sandinos maltrataban, quemaban las casas, mataban los animales, por eso ella solamente luchó. A los pastores, mataban, maltrataban y lo quemaron los líderes, dice. (Tigrilla as translated from Miskitu by Suhar)

[…]the decision she had, she says, fight together and succeed and return to our land ... The Sandinos battered, burned the houses, killed the animals, that is why she alone fought. The pastors were killed, mistreated and set on fire by the leaders, she says.]

Galil’s narrative emphasizes the role the arrest of the leaders had on galvanizing the Miskitu resistance among the youth of the community.

_Bueno, como aquí, habían tres líderes Miskitu y los agarraron y lo hecharon presos, entonces aquí, los Miskitus en Waspán se reunieron aquí para dar la liberación de esos líderes Miskitu. Entonces, cuando no los sacaron de la cárcel, todo los jóvenes decidieron ir a Honduras._ (Galil)

[Well, like here, there were three Miskitu leaders and they seized them and made
them prisoners, so here, the Miskitus in Waspán gathered here to release those Miskitu leaders. Then, when they were not taken out of jail, all the young people decided to go to Honduras.]

Nata Tiara describes her motivation to fight as a way to free the people from persecution at the hands of the Sandinistas.

_Pues, por salvar la vida de nuestra gente. Y para que vivan bien nuestra gente._
_Sufrimos allí por esta gente, la vida de la gente que tenemos aquí. Muchachos, y muchachas, y al jovenes y mas adultos, pobrecitos que no podía andar en otro lugar, que no podía caminar…Por eso motivo pensaba en la libertad de la gente._

(Nata Tiara)

[Well, to save the lives of our people. And so that our people live well. We suffered there for these people, the lives of the people we have here. Boys, and girls, and the young and more adults, poor people who could not travel anywhere else, who could not walk…That's why I thought about people's freedom].

While all of the women name the Sandinistas as the perpetrators of persecution, Avance names the current President (who was also Nicaragua’s leader at the time, in the role of Coordinator of the Junta of National Reconstruction) as the lead persecutor of the Miskitu people.

_El presidente actual que esta ahorita en Nicaragua, dice que, el le dio ordenes…Todos los que los son los líderes Miskitus tenían que agarrar y hacerles preso…ese entonces tenía vario gente preso alla. Los que dirigen a los Miskitu, los dirigente. Cuando esa gente salieron, de la cárcel…Cuando sacaron de la cárcel…los persiguieron nuevamente para matarlos… Por eso
motivo, se cruzaron para Honduras y se fue a la guerra. Dice que cuando Stedman cruzó, detrás de Stedman, todos se fueron a cruzar en Honduras.

(Avance as translated from Miskitu by Mayga)

[The current president who is now in Nicaragua, she says, he gave orders ... All those who are the Miskitu leaders they had to seize and imprison them ... at that time there were several people imprisoned there. Those who lead the Miskitu, the leaders. When those people got out of jail ... When they got out of jail ... they chased them again to kill them ... That's why they crossed over to Honduras and went to war. She says that when Stedman crossed, after Stedman, everyone left to cross into Honduras].

In talking about why the Miskitu fought in the Contra War, Kalwa provides explicit details and first-hand testimony about the Sandinista persecution and murder of Miskitu people.

*Miskitu, luchamos por la patria de Nicaragua. En ese tiempo, llegaba los jóvenes, los agarraban, los maltrataba, y venían los caravanes en la noche, que vivían en Sukapin, y venía un día, lo que cada casa llaman en la casa y cuando salió cada uno ponieron un mecate y lo restraron.... Allí en, en Sukapin de allí hay uno río, que se llama Sabrina. Allí los trajaron, allí los mataron todo. Mataron 10 personas. Pues así, yo lo miré...Yo miraba mal. (Kalwa)

[Miskitu, we fought for the homeland of Nicaragua ... At that time, the young people arrived, they seized them, mistreated them, and the caravans came in the night, those who lived in Sukapin, and a day came in which each house, they call in the house and when each one came out they put a rope on him and they took him away ... There in, in Sukapin there is a river, called Sabrina. They brought
them there, they killed everyone there. They killed 10 people. Well, I saw it. I saw bad things.]

She goes on to explain that witnessing the atrocities motivated her to join the fighting forces.

_Y yo con mi hermano, mi hermano mayor y yo vinimos a la guerra, pues nosotros también tenemos que luchar para que por la patria, tenemos que luchar para que este libre las personas. Porque no mantenía así. No podía vivir así. Por eso luchamos nosotros también la patria para liberarlo._ (Kalwa)

[And my brother and I, my older brother and I came to the war, because we also have to fight for the homeland, we have to fight for people to be free. Because it couldn’t stay that way. I could not live like that. That is why we also fought for the homeland, to liberate it.]

The women’s narratives suggest the Miskitu were the subjects of persecution by the Sandinistas, and Miskitu territory was threatened with Sandinista force. This story is silenced in the national narratives, as it is not present in museums or national monuments and is not included in the national textbooks or curriculum. The only available authorized narratives of the Sandinista are those that show them as liberators, heroes, and champions of the people over a cruel former dictator and/or foreign oppressor. The stories told by reporters and researchers outside of Nicaragua at that time do recount the atrocities and the persecution of the Sandinistas toward the Miskitu, but largely those stories focus on other groups as “directing” the movement of the Miskitu people. The oral history interviews interrupt this silencing and provide an alternate narrative that speaks to the cruelty of the Sandinistas towards the Miskitu.
The oral history also demonstrates agency of the Miskitu people in regards to their decision to leave Nicaragua and to take up arms against this threat.

**Descriptions of life in the Refugee Camp/Military Base**

All of the interviewees share that upon arrival to the refugee camp or military base in Honduras, the conditions were challenging. The blurred lines between the refugee camps and military bases voices itself in the oral history of the women. Suhar gives a detailed description of the early days of her refugee experience that indicates initially there was little support for the influx of immigrants.

*Pues cuando llegamos no habían base. No habían nada. Ni una casita, ni nada. Tenemos que hacer nosotros misma, una champita para dormir allí. Y con hamacás. A veces, si no hay hamacás, tenemos que cortar palitos así y hacer cama. Y allí, tenemos que dormir allí.* (Suvar)

[Well, when we arrived there was no base. There was nothing. Not even a little house, or anything. We have to make ourselves, a little bamboo hut to sleep there. And with hammocks. Sometimes, if there are no hammocks, we have to cut sticks like that and make a bed. And there, we have to sleep there.]

Her narrative highlights the impermanence and harshness of the living situation that the Miskitu refugees faced.

*Cuando estaba en la montaña nadie comía. Nadie dormía bien. No hay ningun lugar para dormir. Solo andaba, como yo siempre le digo como animal.*

*Caminaba que daba en un lugar dentro de treinta minutos tenemos que salir de allí. No tenemos que quedar en un lugar un día ni dos días. Porque los enemigos siempre nos estaban persiguiendo. Tenemos que andar ambulante. Tenemos que quedar en un lugar quince minutos, treinta minutos, de allí*
tenemos que salir y ya. (Suhar)

[When I was on the mountain nobody ate. No one slept well. There is no place to sleep. One just went forth, as I always say, as an animal. One would walk to a place and in thirty minutes we have to get out of there. We couldn’t stay in one place for one day or two days. Because the enemies were always chasing us. We have to walk. We have to stay in a place fifteen minutes, thirty minutes, from there we would have to leave and that’s it.]

Galil, Avance, and Kalwa support this narrative of austere conditions.

Bueno, en primero cuando fuimos, no había nada. No había comida, nada. (Galil)

[Well, at first when we went, there was not anything. There was not any food, nothing.]

La vida muy dura, porque no tenía cama en donde dormir. Era como una finca, mas que todo. Solo arboles. No había lugar para dormir. (Avance as translated from Miskitu by Mayga)

[A very hard life, because she had no bed to sleep in. It was like a farm more than anything. Just trees. There was no place to sleep.]

Primero, era duro, que no tenía nada. (Kalwa)

[At first, it was hard, I did not have anything.]

The report of the initial conditions in their settlements in Honduras paints a picture of emergent decision-making in order to survive. This indicates that these women were in the earliest group of Miskitu arrivals before UNHCR refugee camps were fully organized. However, it is unclear in their narratives if they were led to refugee camps or
straight into the emerging “military bases,” as they would use the word “camp” interchangeably.

Gringo Support

While the initial conditions of the camps/military bases were described as sparse, all of the women describe eventually receiving aid from the United States by relating interactions with “gringos,” “norteamericanos,” or “yanquis.” Despite this, the women’s stories resonate with appreciation for the official and clandestine US support and do not contain critique of US intervention and do not indicate an awareness of US self-interest or any sort of manipulation of the combatants. Their memories of the support from the United States also give credence to the fact that the women were not just refugees but were participants in military training exercises.

Nata Tiara reports interacting with gringos who brought provisions and by her report fought alongside the Contra.

...los gringos cuidaban bien, comida y todo bien... Traían todo, le daban de comer, le daban su ropa, su arma, y todo le daban... Pobres muchachos que vinieron de allí, los muchachos también sí murieron. Todo. (Nata Tiara)

[...the gringos took good care of us, food, and everything was good. They brought everything, they gave food, they gave clothes, weapons, and they gave everything... Poor boys who came from there, the boys also died. All of them.]

Many of the women report that training began with whatever equipment was available, until the gringos provided supplies.

Bueno, en primer lugar, cuando fuimos nos dio entrenamiento militar, nada mas.

Y, allí estuvimos, después de eso, allí cuando fuimos todavía no había nada, pues solo habían los somocistas que daban entrenamiento, pero sin arma, nada.
Solo palos teníamos nosotros allí, el arma de nosotros era un palo. Después, dieron apoyo y dieron uniformes. Sí pero, como era? Solo, cincuenta por allí.

(Galil)

Well, first of all, when we went, we were given military training, nothing more. And, there we were, after that, there when there was still nothing, because there were only the Somocistas who gave training, but without a weapon, nothing. We only had sticks there, our weapon was a stick. Then they gave support and gave uniforms.]

Avance shares that their leader, Stedman Fagoth, went looking for support for their cause and found it in the United States.

Hasta alimentos le traía de alla para aca. Comida, zapatos, ropa. Dice que todo lo traía de los estados unidos y el apoyo que llegaba para ellos. (Avance as translated from Miskitu by Mayga)

[Even food was brought from there to here. Food, shoes, clothes. She says that he brought everything from the United States and the support that came from them.]

Galil also remembers Miskitu leadership seeking support from the United States and receiving food as a result.

…nos apoyó bastante con comida, tenían de todo allí, para comer. Sí. Era normal ya después cuando dieron apoyo de los estados unidos. El líder que estaba preso, salió y el fue a Honduras y después buscó apoyo. (Galil)

[…they supported us a lot with food; they had everything there to eat. Yes. It was normal later when they gave support from the United States. The leader who was}
imprisoned, left and he went to Honduras and then sought support.]

Kalwa also remembers Miskitu leadership seeking support and finding it from the United States in the form of food and weapons.

*Primero era duro, que no tenía nada. Pero, después de, los jefes buscó una,*

*pues buscó como mantanernos y ellos sacaron con los gringos … y de allí, le ayudaba, las comida, armas. Y todos pues le daban.* (Kalwa)

[At first it was hard, I had nothing. But, after, the bosses looked for a, well looked for how to maintain us, and they got it with the gringos, and from there, they helped, the food, weapons. And they gave everything.]

Tigrilla shares that support also came in the form of medical supplies.

*Dice que pues le daban los medicamentos para la guerra, eran los gringos.*

(Tigrilla as translated from Miskitu by Suhar)

[She says that they gave medicine for the war. They were the gringos.]

Avance remembers receiving bedding support from the United States.

*Después, dice que llegó un ayuda pues a petición de la gente le dio ayuda de los estados unidos. Le traían hamacas. Sí, le trajeron hamacas.* (Avance as translated from Miskitu by Mayga)

[Then, she says, that help came because at the request of the people they gave help from the United States. They brought hammocks. Yes, they brought hammocks.]

**Combat training and Military Roles**

Across the interviews, all of the women report a regular routine of training activity in the camps, to include use of weapons and enemy engagement. Galil describes a
typical day of training, demonstrating that women were given training both in theory and in the use of weapons.

…en la mañana, nos levantamos a las cuatro de la mañana. Luego comíamos, descansamos un rato. A las ocho, comenzábamos, estudiábamos unos cursos, nosotros. Sí, cursos de fusiles. (Galil)

[…in the morning, we got up at four in the morning. Then we ate, we rested for a while. At eight o'clock, we started, we studied some courses. Yes, rifle courses.]

Suhar provided details on the purpose of the instruction, demonstrating that the women were trained for combat.

Nos daban entrenamiento, como hay que pelear con los enemigos. Sí. Y como hay que manejar las armas. Y como hay que salvar a su vida. Y cuando se encuentra con los enemigos como hay que salvar su vida…por donde tiene que…, por donde salir, por donde entrar todo eso, nos enseñaba todo. (Suhar)

[They gave us training, how we have to fight with the enemies. Yes. And how to handle the weapons. And how to save your life. And when you are confronted with the enemies, how to save your life... where to go out, where to find everything, we were taught everything.]

Bolondrina, Kalwa, and Tigrilla confirm that the women were trained for combat. Tigrilla suggests that combat training diminished her initial trepidations.

Para entrar la guerra, le daban entrenamiento sobre como hay que pelear con los enemigos. (Bolondrina as translated from Miskitu by Suhar)

[To enter the war, they gave her training for how to fight with the enemy.]

Le da este entrenamiento a nosotros como militar. Tenía que prepararlo como militar. Y de allí tenía que servir lo que dice los jefes. (Kalwa)
They give this training to us like military. I had to prepare like military. And from there I had to serve what the bosses said.

_Diario, diario, cuando recibían el entrenamiento pues había para pelear con los enemigos. No tenía pues miedo, ni pensaba en nada, solo con el ánimo le daban el entrenamiento. Con ese ánimo entró en la guerra._ (Tigrilla as translated from Miskitu by Suhar)

[Daily, daily, when they received the training it was to fight with the enemies. She was therefore not afraid, nor thought of anything, just with courage the training gave her. With that courage, she entered the war.]

In addition to general combat training, the women describe very specific roles they played in the war, some involving skilled positions, some support positions, and some in direct combat. Suhar describe the various roles she played in the war.

_Primeramente, me entrenaron para como instructora para dar entrenamiento a los nuevos que estan entrando. Después me pasaron en inteligencia. Para sacar la inteligencia de donde vienen los enemigos. Y como tenemos que ir a entrar. Y todo eso, nos daban eso entrenamiento y las clases. Después la planificacion. Y después la radio operadora y la paramédica._ (Suha)

[First, they trained me as an instructor to train the new ones that are entering. Then they put me in intelligence. To get the intelligence about where the enemies were coming from. And how we needed to enter. And all that, they gave us that training and classes. After that, I was in planning. And then a radio operator and a paramedic.]
Nata Tiara share that her main role was that of a cook, but that everyone in that camp had to carry arms and engage in combat from time to time.

*Yo cocinaba, pero yo como siempre a nosotros tenía como pues, como los varones también, con armas y todo...uniformado...estuvimos en la lucha...cuando estaban con la guerra de aquí, sonaba bomba. Nosotros estuvimos en la, como se llama...en abajo de la trinchera, nosotros le daba arma de todo.*

(Nata Tiara)

[I cooked, but as always we had as well, as men too, weapons and everything...[we were] uniformed...were in the fight...when they were in the fighting here, there were sounds of bombing. We were in the, as it is called...in the bottom of the trench, we were given weapons and everything.]

Galil explains that after initial training, she was one of six women that managed the logistics of the camp.

*Después del curso, me había dejado en la logistica. Sí. Yo controlaba la logistica. Yo lo controlaba [la comida]. Yo le daba [la comida] a los cocineras, la cocinera. Así nosotras, las mujeres algunas teníamos que lavarle la ropa a los combatientes, sí les ayudábamos así.* (Galil)

[After the course, I was assigned to logistics. Yes. I controlled the logistics. I controlled it [the food]. I gave [the food] to the cooks. So we, women, some of us had to wash the fighters’ clothes, we did help them that way.]

Avance reports working both as a nurse and a troop leader during the war. She provided details about the manner in which she treated those in medical need.
A los que le baleaban, con bala, ella hacía el remedio y así los curaba... Dice que ayudó bastante... a los que baleaban a los que baleaban con bala. Dice eso que ella lo lavaba en una lugar para poner suelo. (Avance as translated from Miskitu by Mayga)

[For those who were shot, with a bullet, she made the remedy and so she healed them... She says that she helped a lot...those who were shot with a bullet. She says that she washed the place, to put in soil.]

Like Suhar and Avance, Kalwa was trained to engage in medical support.

Yo trabajaba como una paramédica. Me lo llevaba en la guerra... con los remedios... a veces llevaba pastillas. Me montaba como paramédica en montes.

Yo llegaba en los montes, llevaba todo allí. (Kalwa)

[I worked as a paramedic. I was brought to the war... with the remedies ... sometimes I had pills. I rode as a paramedic in the mountains. I arrived in the mountains, I carried everything there.]

Bolondrina describes having been given an advanced rank; serving as a leader to a troop.

Cuando estaba en la guerra, ella, responsable que, que le dio era el sargento.

(Bolondrina as translated from Miskitu by Suhar)

[When she was in the war, she, responsible for, for what the sergeant gave her.]

Tigrilla was the only one of the women that reported that her sole responsibility during the conflict was as a combatant.
Ella lo que hizo en la guerra, solo pelear, dice, solo enfrentar con los enemigos…

No hay otra cosa mas, dice. Solo enfrentar. (Tigrilla as translated from Miskitu by Suhar)

[What she did in the war, was just fight, she only dealt with the enemy. There was nothing else, she says. Only confrontation.]

Tigrilla is also the only interviewee who gave an affirmative response that she had killed the enemy in combat. The others were either vague in their responses or chose not to answer the question.

Dice, “no te puedo decir que no los maté, porque sí los maté dice porque estuve en la Guerra,” dice. (Tigrilla as translated from Miskitu by Suhar)

[She says, “I can’t say that I didn’t kill them, because I killed them because I was in the war,” she says.]

Like a Man: Memories of Equality

A resounding sentiment from the women was that their participation in the war was equal to the participation of the men. Across all of the interviews, the women described equivalent training and emphasized that they were as brave as the men were and were equally integral to the survival of the Miskitu people during the conflict. Galil shares that the training and work of the men and women was equivalent.

Bueno, allí eramos iguales, parejo. El entrenamiento lo que hacía los hombres también nosotras tenemos que hacerlo. Pero para dormir sí las mujeres aparte, los varones aparte. Pero el entrenamiento era iguales. Parejo. Lo que hacían los hombres, nosotras, la mujeres también tenemos que hacer. (Galil)
Well, there we were equal, the same. The training that the men did, we women also had to do. But to sleep, yes, women apart, men apart. But the training was the equal. The same. What men did, we women also had to do.]

Nata Tiara affirms that although the females and males were quartered in separate spaces, they were brought together for the purposes of fighting.

Tenían apartes. Aparte, las varones aparte, las mujeres aparte. Cuidaban bien por eso, por esos lados, y estaban bien. Le daban buen lugar. Dejaban los muchachos y las muchachas dejaban aparte. Pero se llegaron al, ya de la guerra, sí juntaban las mujeres y los varones. Juntos se llevaron. (Nata Tiara)

[They were apart. Apart, men apart, women apart. They took good care of that, for those sides, and they were fine. They provided a good place. They assigned the boys and the girls apart. But they arrived to the war, yes, women and men together. They brought them together.]

Tigrilla shared that the Nicaraguan Democratic Force (Fuerza Democrática Nicaragüense or FDN) was the group that provided her training, which was lo mismo [the same] as the training for the men.

Igualmente le daban derechos. (Tigrilla as translated from Miskitu by Suhar)

[They gave rights equally.]

Avance discusses some specific combat includes structural barriers that are gendered.

Pues, la vida del hombre y la mujer, la mujer es muy diferente. Porque la mujer cuando, cuando le va la menstruación es difícil para conseguir Kotex, para conseguir otra cosa. La gente, pues actualmente también usa, la ropa que pone, es la misma ropa pone como toalla sanitaria, ella se usa así. En una situación,
el hombre y mujer, el hombre puede orinar allí, nada más, pero la mujer no puede. (Avance as translated from Miskitu by Mayga)

[Well, the life of the man and the woman, the woman is very different. Because the woman when, when she is menstruating, it is difficult to get Kotex, to get something else. People, well they also currently wear, the clothes they wear, are the same clothes they put on, like, as a sanitary napkin, she used it like this. In a situation, the man and woman, the man can urinate there, nothing more, but the woman cannot.]

Many of the women mention “menstruation” as a difference between the men in the women in the war. Like Avance, Tigrilla spends some time discussing the differentiation.

Cuando no baja la menstruación, andaban bien…con los hombres. Pero cuando se baja la menstruación, no podemos estar bien nosotras porque…no tenían Kotex para usar, ni blúmers por eso, tenían problemas, por eso, no te puede decir que estaban bien nosotras. No era igual como, con los hombres. Sí, cuando no tenían menstruación, sí andan bien, dice, pero cuando bajaran menstruación, ya están mal. (Tigrilla as translated from Miskitu by Suhar)

[When they weren't menstruating, they were doing well ... with men. But when menstruation comes, we cannot be fine because… they did not have Kotex to use, nor panties, therefore, they had problems, that is why, she cannot tell you that they were fine with us. It was not the same as with men. Yes, when they were not menstruating they were doing well, she says, but the menstruation began, things were bad.]
Bolondrina indicates that the role of the women was not subordinate to the men during the war.

En la base, hombres y mujeres daban los mismos derechos. No decían el hombre es más mayor, para las mujeres. Es igual, derechos le estaba dando. Y pues, no maltrataba las mujeres, tenían con el respeto y igual derecho le daba.

(Bolondrina as translated from Miskitu by Suhar)

[At the base, men and women were given the same rights. They did not say the man is above the women. The rights were given equally. And well, the women were not mistreated, they had with respect and equal rights.]

Many of the women made it a point to note their bravery in the war as equivalent to that of a man. Bolondrina insisted that her courage and lack of fear demonstrated the valor of a man.

Dice que ella pensaba como hombre, no como mujer...Porque como en la guerra, en la guerra, nadie miraba como mujer a ella, miraba como hombre. Por eso ella sentía como hombre...Dice que los hombres no tenían miedo, cuando se dice, “si te alistas, te voy a mandar en este lugar.” Y el hombre no decía nada. Por eso, ella también, como hombre, pensaba por eso cuando les dijo, “tienes que entrar en la guerra.” Ella pensó como hombre por eso. Entró en la guerra dice porque ella no tenía miedo. (Bolondrina as translated from Miskitu by Suhar)

[She says she thought as a man, not as a woman ... Because as in war, in war, nobody looked at her as a woman, they saw her as a man. That is why she felt like a man ... She says that men were not afraid, when they say, “if you enlist, I am going to send you to this place.” And the man did not say anything.]
Therefore, she also, like a man, thought about that when they said, "You have to enter the war." She thought like a man because of that. She entered the war, she says, because she was not afraid.

Similarly, Kalwa says she felt equal to men, and like Bolondrina, she describes courage in gendered terms, suggesting that she conducted herself more like a man than a woman during the conflict.

_Pues, yo primero, cuando yo entré la guerra, yo pensé, yo también igual como un hombre andaba. Sí. Yo no andaba como una mujer, la verdad. Yo tenía un valor como hombre, que no tenía miedo. Y yo los muchachos, yo decía “vos es mi hermano” y ya esta._ (Kalwa)

[Well, I first, when I entered the war, I thought, I too went about equal to a man. Yes. I did not go about like a woman, truthfully. I had a courage like a man who was not afraid. And I said to the boys, "you are my brother" and that was it.]

Suhar suggests that women were equally willing as men to give their life to the cause.

_Todas las tropas que estaban allí, solo decían “morir,” sí, “por nuestros derechos.” Sí. No tenían miedo, ni nada._ (Suhar)

[All of the troops that were there, they just said “die,” yes, “for our rights.” Yes. They were not afraid, or anything.]

Bolondrina also shares that she was fearless in the face of the cause.

_Ella sentía bien. Solo pensaba en la guerra. Ella, pues no tenía miedo a nadie._

_Solo pensaba, solo pelear con los enemigos._ (Bolondrina as translated from Miskitu by Suhar)
[She felt good. She was only thinking about the war. She, well she was not afraid of anyone. She was only thinking, only to fight with the enemy.]

Tigrilla admits that she had fear going into the camp, but she gained courage through training.

Antes, sí tenía miedo, dice cuando se recibió los entrenamiento, ella le dio el valor. Y ella no tenía miedo para enfrentar con los enemigos. (Tigrilla as translated from Miskitu by Suhar)

[Before, yes, she was afraid, she said when she received the training, that gave her courage, and she was not afraid to confront the enemy.]

Kalwa suggests that fear was a useless emotion, as the Miskitu had no choice but to fight.

No me daba miedo, porque que vamos hacer? No tenía que hacer nada. Pues, siempre tenemos que salir adelante para luchar. (Kalwa)

[I was not afraid, because what were we going to do? We could not do anything. Well, we had to go forward and fight. Yes. Well, I thought, yes, but I was not afraid.]

The women’s narratives challenge the omissions in the national narratives and the local community in regards to female participation in the Contra War. From the perspective of the women, there was no substantial differential treatment between the men and the women. They did share (only when asked) that most or all of the high-ranking leaders were men but did not offer any critique of that in terms of hierarchy or in terms of how they were treated by the male leadership. Their interviews provide detailed description of combat training, which belies the idea that women’s roles during the war
were only to support male fighters. Each woman described one or more types of specialized training they were given showing that women served as troop leaders, paramedics, nurses, radio operators, intelligence gatherers, directors of logistics, as well as combatants.

*Marginalization of Miskitu, Contra, Females after the War*

*Racial and Political Persecution in the Present Day*

Despite the relative peace that was established after the signing of The Tela Accord (1989) and the subsequent election of the neoliberal President, Violeta Chamorro in 1990, the women’s stories indicate that persecution continues into the present day. Suhar contends that although the Contra War ended with the peace accord, the Sandinistas (which is the political party of the current President and the majority of the country’s legislative assembly) continues to persecute the Miskitu people because of their participation as Contras and/or for being indigenous. Additionally, the women and other community members frequently discuss issues due to present-day encroaching mestizo occupation of indigenous lands. Their narratives suggest that they blame the Sandinista administration for allowing the so-called “colonos” (colonists or settlers) to steal land from the Miskitu people.

*Pero te digo en esto tiempo es bien difícil, bien duro…A veces se elimina. A veces se los dejen en el cárcel, o tienen detenidos. Ese es problema serio. Yo siempre le digo, “No somos amigos de los Sandinistas.” Somos enemigos de los Sandinista, porque somos guerrilleros siempre. Quien no va a decir que Suhar no es guerrillera?...Siempre esta, somos Contra. (Suhar)*

[But I tell you this time is very difficult, very hard ... Sometimes they are eliminated. Sometimes they are left in jail, or they detain them. That is a serious
problem. I always say, "We are not friends of the Sandinistas. We are enemies of the Sandinistas, because we are always guerrillas." Who will not say that Suhar is not a guerrilla? It is always like that, we are Contra.]

Galil shares that being viewed as disloyal or in opposition to the Sandinista political party may affect continued employment. At the time of the interview, recent elections in the area included some elected positions previously held by the indigenous political party, Yapti Tasba Masraka Nanih Aslatakanka (YATAMA), going to the Sandinista party.

Porque hay muchos presos políticos ahorita. No podemos hablar…Nosotros hablamos en contra de Frente Sandinista, lo corren de trabajo. Una hija mia esta trabajando… la van a sacar, porque dicen que yo soy Contra. Una hija de Contra, no puede trabajar con el Frente Sandinista. Por eso, sí, a ella le dio trabajo cuando la YATAMA estaba gobernando la casa gobierno. Y ahora que ellos ganaron, ahora ella tiene que corren de trabajo. (Galil)

[Because there are many political prisoners right now. We cannot speak… Speak against Sandinista Front, you lose your job. A daughter of mine is working … they will take her out, because they say that I am Contra. A daughter of Contra cannot work with the Sandinista Front. That is why, yes, she was given work when YATAMA was ruling the government house. And now that they won, now she will lose her job.]

Tigrilla compares the conflict of the past to the present day conflict with the “colonos.”

…esa memoria, o esa historia que pasó …actualmente, siempre estamos en la lucha, dice, porque no hay libertad. Siempre tenemos problemas de nuestra tierra… (Tigrilla as translated from Miskitu by Suhar)
[...that memory, or that story that happened ... currently, we are always in the
fight, she says, because there is no freedom. We always have problems with our
land ...]

Tigrilla directly implicates the current government for the conflict with the colonos.

*El gobierno actualmente, que este en su sitio, para ella no es bueno dice...,*
*ahorita el Presidente Daniel con su esposa...No es un gobierno bueno dice*
*porque, el gobierno los mandan de lado de pacifico. Se cruzan en nuestra*
*region. Ahorita que tenemos problemas. Quien tiene la culpa? Dice, el gobierno*
*porque el gobierno los mandan para aca. Dice, porque, como hay tierra de los*
*indígenas suficiente, amplia para vivir, se los mandan para aca. Por eso, no hay*
*un gobierno bueno.* (Tigrilla translated from Miskitu by Suhar)

[The government currently, which is in place, for her is not good she says
because, she says... right now President Daniel with his wife ... It is not a good
government she says because, the government sends them from, the Pacific
side. They cross into our region. Right now, we have problems. Who is to blame?
She says the government because the government sent them here. She says,
because, there is enough indigenous land to live, they send them here.
Therefore, it is not a good government.]

Avance like Tigrilla and other members of the community sees parallels between past
and present conflict.

*Pero ahora con este presidente, dice que todo los días esta pensando en la*
*situación que tuvo en tiempos anteriores, puede ser vuelva que suceder los*
*mismo.* (Avance as translated from Miskitu by Mayga)
[But now with this president, she says that every day she is thinking about the situation she had in previous times, it may be that they happen again.]
Likewise, Kalwa views conflict with the national government as an ongoing problem for the Miskitu people.

_Nosotros no sabemos que mas va a salir. Porque, siempre, siempre hay problemas. Siempre hay choque…Las noticias me dio ahorita se murió dos persona allí en río arriba... Siempre hay guerra…Yo tengo tres muchachos y preocupo mucho…Pero que vamos hacer?…Estoy pidiendo a dios que un día que este libre con estos problemas. Siempre sigue. Siempre las madres estan llorando. Siempre una lucha. Una guerra. Siempre que no estamos en calmo. Así, sigue siempre peleando._ (Kalwa)

[We don’t know what else is going to come out. Because, always, there are always problems. There is always shock … I learned from the news right now that two people died there upriver … There is always war … I have three boys and I worry a lot…But what are we going to do? … I am asking God to one day be free from these problems. It always continues. Mothers are always crying. Always a fight. A war. We are never calm. So, we always keep fighting.]
Suhar explains how, since 1997, she has participated in or led several groups focusing on the rights of ex-combatants, but that the concerns of the Miskitu people have been largely ignored by the government.

_Fuimos a buscar por todo el lado el apoyo para los combatientes, nadie nos escuchó, nadie nos brindó apoyo…Quedamos en el aire, pues. Fuimos hasta en Managua…En ese tiempo había el Presidente Arnoldo Alemán. Fuimos en casa presidencial para buscar el apoyo para los combatientes. Solo los recibió los_
We went everywhere to look for support for the combatants, nobody listened, nobody gave us support... Well we were left up in the air. We went to Managua...At that time there was President Arnoldo Alemán. We went to the presidential house to seek support for the fighters. He only received the papers. But nothing else. Nothing. And also in Sandinistas’ time, we also went back there to the presidential house...Right up until today, nothing.]

Suhar suggests that there is a contrast between support for the combatants during and after the Contra War.

[We as Contra, I think they gave us our rights. Right now, to us nobody, there is no one that give us our rights. They have marginalized us. We were only used in war, no more.]

Tigrilla’s interview exemplifies the sense of despair felt by the women in regards to their relationship with the current Nicaraguan government and the mestizo colonizers.

[We hay esperanza para la comunidad, ella dice, por lamente, dice estan esperando cuando entran los colonos para pelear... No podemos andar bien libre, dice porque siempre estamos alerta. Sí vas a ir en la montaña para su cosecha, tiene que estar pendiente...No hay libertad. (Tigrilla as translated from Miskitu by Suhar)
[There is no hope for the community, she says, regretfully she says they are waiting for when the colonists come in to fight ... We can't be free, she says, because we are always alert. If you are going to go on the mountain for your harvest, you have to be aware. There is no freedom.]

Tigrilla implicates the current President, Daniel Ortega, in supporting the mestizo colonization of the indigenous land.

*A nosotros, nos va a matar, dice porque estamos bajo manos vacíos, pero los enemigos, sí tienen sus armas... Dice que de las comunidades...nosotros también tenemos ojos, manos, pies y todo, pero nosotros no tenemos nada porque no tenemos armas, pero los enemigos tienen armas y nos puedan matar...No tenemos armas... El Presidente Daniel Ortega no piensa con los indígenas. Solo piensa para eliminar a los indígenas.* (Tigrilla, as translated from Miskitu by Suhar)

[We will be killed, she says because we are empty-handed, but the enemies, they have their weapons ... She says that of the communities...we also have eyes, hands, feet and everything, but we don't have anything because we don't have weapons, but the enemies have weapons and can kill us ...We have no weapons ...President Daniel Ortega does not think about the indigenous people. He only thinks about eliminating the indigenous people.]

Tigrilla suggests that the Miskitu face danger on a daily basis due to the mestizo colonization and lack of support from the national government.

*Dice que ella siempre anda con miedo, dice porque ella siempre piensa que hay enemigos. Ella no puede andar bien. Ella no puede andar tranquila. Ahorita, que ella en la comunidad, es lejos, si va en el camino, caminando, si sale su*
enemigo se puede portar y la matan allí, nadie se lo suporta. No hace nada dice.

(Tigrilla as translated from Miskitu by Suhar)

[She says she always goes about in fear, says because she always thinks there are enemies. She cannot go about travel well. She cannot go about her way calmly. Currently, she is in the community, she is far away, if she goes on the road, walking, if her enemy comes out they can take her and kill her there, nobody supports her. Nobody she says.]

Tigrilla expressed frustration that the war ended with peace accords rather than a victory. She, like many of the others, lamented the loss of arms as part of the repatriation process.

_Dice en la guerra tiene que finalizar peleando, no con negociación, peleando y terminar y entrar en nuestra tierra. Pensó eso dice, pero con la negociación que entramos, desarmaron, y todo eso no salían antes…quedamos en manos vacíos… Dice que cuando se terminó la guerra, ella pensó que iba quedar con sus armas, pero las armas, quitaron todo, y dejaban manos vacíos y ella pensó mal en ese tiempo. Ella pensaba a terminar la guerra, y estar con su armita en la casa y quedate tranquila. Pero ella no quedó tranquila porque dejó manos vacíos. Y eso no quedó bien. _ (Tigrilla as translated from Miskitu by Suhar)

[She says in war, you have to finish fighting, not with negotiation, fighting and ending and entering our land. She thinks that she says, but with the negotiation we entered, they disarmed us, and all of that did not come out before…we were left empty-handed ... She says that when the war was over, she thought she was going to keep her weapons, but the weapons, they took everything away and left]
us empty-handed and she thought badly at that time. She thought at the end of the war, she would have her weapon in her house and be calm. But she was not calm because she was left empty-handed.]

Many members of the community talk about how acquiring and keeping a government job depends on loyalty to the Sandinista party. One Miskitu woman agreed to be interviewed but did not allow audio or video recording because she feared losing her job. Galil relates that threats to employment serve to silence opposition to the Sandinista and the national government.

*Ahorita la historia que tenemos, solo tenemos que estar en la casa. No tenemos que decir nada de partido, y si hablamos, lo sacan del trabajo. Por eso mejor estar callada. No andar gritando. Los que no trabajan, sí no tienen problemas. Pero nosotros que trabajamos, tenemos problemas con el otro partido, verdad? Entonces, yo le digo a mis hijos, mejor estar en la casa. No hay que meternos en ninguno de los estorbas.* (Galil)

[Right now the story we have, we just have it in the house. We do not have to say anything about the political party, and if we talk, they take jobs away. That's why it's better to be quiet. Do not shout it out. Those who do not work, do not have problems. But we who work, we have problems with the other political party, right? So, I tell my children, it's better to be at home. We must not get into any of the disturbances.]

Avance confirms that support of the Sandinista political party is key to retaining employment.

*Ahora con todo lo que esta pasando en Managua y el nivel nacional, la gente ya*
no quiere estar votando. Es un o obligación que el gobierno no exije a los instituciones del estado para que vote por el...Algunos están trabajando; entonces, es exigido que va a votar por el. (Avance as translated from Miskitu by Mayga)

[Now with everything that is happening in Managua and the national level, people no longer want to vote. It is an obligation that the government demands from state institutions to vote for him...Some are working; therefore, it is a requirement that they go to vote for him.]

The interviews I conducted in March 2018 began the day after regional elections. Members of the community were consumed with the idea that unprecedented Sandinista victories (over the indigenous YATAMA party) in local positions was supported by corruption.

Y ahora los Miskitus en los elecciones también obtuvieron varios votos y lo del Frente lo quitaron varios votos que eran de YATAMA para ganarse ellos. Lo robaron a cajas. (Avance as translated from Miskitu by Mayga)

[And now the Miskitus in the elections also got several votes and those from the Front (Sandinistas), they took several votes that were from YATAMA to win. They stole it from boxes.]

The women’s narratives are full of critique and distrust for the then-current government. In a time where it is very dangerous to critique the government, the women show no fear in speaking directly to me about how the government treats the Miskitu people. At the same time their narratives indicate that speaking out can have serious repercussions.
Loss of Gender Equality

In addition to persecution due to race, political affiliation, and participation in the Contra War, the women have faced the additional insult of having their wartime efforts acknowledged due to their gender. Likewise, the interviewees suggest that the role of women in Miskitu society is not equivalent to that of the men as it was during the war.

...anteiormente el hombre y la mujer, pues en donde estaban ellos, ellos estaban así pues trabajando todo pero, ahorita...los hombres solo quiere estar al frente de todo. Que no quiere que las mujeres estemos al frente al poder que sea en otras cosas. Y hay, gente, hombres que son bien machistes, no le da razón a las mujeres. Solo quiere, solo ellos quieren estar al frente. No quieren que las mujeres tienen un cargo politico, o un cargo así. (Avance as translated from Miskitu by Mayga)

[... previously the man and the woman, where they were, they were like that, everything working but, right now... men just want to be at the forefront of everything. They don't want women to be at the forefront of the power that is in other things. And there are, people, men who are very macho, that do not support women. They just want, they only want to be in front. They do not want women to have a political position, or a position like that.]

Tigrilla agrees that with the end of the war came the end of equality.

A las mujeres, en la guerra, desde que salió de la guerra, a las mujeres no lo respetan...Nadie nos respeta. (Tigrilla as translated by Suhar)

[Women, then, in the war, since leaving the war, they do not respect women... Nobody respects us.]
Galil says that there are some women that resist male domination in the household through holding jobs outside of the home.

_Aquí en Waspán, ellos dicen que son iguales ahorita, tantos los hombres y los varones dice que son iguales, pero algunos varones no piensan así. Que ellos mandan, dice que “Yo soy el hombre de la casa” dice…Aunque estudié, dice que tiene que estar en la casa, no quieren que sus esposas trabajen, que tiene que estar en la casa. Pero algunas mujeres no se dejen. Ellas trabajan como sus esposos igual. Pero algunos, no. (Galil)_

[Here in Waspán, they say they are equal right now, so many men and boys say they are equal, but some men do not think so. They insist, he says, "I am the man of the house," he says. Even if one studies, he says she has to be at home, they do not want their wives to work, she has to be at home. But some women do not put up with it. They work like their husbands work. But some, no.]

Bolondrina describes poor medical treatment of ex-combatants that may have roots in gender-biased medical practices. She describes treatment provided by _la MINSA_ (Ministerio de Salud, Ministry of Health) as being dismissive of the needs of the ex-combatants.

…_siempre los, los ex-combatientes no estan bien salud. Ahora con la salud se queda mal ahora. Con el dolor del hueso, dolor del riñón, y dolor de cabeza…Y cuando se pasa en la consulta, aquí no mas en la MINSA, en el hospital. Solo le esta brindando acepto Menofen y Ibuprofen no mas, dice. Mas bien con esa partida, con esa tratamiento, se quedaron con dolor del estomago, dice. Con ulcer. Y no alivia nada. (Bolondrina as translated by Suhar)_
[.. always the ex-combatants are not in good health. Now with the health, one finds themselves in bad shape. With bone pain, kidney pain, and headaches ...
And when it happens in the consultation, here only in the MINSA, in the hospital. One is only offering that I accept Menofen and Ibuprofen no more, they say. With that sort of dismissal, with that treatment, they find themselves with stomach pain…with ulcer. And it does not relieve anything.]

The women’s narratives demonstrate that silencing due to racial identity, political affiliation, and gender have real effects on their present day access to employment, benefits, and potential for female empowerment in the domestic sphere and the political landscape.

Silencing in Curriculum and National Narratives

The accounts from the women and other residents from Waspán provide a unified stand that the Miskitu people and the Contra War are “silenced” in the overall national narrative. Suhar laments that the story of the Miskitu is left out of the national curriculum.

Creo que la historia de los sandinistas siempre le esta dando en la educación, en la escuela, y en el estudio y todo eso. Pero la historia de nosotros, como indígenas nunca le esta dando en la clase. Yo, como Suhar, pues yo pienso, si le esta dando la historia de los sandinista, creo que tiene derecho a dar la historia de los combatientes, de los indígenas también. Porque son los dueños de la tierra. Somos las dueñas de la tierra. Porque somos Miskitu. Fuimos en la guerra. La historia tiene que dar en la educación también para que conozca la historia. Como fueron? Porque se pelearon? (Suhar)
[I think they are always providing the story of the Sandinistas in education, in the school, and in the studies and all that. But they never give the history of us as indigenous in class. I, as Suhar, well, I think, if you give the story of the Sandinistas, I think you have the right to give the story of the fighters, of the indigenous too. Because they own the land. We own the land. Because we are Miskitu. We were in the war. They have to provide the story in education as well so you know the story. How was it? Why did they fight?]

As a teacher for thirty years, Galil is intimately familiar with the national textbooks and the regulation regarding curriculum content.

*En el libro, todo que, lo que aparece, tiene que dar en clase. Sí, pero la lucha de los indígenas no, solamente en la lucha de los Sandinistas sale. Augusto César Sandino, Carlos Fonseca, solo de los Sandinistas tiene confirmar. Pero la lucha indígena, no….ahora es prohibido. Sí les decíamos, eso somos corro de trabajo. Sí…Con el gobierno del Frente Sandinista no se puede. (Galil)*

[In the book, everything that appears, you have to cover in class. Yes, but the struggle of indigenous people does not, only the struggle of the Sandinistas comes out. Augusto César, Carlos Fonseca, only of the Sandinistas is confirmed. But the indigenous struggle, no…now it is prohibited. If we told them, we lose our job… With the Sandinista Front government you cannot.]

Kalwa confirms that the current government prohibits the teaching of Miskitu history.

*La verdad, te digo. Como el es presidente, el no le da historia de Miskitu que, que fue en la guerra. No le enseña a los niños, ni estudiantes, ni nadie. Ellos tienen como cerrado, ojos cerrado. Pero de ellos, sí. La verdad, así es. Como ellos tiene su mando, estamos en bajo de Sandinista del Presidente Daniel.*
Entonces, tiene todo atrapado es que, atrapado pues historia de Miskitu. Así es la verdad. (Kalwa)

[The truth, I tell you. As he is president, he does not give Miskitu history that was in the war. He does not teach children, students, or anyone else. They have like closed, eyes closed. But of them, yes. The truth, that’s it. As they have their orders we are under Sandinistas of President Daniel. So, everything is trapped, it’s that, the history of Miskitu is trapped. This is the truth.]

She thinks that it is important that young people know and understand the gravity of war.

De los Miskitus casi no le cuenta nada. Es que la verdad. La verdad te voy a decir, ahorita... Tiene que enseñarlos. Porque, yo le digo, yo a mis hijos ahorita digo, dos son joven, yo le digo, “La guerra no es juguete. La guerra no es una fiesta.” Yo le estoy diciendo a mis hijos, “Yo luché, y yo se que es guerra.”

(Kalwa)

[Of the Miskitus, they recount almost nothing. It is true. I am going to tell you the truth; right now... You have to teach them. Because, I tell them, my children right now I say, two are young, I say, “War is not a toy. War is not a party.” I am telling my children, “I fought, and I know what war is.”]

Tigrilla agrees that young people should learn the history of Miskitu participation in the war.

Dice que es importante para que conozcan la historia los jovenes. Es importante. (Tigrilla as translated from Miskitu by Suhar)
[She says that it is important that the young people know the history. It is important.]

The women’s narrative of the lack of representation in national curriculum mirrors an overall sentiment shared by many I have interacted with in the community (including the male interviewees) that their participation in the war has been suppressed and/or erased by the national government. It also aligns with what I have seen in reviewing Nicaraguan national curriculum material.

Voicing and Indigenous and Ex-combatant Pride/Voicing as evidence of silencing

Among all of the members of the community with whom I interacted, it was obvious that despite their challenges and obstacles in life, they carried pride related to being indigenous and specifically being Miskitu. Suhar was always vocal on this issue.


[I say I am proud because I am indigenous, and I was in the military of the indigenous. And I am Contra. There I learned all the, many things. And I also have value always. I do not have fear of anyone. I go about with strength. And I have a value. And I know my rights too. I am always proud because I am a guerrilla. I am indigenous.]

Avance indicated that she would be willing to sit for multiple interviews to tell her story and further suggested that even more Miskitu should share their stories.

Dice que para sacar un historia así, ella está dispuesto hacer todo las
entrevistas. Pero hay más gente que tiene que invitar para que habla, y hay que tener alguien como representar y organizar a esa gente. (Avance as translated from Miskitu by Mayga)

[She says that in order to get a story like that, she is willing to do all the interviews. But there are more people who you have to invite to speak, and you have to have someone like to represent and organize these people.]

She specifically wants the world to know that she fought for her people.

_Ella luchó…lo que hicieron en la guerra, lo que mataron a la gente. Entonces que haga públicamente todo lo que hizo. Y ella está hablando la verdad. Como ella estaba en la guerra. Sí, ella luchó._ (Avance as translated from Miskitu by Mayga)

[She fought…what they did in the war, that they killed the people. So make public everything she did. And she is speaking the truth. How she was in the war. Yes, she fought.]

Likewise, Bolondrina says that she wants the world to know her story.

_Dice que ella era como combatienta, y ella dice que tiene que saber la historia de ella…. Cuando me muero, pues la historia que va a quedar. ¿Quién era la Bolondrina?_ (Bolondrina as translated from Miskitu by Suhar)

[She says she was a fighter, and she says her story has to be known …When I die, then the story that will remain. Who was the Bolondrina?]

Tigrilla shared that she was thankful to have people come and listen to her story.

_Dice que primero, dice, le da gracias al Señor, había una persona, dice, a pensar por ella, por la lucha que pasó, y que conozcan su historia, ustedes. Y eso para_
ella es alegre dice por estar hablando con ustedes aquí, la historia de ella.

(Tigrilla as translated from Miskitu by Suhar)

[She says that first, she says, she thanks the Lord, there was a person, she says, thinking of her, for the fight that happened, and that you all know her history. And that for she is joyful, she says be talking to you here, the story of her.]

Galil relayed that even without a victorious ending to the struggle, the Miskitu people are proud to have fought.

Porque nosotros pues, nosotros no queríamos a los de Frente Sandinista, verdad? Fuimos a combatir, pero lastimosamente no ganaron del combate.

Entonces, dentro de un diálogo, acuerdo, así quedarnos…Pero nos sentimos orgulloso. (Galil)

[Because we, well, we didn't love the Sandinista Front, right? We went to fight but sadly, they did not win the fight. So inside a dialogue, agreement, we remain… But we are proud.]

She goes on to relate that Miskitu participation was silenced due to the support of the United States for the Contra cause. She relates how the enemy would tease the fighters by calling them “yankees."

Bueno, nosotros, los indígenas también que, por el derecho, buscando un derecho, de nosotros fuimos a pelear, verdad? Por lo menos, lograron, aunque murieron muchos. Muchos indígenas allí murieron, pero por los menos, en historia, porque los Miskitus también fuimos a la guerra, sí, en contra del gobierno. Sí, es el orgullo que tener. Sí. Cuando estaban en la guerra ellos pensaban que los gringos estaban peleando. Algunas veces los muchachos
cuando iban de combate, decían, que le decía a ellos riéndanse, “Yanqui,” se decían a ellos. Pero no era Yanqui, dice. No había a un Yanqui, dice cuando estaban peleando. Eramos Miskitus. Sí. Entonces el orgullo de nuestra causa indígena que fueron a combate. (Galil)

[Well, we, the indigenous also who, for rights, looking for our rights, we went to fight, right? At least, they succeeded, although many died. Many indigenous people died there, but at least, in history, because the Miskitus, we also went to war, yes, against the government. Yes, it is the pride to have. When they were at war, they thought the gringos were fighting. Sometimes the boys, when they were going to fight, said, they said to them laughing, “Yankee,” they said to them. But he wasn’t a Yankee, he said. There was no Yankee, he said when they were fighting. We were Miskitus. Yes. Then the pride of our indigenous cause was that we went to battle.]

She remains steadfast in her loyalty to the Miskitu people and the indigenous political party.

_Siempre yo me voy a morir con el mismo partido. Digo yo, “Fuí YATAMA. Fuí Contra. Y así me voy a morir.” No como algunos que andan cambiando partido por interés, no tengo ningún interés, yo. Fuí a luchar por mi pueblo. No para que me den dinero, así, aquí para que me den cargo. Desde que vine, nadie me agarro trabajo, cargo ni nada. Pero, siempre yo voy a luchar de indígena._ (Galil)

[I am always going to die with the same political party. I say, “I was YATAMA. I was a Contra. And will die as such.” Not like some who are changing political parties for interest, I do not have any interest. I went to fight for my people. Not]
for money, so here to take charge. Since I came, no one gets me a job, position or anything. But, I'm always going to fight indigenous.]

Bolondrina’s pride is demonstrated in description of combat as a talent.

_Ese no es talento de todos personas, dice. Lo que pasó en la vida de ella, pues ella se siente bien, dice. Porque es una historia va a quedar en el mundo._

(Bolondrina as translated from Miskitu by Suhar)

[This isn’t a talent of everyone, she says. What happened in her life, well she feels good, she says. Because it is a story that will remain in the world.]

_Sí, le gustó, dice que como se viva las Miskitu, de su cultura. Ella siente orgullosa._

(Bolondrina as translated from Miskitu by Suhar)

[Yes she liked it, she says, how the Miskitu live, of her culture. She is proud. And she is very proud to be an ex-combatant.] (Bolondrina as translated from Miskitu by Suhar)

Kalwa relates that despite the continual aggression and/or dismissal by the Sandinistas/national government, she knows that Miskitu have inherent value as human beings.

_Cada uno, si piensa por la patria, puede luchar. Si quiere seguir adelante …_  
_Porque, unos somos personas iguales. Tenemos derechos iguales._ (Kalwa)

[Every single person, if they think of their country, can fight. If you want to move forward…Because we are people too. We have rights too.]

Nata Tiara indicates that she is proud that the work of she and the other combatants saved lives.
Pues, yo no por mi parte, que vale la pena porque la gente salvaron, mucho gente que salvaron. (Nata Tiara)

[Well, for my part, it was worth it because people they saved, many people they saved.]

The women’s narratives demonstrate that they are keenly aware of how their stories have been silenced and locate the cause of the silencing as a function of their racial, political and gender identities. The fierce pride demonstrated by the women was evident in their stories and in their insistence that their stories should be publicized even though such stories and material are prohibited and could bring them harm. It was clear that the women were tired of years of being dismissed by the government and felt that such a publication was a possible way to fight back, to at least in some small measure, be “heard.”

Community Engaged Heritage Output

To support the interruption of silencing, utilizing the oral history interview data, I created a 30-page heritage storybook (plus a cover page and back page) that publicizes each woman’s story in her own words. The book is entitled “Aiklakabra Mairin: Nuestras Historias, Nuestro Patrimonio” [Women Fighters: Our Stories, Our Heritage]. The front cover includes a photo of Suhar at the age of thirteen taken during the Contra War. She is dressed in military clothing and holding a weapon. I chose the photo for the cover because Suhar initiated the community-engaged project and the photo visually interrupts the silencing of the female combatant, as Suhar is clearly suited and armed for combat in the photo. In the inside cover, I provide a brief introduction, which I have translated below:
As a result of the conflict with the Sandinistas after their revolutionary victory in 1979, at least 12,000 Miskitu people were relocated from Nicaragua to refugee and military camps in Honduras by the end of 1982. This book includes the oral history of Miskitu women that became combatants in the subsequent Contra War. The women shared their stories between the years 2017-2019.

The introduction page is followed by the women’s stories. For each woman, there is a summary page, which includes a current photo and gives a brief biographical statement. Suhar’s page and Bolondrina’s pages also include a photograph of them taken during the war. These were the only two women who had photographs from that time. Following the introductory page for each woman is 2-3 pages of their oral history organized in temporal sequence in the story format (as arranged and edited as described in chapter four). Present day photos of the women are distributed across their stories in compliance with their wishes. Also included throughout the book (in order to provide additional context) are photos I took of structures and places in the community during the same visits when the interviews were conducted. The photos were chosen to emphasize that these women are not just linked due to participation in the conflict, but they inhabit a particular geographic space that is the community from which this heritage product emerged. The back cover has a photo of a group of women to include Suhar from a day when they first became refugees in Honduras.

As evidenced in these excerpts, the act of sharing their oral histories interrupts the silencing that occurs in their country and community. Their stories challenge the narrative that Sandinista rule is just and without opposition. Their stories recognize the Miskitu as agents in their own destiny as related to participation in the Contra War, while
recognizing support from other groups such as the United States. Finally, their stories provide alternative narrative to how females contributed to the cause by receiving training and engaging in important roles mirroring both skilled professions (e.g. paramedics, radio operators, intelligence gatherers) as well as martial assignments to include armed combat.
CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION: SILENCING AND RETROSPECTIVE SIGNIFICANCE

I am sitting in the airport in Waspán, which is to say I am sitting in on a wooden bench in a pavilion in the middle of a cow patch, waiting for the single-engine Cessna plane to arrive from Managua, quickly refuel, and then make the return trip. I am reflecting on the lives of the thirteen voices of the Miskitu ex-combatants that I was privileged to interview in rapid-fire succession over a three-day period. Much of what I heard confirmed what I had read about this indigenous group and their participation in the Contra War, but there were also many surprises. Both the women and men interviewed expressed their concerns that their stories continue to go untold in schools and in national heritage sites. They were hopeful that I could somehow publish their oral histories to help document what they contributed to the cause. They described how The Tela Accord (1989) and the election of Violeta Chamorro led to an end to the Contra conflict, disarmament and repatriation of the Miskitu fighters (many that had been living in refugee camps or military bases in Honduras during the conflict). Not all promises had been kept, even by their own leaders and they continue to struggle economically. But they also shared their consternation over what they described as the continued persecution of the Miskitu people. They view the Sandinista government as the enemy, as well as the Mestizo population who were illegally settling in the autonomous zone that was historically occupied by Afro-descendant and indigenous peoples such as the Miskitu. Some of the interviewees, including one woman who
declined to be recorded due to fear of losing her government job, explained how in order to have a well-paying job, you must show loyalty to the Sandinista party. Being a former Contra combatant was a stigma that excluded many of them from having gainful employment.

My reverie is interrupted when two teenage Miskitu boys that I had met the day before when they performed as part of a mixed sex dance troupe came into the pavilion to say goodbye and share contact information. The plane was late in arriving so we chatted for a while about their aspirations and they provided me an unsolicited but entertaining history of their dating history with some of the young women in the dance troupe. Thinking about the oral histories shared by the ex-combatants, I ask one of the young men if he knew about the Contra War, and if he had learned about it in school. He explained that he had heard various family stories from relatives that had participated in the conflict, but other than that, he knew relatively little about it. He said he was more concerned with the current war.

“What war?” I ask confused. The young man explains that his people were at war with the colonos who were taking their land by force. I am fascinated by the use of the term “colonists” to describe people who are their own countrymen. It speaks volumes about Miskitu versus Mestizo identity and the failure of the Sandinistas to fully engender the “multicultural” and “multi-ethnic” nation described in the Nicaraguan Constitution.

The next day, I am sitting in La Marseillaise, a fine dining restaurant in Managua, Nicaragua. I am surrounded by stunning artwork bedecking the walls and wondering why these are not housed in a National Museum so that more people could have access to view them. My host, General Humberto Ortega Saavedra, co-founder of the
Tercerista Tendency of the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) in 1975, former Sandinista Minister of Defense, and brother of the current President Daniel Ortega, lets me know that this very restaurant was once the favorite establishment of Anastasio Somoza Debayle, the former President of Nicaragua and leader of the National Guard, who was overthrown by the Sandinista Liberation Front in 1979. Two Victoria beers into the interview with El General, and I am ready to pose the question that was burning in my brain all week. I refer to the goals of the Revolution as he had described them in his book, “La Epopeya de la Insurreccion,” and ask him if he thought that the objectives had been fully realized since the victory. His initial response is to note the improvements the Sandinista government has made in the country to include better healthcare, a dramatic rise in literacy rates, low incidence of crime and improved infrastructure. He pulls up some photos on his phone to show me his grandchildren playing in one of the many beautiful playgrounds now available in the country. The General is also somewhat (to my surprise) reflective, noting that not all the revolutionary goals had been fully realized and that the current Sandinista party does not necessarily embody all of the ideas of the original leaders. I push the General further to ask him if he thinks that the government embraces all sectors of society. He says “of course.” I ask him about the indigenous and Afro-descendant autonomous region and he explains that there is still work to be done, but there has been much progress and currently the government has been working on putting highways in these remote rural regions and working on other public works such as getting more access to electricity and water. He assures me that as these projects continue, these people will begin to feel embraced by the government. I reflect upon the days I spent with the Miskitu. I stayed in one of the more modern homes in the
community, but like all the homes there, it lacked plumbing technology and I washed
myself out of a rain barrel. However, none of the interviewees complained about lack of
what I would call “modern” conveniences highway construction, electric, plumbing or
internet access. Their issue with the government as they reported was lack of
recognition, financial support, and protection, and a belief that they were persecuted
because of being indigenous. I wonder aloud to the General if something like police
protection in these areas that reportedly suffer much higher crime rates than Mestizo
areas may serve to engender feelings of appreciation for the government. Ortega
reiterates the progress with highway construction and then uttered the words that
seemed to encapsulate all of the country’s colonial legacies, “We haven’t conquered the
autonomous region yet.” [excerpt from my fieldnotes dated July 20 and 21, 2017]

Silencing and Retrospective Significance: Race, Political Affiliation, Gender

This study demonstrates that silencing occurs at both the national and local level
in Nicaragua, and the women’s stories are vulnerable to this silencing due to their
race/ethnicity, political affiliation/participation in counterrevolution, and gender.
Trouillot’s (1995) framework is useful for examining the silencing of the Miskitu
participation in the conflict. As with his analysis of the silencing in reporting of the
Haitian Revolution, an analysis of the Contra War locates silencing in four levels of
historical production. At the moment of fact creation (the making of sources), some of
the Contra activity was already being silenced as the CIA involvement was clandestine
and so some of the global reporting was limited and biased. At the moment of fact
assembly (the making of archives), much of the CIA reports were classified, the
documented experience of the Miskitu were limited to what was reported from UNHCR
Refugee camps, and from historians like Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz and anthropologist Charles Hale, who specifically focused on documenting the experiences of the Miskitu during the conflict. At the moment of fact retrieval (the making of narratives), there was limited focus on widely publicized Miskitu accounts, with the Contras often reported upon as a monolithic group of those in opposition to the Nicaraguan (or reportedly Communist) government. These reports did not account for indigenous resistance and indigenous leadership within the Contra group. The findings of this study demonstrate that at the moment of retrospective significance, (the making of history in the final instance), Miskitu are left out of the Nicaraguan national narratives, as produced in museums, monuments and heritage sites and curriculum even though the records of their participation are now available.

“Retrospective significance can be created by the actors themselves, as a past within their past, or as a future within their present” (Trouillot 1995, 59). Trouillot outlined how the significance of the Haitian Revolutionary actor, Colonel Jean-Baptiste Sans-Souci, was effectively silenced by Henri Christophe, former monarch and later President of Haiti. Christophe’s actions effectively rendered the story of Sans-Souci with “only marginal retrospective significance” (60). Likewise, the present-day silencing of the interviewees is not due so much to the omissions at the moment of fact creation, fact assembly or fact retrieval, as much as it is due to the current moment of retrospective significance. The Nicaraguan heritage narratives are heavily focused on the Revolution and its victors. Stories of the Contra War are “distracting footnotes” (Trouillot 1995, 107), and interrupt a national narrative that shows an “inevitable” trajectory from Sandino, to the FSLN revolutionaries, towards the legitimacy of the rule
of the current Sandinista administration. To be a Sandinista is to be Nicaraguan. Any other political party affiliation makes one an outsider, and a target of persecution, and vulnerable to silencing. In addition, the story of the Miskitu people belies the national myth of mestizaje creating a fracture in the attempt to create a unified conception Nicaraguan citizenship. Finally, the detailed description of female contributions to combat challenge the patriarchal values of both the Nicaraguan national society and the Miskitu culture. In national heritage production, indigeneity is present only when it is framed in a narrative of rebellion against a foreign invader.

Every word of the oral histories shared by the women I interviewed interrupts the silencing they experience in the community of Waspán and as citizens of Nicaragua. Their interviews, and their persistence to be heard and recorded, demonstrate their resistance to that silencing. Expressions of resentment and indignation over the failure to recognize the Miskitu participation in the Contra War tied these interviews together, and this theme was present across all of the interviews I have conducted in the Miskitu community, as well as many informal conversations. The women and men I have spoken to lament that there is no record of what they did museums, monuments or history books. This is most often the stated reason that the interview participants give in regards to why they are interested in sharing their oral history with me. In addition to the narratives of gender differential between the men and women, I observed and became entangled in situations (like when I had to agree to interview the men before the women) that showed it was clear that the men saw themselves as more important to the Contra cause, and more worthy of having their narratives recorded and publicized.

*Retrospective Significance: Challenging Dominant Racial and Political Narratives*
The legend of the revolutionary leader Augusto César Sandino is an important national hero narrative, so much so that throughout museums and heritage sites, the national origin “myth” begins with the birth of Sandino. His successes against tyranny and specifically with bringing an end to US Marine occupation in Nicaragua mirrors the David versus Goliath narrative, positioning Nicaragua as a potent force against any threat to sovereignty to include US intervention. Heritage stories available in museums, monuments and heritage sites begin with Sandino and his rebellion, then leap ahead to the historical moment of the founding of FSLN, posing Carlos Fonseca Amador as the face of the movement, and ending with the present day “hero” of the revolution, President Daniel Ortega Saavedra and his Sandinista administration. Heritage “involves the construction of a story about the past that affects the present” (Jackson 2012, 24). The construction of the authorized heritage story about Nicaragua is most certainly “written” through heritage production to come to the pre-determined end that the administration in the present is justified by heroes and martyrs of the past.

The national narrative of Sandinistas as the heroes that overcame the oppressive dictator in order to liberate the people is disrupted by the ten years the country spent in the “civil” conflict we know as the Contra War. The racial categories and racist tropes that were imported and (re)produced by European colonists and later the “mestizo” majority have established a system of differentiation that does not allow indigenous and Afro-descendant groups the full privileges of Nicaraguan citizenship.

Nationalism-like any ethnic worldview-is a political ideology that frequently evokes intense feelings among its adherents. It draws its emotional force from addressing one of the most fundamental challenges in our existence: the fact the
individual life is finite. By assuming bonds to supposedly contemporary co-
natural people and constructing a common past and future, nationalism 
transcends the limits of individual existence (Gabbert 2011, 11).

The myth of mestizaje does not neatly map onto the daily life experiences of the people 
of Nicaragua, and the Miskitu resist (or feel disenfranchised from) Nicaraguan 
nationality. This may be due to the racist discourses still omnipresent today and may be 
a byproduct of nationalistic thinking itself as Hooker (2010) explains that one of the core 
components of nationalism "is that all members of the nation share a common identity 
that differentiates them from outsiders, and all nationals possess it equally...Yet 
nationalist movements may rely on the support of the lower classes without necessarily 
wishing to extend them full political rights" (Hooker, 2010, 248). If the Miskitu do not fit 
into the myth of mestizaje, they are in an ideological sense, not fully Nicaraguan nor 
privy to the benefits of Nicaraguan citizenship. This has real effects on the past and 
present attempts by the mestizo population to engage in conflict with and take control of 
land from the Miskitu people.

As in the United States, the women in this study and other Nicaraguans I have 
interviewed suggest that there is silencing in the Nicaraguan national curriculum taught 
in schools. In the community of Waspán, where anyone around the age of 30 or older 
has an up close and personal memory of the conflict, these narratives are already 
drifting off into the ephemera. As an educator and a parent, I have seen such silencing 
in the United States as realized through state and national standards that present 
history from a point of view that continue to favor the white, Western, moneyed, male as 
the protagonist of global narratives. It is not that all other groups are completely
silenced, but the “volume” is certainly turned down. These hegemonic discourses can also be found in national museums, monuments, and heritage sites. I argue that the narratives that we are surrounded with serve to reproduce racial, gender and class-based hierarchies. “By universally imposing and inculcating (within the limits of its authority) a dominant culture thus constituted as legitimate national culture, the school system, through the teaching of history…culcates the foundations of a ‘true civic religion’ and more precisely, the fundamental presuppositions of the national self-image” (Bourdieu, Wacquant and Arrage 1994, 8). It is only, as in the case of the women of Waspán, when minority groups reject the national self-image handed to them by those in power, do we open up a space for alternative narratives. Jackson (2012) tell us that the “journey to know our heritage represents a profound desire to see ourselves in the continuum of history on a family, community, national, or global level. It is a quest to know more about ourselves and to share that knowledge with others through a variety of means” (21). The request for a heritage product from the aiklakabra mairin demonstrates such a desire.

Silencing in the national narratives may have real effects on access to political power. In the National Assembly of Nicaragua (analogous to the US legislative branch), there are currently 92 deputies (analogous to senators). Of those, 71 are part of the Sandinista party, with the remainder split among other parties. Only one representative represents the indigenous party, YATAMA. As evidenced by the comments of General Ortega, the country’s political leadership continues to view the Autonomous Indigenous region as a “problem,” and use of the word “conquer” may suggest that further aggression is anticipated to solve the “problem.”
If anyone is unsure of the authorized narrative of Nicaragua, just look at any of the ubiquitous billboards, posters or flyers that surround you in the urban areas that champion the current Sandinista party utilizing words like “victory” and “solidarity”:

**VAMOS POR MAS VICTORIAS! [LET’S GO FOR MORE VICTORIES!]**

**NICARAGUA, DE VICTORIA, EN VICTORIA! [NICARAGUA, OF VICTORY, IN VICTORY!]**

**POR MÁS VICTORIAS! [FOR MORE VICTORIES!]**

**PATRIA POR TODOS! [HOMELAND FOR EVERYONE!]**

These words are accompanied by the image of the President Daniel Ortega and the Vice President (and also the wife of Daniel Ortega) Rosario Murillo surrounded by the authorized color scheme, a high contrast of a bright fuchsia, turquoise and other pastel colors. In this eye-catching manner, the President and Vice President remind everyone that they (as Nicaraguans) live in solidarity. Authorized discourses and/or the beliefs and practices of the ruling class may become accepted by society as unquestionably correct/valid through the process of manufactured consent (cf. Gramsci 2007). With limited fieldwork, it is unclear to me the level to which people across the country consent to the dominant narratives or agree that they live in solidarity, but the oral history work provides how these seven women experience silencing in the national narratives and feel persecuted and dismissed by the national government. From what they share, the ability to have narratives recognized in part correlates with the racial and political categorization of the groups who participated in and/or are survivors of the country’s conflicts.
Retrospective Significance: Challenging Dominant Narratives of Female Participation in Combat

The narratives of the women and their publication interrupt the silencing they have experienced at the national and local level. The overall thematic tie to what the women shared about the Contra War across the interviews was that they were *there*, and that they fought *bravely*, like a *man* but as Miskitu *women*. This emphasis may be a reaction to their feelings of their participation being silenced, and such silencing provides structural barriers to their lives. The choice of what they voice in the oral history may align with Thomson’s (2016) suggestion that we “compose our memories to make sense of our past and present lives” (344). The women seem to be asking for recognition *now* for the combat activities they did *then*. “Anthropologists have observed how the expression of women’s unique experience as women is often muted, particularly in any situation where women’s interests and experiences are at variance with those of men” (Anderson and Jack 2016, 179). The women interviewed seem to experience “silencing” at three levels (that intersect) race/ethnicity, political affiliation, and gender. The experience of gendered silencing is reproduced through the patriarchal values of the larger Nicaraguan society, but is also realized within the confines of the Miskitu community.

I have witnessed the “silencing” effects of machismo in my visits to the community. In my first visit, even though the stated purpose was to interview the women, upon arrival, six male Miskitu ex-combatants were waiting for us at the airfield, and followed us to Comandante Pipli’s house and made it clear that they were to be interviewed before the women were interviewed. Although that was not the stated
purpose of the research, through a side conversation with Suhar, I understood that it would be necessary to interview the men in order to avoid conflict. Though, not the focus of this overall project, hearing the men’s stories informed my overall understanding of the Miskitu participation in the conflict, their feelings towards the current government (which mirror the sentiments of the women I interviewed), and their desire (which also mirror the sentiments of the women) to have the story of the Miskitu people and their participation in the conflict memorialized and acknowledged in the way the stories of the Sandinista fighters and heroes are memorialized in the national discourses. I was also able to understand how the men were dismissive of the Miskitu women’s contributions to the conflict, noting that they (the men) had fought the war. They (the men) should be consulted for the “real” story.

Even as the women shared their oral histories, there are inevitably narratives that they themselves choose to silence and/or memories that have faded with time. For example, while the women shared examples of the Sandinista persecution against the Miskitu (specifically before they fled to Honduras), they did not provide details about the Contra guerrilla activities or atrocities they may have witnessed (or that they themselves were possibly responsible for) during the war. Allison (2016) discussed the hazards of conducting oral history interviews several years after a historical event. "The weakness of the later interviews is that one’s memory naturally works to either forget the horrific experience or make sense of it" (Allison 2016, 341). I would contend that this is not so much as a weakness in the case of the women, as their lack of dwelling on the horrific demonstrates what they find meaningful, namely the ongoing “colonization” of their land. They seemed much more emotional about the present conflict than the past one,
though arguably there was much more harm done to the community during the Contra War period. The “benefit,” therefore, to the later interviews is understanding the long-term effects of persecution and how it shapes their present-day feelings as indigenous female ex-combatants.

The women were also reticent to share details about romantic relationships or sexual activities in the camps. Questions in this area did not receive significant responses other than noting that the Miskitu were Christian people and/or relationships were prohibited among the troops. Other studies (e.g. Dunbar-Ortiz 2016, Garcia, Cottman and Baltodano 2019) suggest that there is evidence that some Contra women were victims of sexual exploitation during the conflict, but none of the interviewees for the present study supported this. In addition, while the women were clear that there were no relationships in the military camps, a number of them talked about how women who were impregnated would leave the military camps to live in the refugee camps. Kalwa herself shared that she was impregnated during the conflict and left the military life to live in the refugee camp until the end of the conflict. In some sense, the women contradicted their own reports, as several seem to have had wartime relationships. I do not intend to evaluate the “truth” of what they did or did not experience in terms of sexual relations or possible sexual exploitation other than to say these discussions were not present in the women’s narratives. Or perhaps it may be more accurate to say that the women did not choose to focus on these topics.

Allison (2016) suggests that ex-combatants shape their narratives to focus on group loyalty. “Belief systems have associated behavior, rituals, morals, and action that are considered appropriate and good” (Allison 2016, 339). Most certainly, these women
emphasized their role as combatants, members of a troop, and Christians over the role of a sex object as may have been implied by my questions. Anderson and Jack (2016) propose that a “woman’s discussion of her life may combine two separate, often conflicting perspectives: one framed in concepts and values that reflect men’s dominant position in the culture, and one informed by the more immediate realities of a woman's personal experience. Where experience does not ‘fit’ dominant meanings, alternative concepts may not readily be available” (179). It seems to me that all of the women chose to emphasize their participation in the war effort (and that their work and valor was equivalent to men) was the story that they wanted told to the world. They may have shrugged away questions about relationships because they realized that stories about love and sex might trivialize their experience as combatants. That is, they wanted their narratives to focus on that which would most directly challenge and interrupt the master narratives about female participation in war. It is clear that the women feel that the equality that was afforded to them during the conflict does not continue into the present day.

*Interrupting Silencing through the Applied Project and Next Steps*

The final product (as described in chapter six) of the oral history project is a book of the women’s stories to include photos of the women, both past and present. Due to the lack of availability of technology and limited access to the internet in Waspán, a printed copy of the book is what would allow the women to access the stories and share them with the community as they choose. I will bring a copy of the book to each of the women in 2020. I will also bring additional copies to be distributed as the women see fit, for example, to give to schools and the local heritage museum. I will ask for
comment on the final product and discuss potential ways to continue the community project.

The book was created using Canva software which allows for a product with a professional layout. I hold a subscription to the Canva software, which includes a nominal fee. The software is also accessible through a login from any computer, which allows me to share access with members of the community who may want to make their own additions, deletions, or modifications to the text. Through continued communication with community members through WhatsApp and Facebook messenger, I am aware that there are other members of the community who wished to be interviewed and included in the text. I intend to continue to collect oral history with members of the Miskitu community. In order to make the project manageable, I hope to bring students from the United States to the community to collect oral histories, help train community members in oral history methodology, and to work on the transcription and layout of the stories. The long-term objective would be to support community members in doing their own oral history project with this first version of the book as a model to help shape the interview process and publication. The women and men who participated in the Contra War are aging and have various levels of literacy so it may be a project that the younger generation more likely would embrace. Suhar also would like to connect me to a Miskitu professor who brings students from the University of the Autonomous Regions of the Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua (URACCAN) into the community for various projects. There is potential that I can work with this professor and the community to allow the URACCAN students to support the project by giving them access to the Canva account to make additions as they interview additional members of the community. As the oral
histories and digitized photographs are collected in this software, they can also be retrieved by the community to produce other heritage materials such as museum panels, posters, and billboards.

While I have engaged in critique about the silencing that has occurred in the production and reproduction of the Nicaraguan Revolutionary narrative, I admit that this paper contributes to anthropological issues of silencing of the voices of the Miskitu as it does not include Miskitu from all sectors or political affiliations. I have also interviewed Miskitu men but chosen to limit the current analysis to females. I have limited field experience in the country to draw upon, but my visits have been informed with the privilege of meeting and interacting with key figures from the Nicaraguan Revolution and the Contra War. In my role as an anthropologist, I made choices as to which narratives I would attend. These choices are based on my education, experience, interests, but admittedly may also demonstrate my ignorance and biases.

Baker (1998) challenges anthropologists and other scholars to “continue to advance research that exposes the contradictions…in an effort to reconcile the ideal of racial equality with the nagging, persistent, and seemingly perpetual forms of oppression” (228). Likewise, in her reflection on her research with aboriginal women, Fiske (2000) encourages researchers to consider oral history as it “opens new spaces for developing a self-reflexive stance on race, gender, and class in societies carrying the burden of colonialism, racialization and oppression” (20). In general, I want to continue this type of work in Nicaragua and the US to help citizens engage with the past for present purposes. I think this work is important because as a woman, I have personally felt that my half of the species continues to be “silenced” in national
narratives, and this silencing has very real consequences on the daily lives of women. I believe that national heritage stories are a mirror. If my group is not characterized as “powerful” or “meaningful” in the authorized narratives, I may be victim to:

- Racial Slurs and Epithets
- Glass ceilings/Unequal pay
- Being passed over for elected office
- Expropriation of private property
- Environmental racism
- Racial profiling and travel bans
- Slut shaming
- “Man”splitting
- Police brutality
- Discrimination
- Subjugation
- Exploitation
- Enslavement

I hope that this research and applied project offers a small contribution to combating this type of victimization and provides a model to inform future projects toward that end. Feminist thinking guides the applied aspect of the project as I worked collaboratively with the community to support heritage production as they define it and as they feel is useful. While the project itself may contribute to the literature on applied anthropology as related to silencing, heritage production, and utilizing the oral history method, it may more importantly help a community accomplish one of its goals. Davis
and Craven (2016) suggest that feminist ethnographers “hope to ‘give back’ to the people, organizations, and communities with which they work by publishing their research beyond academic audiences with the hope of raising visibility of the issue or the group” (115). The book of narratives is in their voice and will be accessible to members of the community of various ages. This project is only a small contribution to interrupting silencing and offering a counter-hegemonic discourse, but it may lead to other collaborative opportunities that could support the Miskitu in their individual and collective goals to be represented in the country’s narratives.
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APPENDIX A

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW QUESTION SET

1. How long have you lived in the Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua or in Waspán specifically? Did you grow up in Waspán or another town?
2. Can you share some of your memories about growing up?
3. What was the best thing about life in your town before the war? What were some of the challenges for you or your family before the war?
4. Can you share some of your memories about when you became aware of conflict in your area? What are your first memories of war in your country?
5. How did you become involved with the Contra cause?
6. Describe the type of activities you engaged in as part of the cause.
7. How was the Contra group organized? Who were the leaders? How were decisions made?
8. What is the experience of a woman entering into combat? Can you tell us some things that stand out in particular?
9. Were the Contra tasks assigned by gender? Can you describe any differences in the assigned tasks?
10. Was there support for your participation from your hometown or the local population?
11. Did you receive training? Did you have weapons?
12. Where did you live during this time?

13. Describe any friendships or relationships formed while with the Contras.

14. Did you engage in any cultural activities at this time: Telling stories? Singing? Religious observances?

15. Can you describe how romantic and/or sexual relations formed among members of the group?

16. What sort of medical care was available? What sort of medical problems? How were sanitary issues handled?

17. Describe how you exited participation in the Contra group and/or war. What do you recall about the first few days of returning home?

18. Describe how you put your life together after the war. Where did you go? With whom? What did you do?

19. Did you talk about your experiences? Who listened? How did you adjust to a “normal” life after the war? Did religion play a role? The arts? Political ideology? Any belief system?


21. Can you talk about the long-term impact that your participation with the Contra or in the war had on you?

22. People have opinions about the role of a woman in society. What is yours?

23. Are you part of any religious organization? Which one?

24. Is there anything that we haven’t dealt with that you would like everyone to know? What would you like future generations to know or understand about you and/or your participation in the Contra War?
25. What do you think is the best way to share your story with others? Would you like to see excerpts from your story presented in a museum or published on a Website?