



Recycled *Sandalistas*: From Revolution to Resorts in the New Nicaragua

ABSTRACT In the post-Sandinista period, Nicaragua has adjusted to the new terms of a neoliberal economy by turning to tourism development as a leading industry. As the nation is refashioned as a safe and desirable tourist destination, efforts have been made to conceal evidence of the recent revolutionary past that might discourage visitors from traveling to the country. Nevertheless, there are indications that selected images and memories of revolution are making a reappearance and may prove marketable for tourism. This article argues that the twin projects of neoliberalism and nationalism may be served by this seemingly contradictory process. The Nicaraguan case offers an example of how the past figures in the remaking of postrevolutionary nations for tourism in the era of globalization. [Keywords: tourism, revolution, Nicaragua, cultural politics, globalization]

Managua, Nicaragua what a wonderful spot,
There's coffee and bananas and a temperature hot.
Managua, Nicaragua is a beautiful town,
You buy a hacienda for a few pesos down.

—Irving Berlin, recorded by Guy Lombardo, 1947

And why must we develop tourism in this God-forsaken
country? Because it's the path to salvation for the
national economy.

—Comandante Tomás Borge, 2003¹

IN APRIL 2002, I came across an advertisement in the *New York Times* for sandals from Barneys with a single word that caught my eye: *Sandalista* (2002:7). It was not only the word but also the bold font used that clearly invested the word with political meaning. Surely, I thought, there are few readers of the *Times* who will realize that this was a term used in Nicaragua during the 1980s to refer to international supporters of the revolutionary Sandinista government then in power. Certainly, most of those attracted to the photograph of a single shoe, a sort of upscale version of the rubber tire-soled sandals worn by the rural poor in Latin America, here selling for \$165, would make no such connection (see Figure 1). But when I was in Nicaragua over the summer and showed the ad to several U.S. citizens living in the Central American country, they reacted as I had. Seeing the ad took their breath away.

Another recent invocation of the word *sandalista* is found in the February 2002 issue of *Condé Nast Traveler* (Wilson 2002:98–112), the glossy travel magazine, which

featured a lengthy article on travel in the “new” Nicaragua. Here, however, the term has acquired a new meaning. The author gushes, “Here come the foreigners: ‘*sandalistas*’ with backpacks, businessmen in short-sleeved shirts trying to look tropical casual, church missionaries sweating under straw hats, and me” (2002:100). He goes on to confess that although he is a journalist, on that day he was doing what many other U.S. tourists have been doing in Nicaragua: “scouting property” (2002:100). In fact, many of the 360 small islands in Lake Nicaragua are up for sale and are being purchased “for a song” by U.S. residents looking for a bargain. Although the article describes Nicaragua as “a little rough around the edges” (2002:99), readers are assured that a trip is well worth it, because the country has had a real makeover since the revolutionary period (1979–90).

For the past 15 years, I have observed the quickening pace of change in Nicaragua²—or at least the appearance of substantial change, even if the country has been on a rather grim program of neoliberal free-market development since the Sandinistas lost the 1990 election. The measures that have been mandated by the International Monetary Fund and administered by the U.S. Agency for International Development have produced a turn toward economic privatization and the shrinking of state-led social development. This has meant rising unemployment, ill health, and growing illiteracy for a majority, while a small elite benefits from new products on the market, new restaurants and clubs, and a new look to the capital city of Managua, where a third of the nation’s population lives (Babb 1999). Other parts of



FIGURE 1. Advertisement for sandals, appearing in the *New York Times*, April 14, 2002. (Courtesy of Barneys New York)

the country, notably the colonial city of Granada and the Pacific Coast, have also seen a host of renovation and construction projects designed to attract moneyed interests and tourism. Examining these localities in the midst of a fairly rapid process of change can tell us much—beyond this particular case—about the politics of location in a period of globalization (Appadurai 2001; Gupta and Ferguson 1997).

Two decades ago, Nicaragua was the destination of “tourists of revolution,” in the wry words of poet Lawrence Ferlinghetti (1984). Now it is being refashioned as the destination of another category of tourists, some adventurous and environmentally conscious and others simply eager to find an untraveled spot in the tropics. Here I consider the remaking of the country, from within and without, as Nicaragua struggles to make tourism its leading industry (surpassing coffee production), and as an international clientele discovers a new region to call its own. Until recently, the revolutionary nation was considered off limits to uninformed travelers and its inconveniences made even

adventurous backpackers uneasy. Today, in contrast, the nation attracts these travelers and others desiring more luxurious accommodations. While postrevolutionary Nicaragua remains one of the poorest countries in the hemisphere, it is suddenly getting the attention of those who shunned it only a few years ago. Nicaraguans themselves are divided between cynicism and a desire to bring needed revenue to their impoverished, neoliberal economy. I am interested in discerning how these developments are being experienced locally and globally, as the Nicaraguan nation is reconstructed as a safe and desirable location that offers both the “traditional” and the “modern” for foreign consumption.

Furthermore, and more broadly, I am interested in the ways that some places appeal to travelers who are seeking more than a comfortable holiday at the beach or visit to colonial towns. Recently, we hear of not only “political” tourism but also “danger” tourism; not only religious pilgrimages but also “red” pilgrimages to postsocialist countries; not only “socially responsible” tourism but also tours to the world’s “trouble spots.” *Newsweek International* reports on organizations like San Francisco-based Global Exchange, which takes groups to such destinations as Kabul to “vacation in the remains of the Afghan capital” (Eviatar 2003). Other groups visit “areas under siege” in Israel and the Palestinian territories, or learn about “social struggles” in Chiapas, Mexico, and the “legacies of war” in Vietnam (www.globalexchange.org). Having traveled with this organization to Cuba twice over the past decade, I am aware that some group members particularly relish going to a country designated as illegal for U.S. tourists, requiring special licenses for entry. I will suggest that Nicaragua holds the same allure for travelers who desire to see for themselves “the land of Sandino,” even years after the demise of the revolutionary government.

Scholars of tourism have theorized the development of what is today, according to many sources, the world’s largest industry. Dean MacCannell’s classic text *The Tourist*, first published in 1976, delved beneath surface appearances to advance the argument that tourism offers “staged authenticity,” inviting visitors to “make incursions into the life of the society” (1999:97). More recently, writers have emphasized that representations and readings of tourist sites are always contested, so that the sites and their meanings are subject to interpretation (Hanna and Del Casino 2003; Rojek and Urry 1997). My work follows this line of research insofar as I view tourism as a set of cultural practices that are under constant negotiation and that may illuminate broader social and historical processes. Most significantly, I have sought to contribute to studies of tourism in past and present “danger zones,” in this case a revolutionary society experiencing prolonged instability and civil war, being ever mindful of the ideological projects that are under construction as nations establish the historical accounts that they wish to represent (Gold and Gold 2003; Rojek 1997).

The first section of this article considers prerevolutionary travel and later “solidarity” travel to the country through textual and ethnographic analysis. The second

section, based on my travel to tourism sites and interviews with tour operators, government officials, and tourists themselves, examines the way in which Nicaragua has undergone a transition from being a revolutionary destination to one of interest to mainstream travelers. The third section presents evidence from recent research that, contrary to my earlier expectations, indicates that the revolution is making a reappearance on the tourist circuit. By considering the Nicaraguan case, I will illustrate what may also be observed in other postrevolutionary societies such as Cuba, China, and Vietnam, as the past figures in the re-making of these nations for tourism in the present era of globalization.

NICARAGUAN TRAVEL, PAST AND PRESENT

Long before revolutionary Nicaragua was remade as a tourist destination, the country captured the interest of foreigners. In earlier times, the country attracted some adventurous travelers who were making their way by sea from one coast to the other in the United States or who were going on to Europe via the Central American Isthmus. No less celebrated a traveler than Mark Twain ventured there with a companion by ship from San Francisco during a transatlantic voyage in 1866–67. This was only a decade after William Walker, the U.S. expansionist, defeated warring factions in the country and made himself president, ruling for a year before he was routed. Writing *Travels with Mr. Brown* for the San Francisco *Alta California*, Twain described the passengers' arrival at the Nicaraguan port town of San Juan del Sur during an outbreak of cholera. He and his companion found "a few tumble-down frame shanties—they call them hotels—nestling among green verdure . . . and half-clad yellow natives, with bowie-knives two feet long," the citizens of the town (Walker and Dane 1940:39). Some four hundred passengers endured 12 miles of land travel by horse, mule, and vehicle to Lake Nicaragua in order to cross the Isthmus. This gave the two men a chance to appreciate the passing scene, about which Twain wrote, "Our interest finally moderated somewhat in the native women . . . but never did the party cease to consider the wild monkey a charming novelty and a joy forever" (Walker and Dane 1940:42).

In the 1880s, a female member of the east coast elite named Dora Hort made the trip from New York by steamer along with her sister, a gentleman companion, four nephews and nieces, and a male servant, crossing the Central American Isthmus before taking a boat bound for San Francisco. The fascination that this Victorian lady traveler held for Nicaragua and its people is revealed in her memoir, *Via Nicaragua*, published in 1887. Hort describes the arduous trek through jungle with brilliant birds and an "imbecile" guide who led them across to the "uninteresting, desolate hamlet of San Juan del Sur" (Agosin and Levison 1999:223)—which has become a popular resort town in recent years. Early travel writers like Hort exemplify what Mary Louise Pratt has aptly de-

scribed as "imperial eyes" producing "the rest of the world" (1992:5).

During four decades prior to the Nicaraguan revolution, the Somoza family dictatorship held sway and imposed harsh conditions for the majority of citizens of the country. Nevertheless, the Somoza period held certain pleasures for the national and international elite. The widely traveled British writer Maureen Tweedy wrote a memoir entitled *This Is Nicaragua* (1953), in which she compared the country favorably with her own. She paid Nicaragua her highest compliment when she wrote, "The placid river flowing so gently through the cattle sprinkled meadows beyond Nandaime reminds me of the upper reaches of the Thames" (1953:60). She admired the people as well for their simple, friendly manner, writing, "In the springtime, in preparation for Holy Week, the thrifty peasants build huts and shelters of pineapple leaves, palms and bamboos, to rent to the picnickers and bathers who throng the beaches" (1953:61). The book concludes with Indian legends, and then advertisements for Coffee Planter and Exporters based in Managua, as well as for the capital city's Gran Hotel and Lido Palace Hotel (see Figure 2), which offered amenities to foreign guests. Folkloric and modern images of the country thus shared the same textual space.

The Sandinista victory in 1979 drew another class of travelers to Nicaragua. Journalists, artists and writers, engineers, and activists of many backgrounds made their way to the country, often in delegations, from the United States and elsewhere. Some stayed for a time and wrote books based on interviews with militants and celebrated figures, for example Margaret Randall's *Sandinista's Daughters* (1981), or memoirs, notably Lawrence Ferlinghetti's *Seven Days in Nicaragua Libre* (1984) and Salman Rushdie's *The Jaguar Smile* (1987).³ Some visitors came simply to see the revolutionary society for themselves and others determined to stay a year or longer in order to contribute to what many of them viewed as the most significant process of social transformation in the Americas since the Cuban revolution. A cottage industry in guidebooks for *internacionalistas* (international activists) grew out of the solidarity movement influx to Nicaragua during the 1980s.

The new travel guides were an amalgamation of brief historical and cultural background, emphasizing the profound changes recently brought about, along with practical information about where to find cheap lodging and meals, survive the tropical heat, and link up with other solidarity workers. One, entitled (like Tweedy's book) *This Is Nicaragua* (1988), was made available in several languages by the Nicaraguan Institute of Tourism and could be purchased on arrival in Managua. It mimicked standard travel books in its attention to the natural environment and the everyday concerns of getting around a new place, but with one major difference: The guide begins by celebrating the "General of Free Men," national hero Augusto César Sandino who was killed by Somoza's National Guard in 1934, and by heralding "a new geography for a new nation" (1988:xi–xiii). Indeed, the Sandinista government redivided the country into

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We are interested in forming connections with manufacturers for their exclusive representation in Nicaragua, either to function as importers and distributors or on an indent basis, or both.

FIGURE 2. Advertisements appearing in travel writer Maureen Tweedy's *This Is Nicaragua* (Ipswich, England 1953).

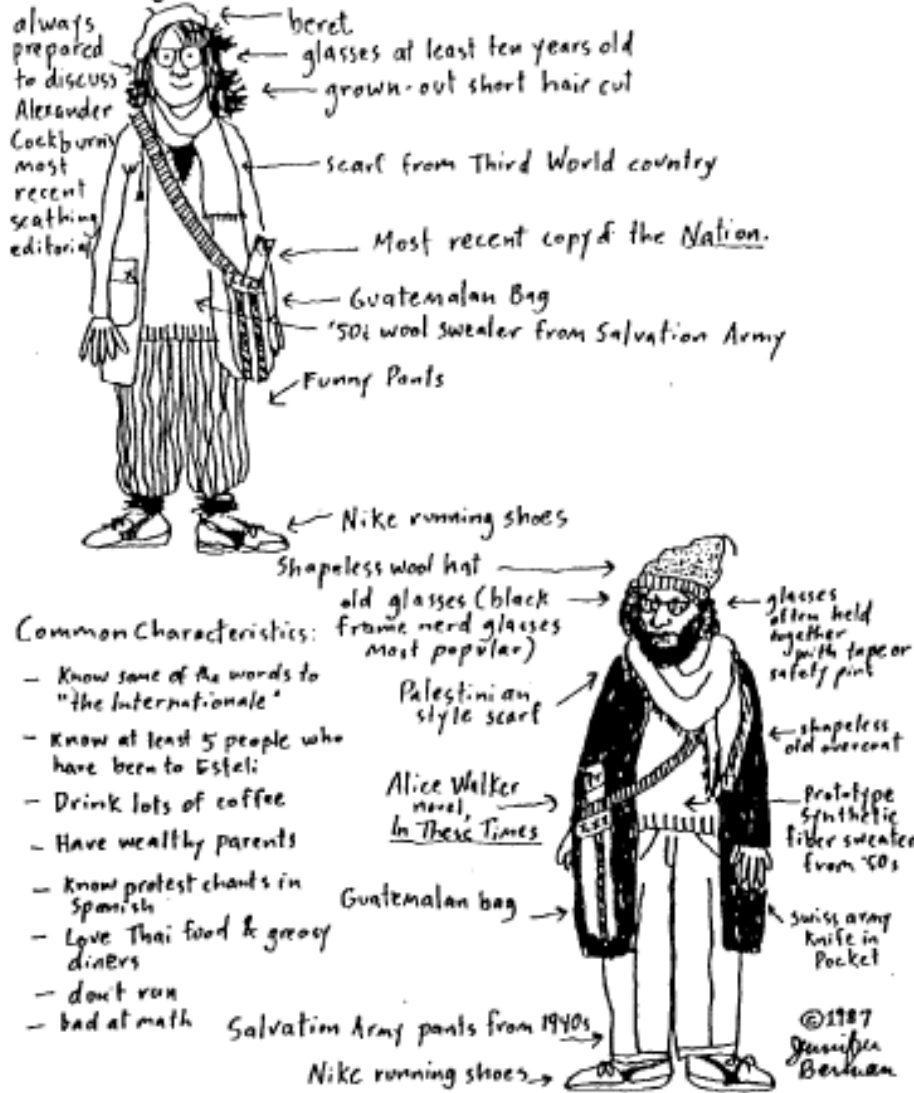
political and geographic regions and gave revolutionary names to the streets and neighborhoods of the capital city. The new political culture was imprinted on the national landscape, not only through rezoning and renaming but also through the widespread painting of murals and construction of monuments to the people's history of struggle (Kunzle 1995; Sheesley 1991; Whisnant 1995).

Some guidebooks were clearly directed to the new breed of visitors to the country. *Not Just Another Nicaragua Travel Guide* (Hulme et al. 1990) proclaimed its intention loudly, and ads in its front matter included not just hotels and car rental agencies but also language and culture schools, fair trade coffee outlets, and the Bikes Not Bombs recycling outfit in Managua. Readers were congratulated for choosing to travel to a place that was "poised on the cutting edge of history," serving as a "perfect vantage point to study the world" (1990:9). The country was summed up in a few words: "Revolution. Empty beaches. Lifelong friends and cheap rum. Priests, poets and rocking chairs" (1990:9). Many young people from the United States used the book to find their way to Managua's centrally located Barrio Martha Quesada,

named for an urban combatant who was shot in the neighborhood by the National Guard in 1978. The barrio is sometimes referred to as "Gringolandia," since so many U.S. and European travelers have made its inexpensive hostels their base camp. Buses arrive and depart frequently in this barrio for neighboring Honduras and Costa Rica, so that there is a steady flow of budget and activist travelers making their way through Central America, along with others who stay much longer in Nicaragua. From the barrio, travelers may walk to the shore of Lake Managua and pay respects nearby in Plaza de la Revolución (now renamed Plaza de la República); there they may visit the National Palace (now the National Museum), which was famously taken during the insurrection by Sandinista Comandantes Eden Pastora and Dora María Téllez, and the tomb of the celebrated martyr Carlos Fonseca.

After the Sandinistas lost the 1990 elections to the opposition candidate Violeta Barrios de Chamorro, some loyal solidarity workers remained in the country and some curious travelers continued to arrive looking for traces of revolution. Their number was much reduced, but they could

THE AMERICAN LEFTISTS (Progressivus Sandanistis Supportoris)



Drawing © 1987 by Jennifer Berman; from *In These Times* magazine

FIGURE 3. Cartoon appearing in *In These Times* in 1987, entitled "The American Leftists," with references to internationalist supporters of the Sandinista revolution. (With permission from Jennifer Berman)

be recognized by their oversized backpacks and copies of such "alternative" resources as the Ulysses travel guide to Nicaragua (see Figure 3). In its second edition, author Carol Wood's (1999) tone is still sympathetic to the Sandinista government and what it accomplished, but she acknowledges that Nicaraguans became weary of the U.S. opposition that produced the Contra war and the economic embargo. There is more attention to the natural wonders of the country than to its politics. Indeed, the guide even urges visitors not to miss touring the *Isletas*, the small islands in Lake Nicaragua, noting that "It's a great spot to dream about living on your own little tropical paradise" (1999:162). This

casual remark presages the rapid sales of islands to foreigners, as recently trumpeted in *Condé Nast Traveler*.

FROM REVOLUTION TO RESORTS

The Chamorro government did not bring about the economic recovery that had been promised following the national election, but political stability was gradually achieved with the cooperation of the Sandinista party. When the United States failed to offer assistance at the level expected and international coffee prices plummeted, Nicaragua sought to develop tourism. By the mid-1990s

the Nicaraguan Institute of Tourism (INTUR), in collaboration with the national universities, promoted tourism as a key area for professional training. Reports of increasing levels of tourism showed that while the largest influx of visitors still came from the Central American region, a new class of tourists was coming to the country from the United States and Europe. Efforts were made to capture more of this market, through improvements in infrastructure catering to tourists and more effective means of marketing the country as a tourist destination (Ministerio de Turismo 1995). By the year 2000, the annual number of visitors to Nicaragua approached 500,000, significant in a country with a population of four million—although as many as half came for business rather than pleasure. The goal became to entice visitors to stay longer and spend more money, and to provide more facilities for them to enjoy during their stay (Instituto Nicaragüense de Turismo 2001:5).

To that end, a number of sites have been enhanced and promoted for tourism. The premier Pacific Coast beach destination Montelimar, which formerly was owned by the Somoza family and then nationalized under the Sandinistas, was sold to the Spanish interest Barceló and turned into a five-star, all-inclusive resort. San Juan del Sur worked hard to attract cruise ships to its sleepy fishing village and to appeal to a younger and environmentally conscious clientele to come to newly constructed guest houses and hotels. Selva Negra, in the mountainous north, also sought to capitalize on a more robust tourist industry to draw visitors to its German-style cottages and restaurant, where guests could visit the local coffee plantation and walk through tropical forest to spot howler monkeys and exotic birds. The colonial city of Granada was privileged to have a more complete makeover as a charming destination or stopping-over place for those traveling through the country. Already an architectural marvel and historical draw, the city received international support to renovate and restore its cathedral, convent, central plaza, cultural institute, and oldest hotel, making it attractive to international visitors. By adding canopy tours of the nearby forest and boat trips to the Isletas, the city has catered to the diverse interests of travelers in recent years.

Research over the last decade in Nicaragua has allowed me to observe the refashioning of Managua, Granada, Montelimar, and other well-traveled areas—indeed the country as a whole—as part of the national effort to attract tourist dollars (Babb 2001a, 2001b). On arrival at Managua's international airport, recently spruced up with five million dollars in U.S. support, visitors are greeted by signs for high-end hotels and the Hard Rock Café, in addition to the old signs for Victoria Beer and Flor de Caña rum. Since 2000, I have gone where tourists travel, consulted tourist agencies, and interviewed those in the industry and government as well as tourists themselves. Thus, I have considered how formerly revolutionary Nicaragua has readied itself for an influx of newcomers who may know and care little about the country's unique history and who expect to find a well-established tourist industry in place.

Before making my way to INTUR (part of the government's Ministry of Tourism) in Managua in 2002, I had been interested to discover its colorful and attractive website.⁴ The site offers a brief introduction to the country, a friendly appeal to tourists, and advice to those investing in the tourist industry or buying up private property. The INTUR office itself, tucked away just a few blocks from the landmark Intercontinental Hotel, was not as impressive. A woman at a desk in the small reception area welcomed me and offered several brochures featuring the usual half dozen attractions, all outside of Managua: Masaya and its volcano, Granada, León, San Juan del Sur, Montelimar, and the Río San Juan (serious travelers would also be told about Selva Negra and the Atlantic Coast). She told me that on a typical day only about three visitors come to their office. Across the street, there was more activity in INTUR's documentation center, as secondary school and university students crowded the few tables there. The woman heading the center confirmed that they were students of tourism, which has replaced computer school as young people's best hope for future employment. The walls of the room were decorated with framed pictures of the country's natural beauty and folklore; a portrait of a woman entitled "India Bonita" was emblematic of both aspects that INTUR hoped would enhance tourism (field notes, June 18, 2002).

Although Managua has had a major facelift, with improved roads, a new city center, hotels, casinos, and shopping malls in the area left devastated by an earthquake in 1972, Stephen Kinzer, writing in the *New York Times*, recently described it as "still among the ugliest capital cities in the hemisphere" (2002:10–12). Visitors to the city are generally there on professional business, as I learned during forays into the Princess Hotel, Holiday Inn, and Hotel Legends. Employees at the hotels offer suggestions about night spots and a few places worth visiting in the city, but in general Managua is regarded as uninviting to international visitors who would rather venture out to other parts of the country. Tour operators often recommend just a half day in the city to see the ancient footsteps of Acahualinca (evidence of early human presence), the National Museum and the National Theatre, and the view from Sandino Park. Those who stay longer might visit the artisan market known as Huembes, the *malecón* (promenade) alongside Lake Managua, or (until Hurricane Mitch) the volcanic Lake Xiloa just outside the city—but they find a better market for shopping in nearby Masaya and a lovelier lake in Catarina just 40 minutes away.

Indeed, many bypass the sprawling capital altogether by going directly from the international airport to Montelimar about an hour away on the coast or traveling in tour groups through Central America and stopping only in the more historic cities of León and Granada before heading on to San José, Costa Rica. The ruins of Old León have a unique distinction in Nicaragua as a designated UNESCO World Heritage Site (Patrimonio Mundial). The colonial city of León may soon emerge as the most popular destination in the country for tourism (as some operators predict), but for

now Granada draws the greatest number of international visitors, as well as a growing expatriate community of retirees from the United States.

Visits to Granada, which claims to be the oldest city in the hemisphere (much of it destroyed in a fire ordered by the failed dictator William Walker in 1856), provided opportunities to observe and query travelers and residents. They are a diverse group, ranging from the so-called relax category of international travelers and long-time residents in Managua wishing to get away from the “big city,” to day-trippers traveling in from the Pacific Coast, to backpackers pleased to find cheap accommodations in a place modern enough to have Internet cafés and a laid-back attitude. Well-heeled visitors stay at the landmark Hotel Alhambra with its arcade looking out on the central plaza or at newer and more expensive places like the Hotel Colonial. Several restaurants cater to this clientele, who are sought after by guides clamoring to provide package tours for fees that are very high by local standards (field notes, June 21, 2003).

European and U.S. travelers on limited budgets stay at the Hospedaje Central (Central Hostel) or other inexpensive lodging a few blocks from the plaza. The popular Bearded Monkey, a hostel operated by a young couple from England and the United States, is reminiscent of the hippie generation. Guests at this hostel listen to mellow music from places distant from Nicaragua’s shores as they relax in hammocks, eat natural food at the small restaurant, borrow books and videos from a lending library, and contemplate their travels. Access to the Internet and to phones for making international calls—as well as arrangements for getting a massage or even a tattoo—add to the hostel’s “hip” appeal. Speaking with travelers at several of these venues in Granada, I found that few knew much about Nicaragua’s recent political history, or if they did, it was little more than what they read in the *Lonely Planet* guidebook.⁵

At the other end of the spectrum are the retired residents who have come to live in Granada in recent years. Some have turned to Nicaragua rather than Costa Rica (a neighboring competitor for tourism and property ownership) because they find it to be less expensive and to suffer less from the overdevelopment of tourism. One tour operator went so far as to credit the revolution for having held off tourism development long enough that the city may now thrive. Capitalizing on Nicaraguans’ willingness to sell off property at locally high prices (only to see the value soar quickly in the hands of foreign investors and property owners), Granada’s historic center is fast becoming “Americanized.” All five real estate offices in the city are owned by U.S. citizens, men who see an opportunity to “get rich quick.” In interviews with two of them, I discovered that they fit the local pattern of older “gringo” males linking up with local “Nica” girlfriends or wives who were young enough to be their granddaughters—trophies and service providers in their businesses and homes.

An Austrian historian now living in Granada, Dieter Stadler, has been central to the restoration project in the city. He qualified the enthusiastic reports of tourism in

Granada when he told me that at present there are only about 450 beds in first- to third-class hotels in the city of some 100,000 residents. Most people who travel there are either backpackers, who spend little money, or Nicaraguans coming back to visit relatives over the holidays, who spend even less (but who may bring gifts and monetary remittances). Thus, despite heavy reliance on financial support from Spain, Sweden, and other nations to restore the city to its former grandeur, the present potential for tourism is limited (Stadler, personal interview, June 22, 2002).

Nevertheless, tourism was touted in a two-page article from the *New York Times* (Rohter 1997: sec. 5, p. 10) that was still displayed prominently five years after publication on a stand adjacent to the Alhambra’s registration desk. Entitled “Nicaragua on the Mend,” the article averred:

Seven years after its brutal civil war, the country is at peace and putting out the welcome mat. . . . For more than a decade, the only foreigners likely to visit Nicaragua in any numbers were “internationalists,” sympathizers of the Sandinista revolution inspired by the idea of sharing the hardships and dangers of a country under siege. . . . Ordinary visitors were encouraged to stay away. [Rohter 1997:10]

But, the author asserted, “Nicaragua has changed enormously” (1997:10). Quoting Nicaragua’s Minister of Tourism, Pedro Joaquín Chamorro: “We are on the brink of an awakening to tourism. . . . We want to make tourism the main product of Nicaragua, and we plan to do that by promoting our country as an exotic destination at a reasonable price” (1997:10).

Nicaragua is represented in various ways to different potential travel clienteles. To Nicaraguans themselves, notably the elite, there are efforts to eclipse the revolutionary past and show continuity from the Somoza family regime through the present, excising the Sandinista decade in a new revisionist history. A video produced a few years ago by the government’s Institute of Culture, *Managua en mi corazón* (Managua in My Heart, 1997), shows the capital city in ruins after the earthquake and, as if immediately after, the rebuilding of the 1990s, with no indication of the social transformation that occurred a decade before—and no irony as the spectacle of movie marquee and huge traffic circles are deployed as hallmarks of modernity. Another video, *Tierra Mía, Nicaragua* (My Land, Nicaragua, 2001), is directed to Nicaraguans living outside the country, especially in the United States, luring them back with the promise that “When you return to Nicaragua, it will all be as you remember.” Nostalgic images in both videos serve up a shared history and cultural identity that scarcely existed in order to endorse the present national project of neoliberalism.

The shared cultural identity that is frequently held out to both Nicaraguans and international visitors generally relies more on memories of the natural beauty of the land, its people, and ceremonial traditions than it does on any moments in the nation’s history. Localities like the Pacific Coast beaches, the mountainous north with its exotic

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