"LIKE IT OR NOT, HERE WE ARE":
EXPLORING XENOPHOBIA TOWARDS NICARAGUAN IMMIGRANTS IN COSTA RICA.

by

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
Vancouver

April 2009

ABSTRACT

In recent decades, Costa Rica has experienced an increasing number of Nicaraguan immigrants who have come to the country seeking political refuge, work, education or other opportunities. Meanwhile, Costa Rica has developed and maintained an image of itself as an exceptional nation within Central America, standing out for its peaceful and democratic foundation. One consequence of these processes has been the rise of strong negative attitudes held by Costa Ricans towards Nicaraguans. How and from where did the negative perceptions originate from? What feeds these negative attitudes? How can these attitudes be challenged? These questions were addressed through a qualitative participatory action research project with 18 Nicaraguans in 3 distinct areas of Costa Rica. Interviews were audio recorded or filmed. Analysis of these interviews suggests that overall, xenophobic attitudes towards Nicaraguans are strong in Costa Rica. Individual differences between participants' motivations and experiences as immigrants challenge the widespread stereotypes about Nicaraguan immigrants. The socioeconomic status of participants influenced their experience of xenophobia, as did the cultural diversity of the area in which they lived. Finally, the different ways in which the participants experienced and were involved with resisting widespread xenophobic attitudes in society challenges mainstream literature on resistance as well as drawing attention to the different practices that contest xenophobia in different areas and across different social classes.

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*Dedicated to all of the Nicaraguan men and women
who participated in this study;
who are needed yet excluded;
who are here.*

CHAPTER I

Introduction

"A good part of the political history of the 20th century has been marked by struggles to extend, defend or create political, civil and social citizenship rights"
                                                                                    - Ruth Lister.

<u>How my eyes were opened to xenophobic attitudes in Costa Rica</u>

In 2007, I was able to spend some time working with a group of Nicaraguan immigrant families in Costa Rica. Although I had lived among Nicaraguans for a number of years, this experience exposed me to a much tougher side of their lives as immigrants that I had failed to acknowledge in my daily life. It was summer and I was performing the final field placement for my Master's degree in Social Work. I had approval to work with the *"Project to prevent and provide attention to potential victims of human trafficking in the Central Pacific region of Costa Rica"*, sponsored by the International Organization for Migrations (IOM) (IOM, 2007). Not surprisingly, many of these potential victims were undocumented migrants[1], because their condition exposes them to a number of human rights abuses and exploitation (Stalker, 2001). Among the groups of undocumented migrants, 3 countries of origin stood out —Nicaragua, Colombia and the Dominican Republic— among which Nicaraguan immigrants were most prevalent, a trend consistent with Costa Rica's immigrant demographics (Morales & Castro, 2007).

My past experience living and doing social service work in this particular Costa Rican town, together with more recent academic experience doing group work, made me a suitable candidate to work with some of the local communities facilitating workshops on different topics related to the current

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[1] According to the United Nations High Commission on Human Rights, "the expression 'illegal migrant' should not be used. It contradicts the spirit and violates directly the words of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which states in article 6 that "Everyone has the right to recognition everywhere as a person before the law'. The preferred term is 'undocumented migrant'" (United Nations International Research and Training Institute for Advancement of Women).

issues of human trafficking in the region. Our goal was to provide concrete tools which both parents and children could use to prevent getting involved with human trafficking or other activities that lead to this.

Seeing the material conditions in some of these communities, it was easy to see how these individuals could be vulnerable to any number of human rights abuses. Conveniently tucked away and hidden behind the new high-rises and trendy tourist attractions of the Central Pacific town of Jacó, there are small enclaves of Nicaraguan families and individuals living in precarious states, referred to as *precario* neighbourhoods in Spanish. One particular community lay at the edge of a river that overflows with every heavy rainfall (a frequent event in a tropical humid country), often flooding into the dirt floor homes of these families as well as blocking their ability to go to school, the store, or anywhere. Commonly referred to as *El hüeco* (translating "The hole"), this area is infamous for its allegedly high levels of crime, drugs and poverty, although cases of drug use and stealing are isolated and only pertain to a specific few (Arroyo, 2008). Even with the local municipal building visible from only meters away, it was impossible to convince a taxi to drop me off there (later on, a cameraman would also refuse to go there to film interviews for this thesis).

Once there, I gathered with 24 families (22 Nicaraguan and 2 Costa Rican) living in this community, the majority of which did not have access to adequate water, electricity or shelter (Arroyo, 2008). By the end of the 3-week workshop process, I had become familiar with many of the faces in that community, along with the issues they confronted. They felt excluded from the larger community. They felt stereotyped; that they were all dangerous, drug-afflicted households. Whether their living conditions were an outcome of their poor infrastructure or the fact that they were mostly Nicaraguans was not clear, yet I was perplexed by the strong, negative stereotypes that people in the larger town held of this area and its people. I always traveled there alone, was welcomed warmly and never felt any danger whatsoever. The families continue

to be a source of inspiration and hope to my personal and academic endeavours.

Another task within my field placement was to make the general community aware of our project and to encourage cooperation from local stakeholders. For example, if a restaurant or hotel owner noticed any unusual interactions between people that looked coercive or otherwise suspicious, they could contact our hotline immediately and inform us. In small towns like that one, this was a very effective method, so perhaps this is why I was extremely taken aback when some prominent business owners —including the town Mayor— were unsupportive and even resentful of our work. The message from them, basically, was that the problem of trafficking was a problem of immigration (mainly Nicaraguan), that this group had caused enough problems, and that the Nicaraguan government or someone else (i.e. not them) should remedy this. From this perspective, it seemed as though trafficking of persons entailed bringing people into Costa Rica to work illegally, thus making it an issue of immigration (regardless of looking at factors such as who is trafficking people, to where, and for what reasons they are being trafficked). A year later, when I met with the mayor again to tell him about my thesis project, he laughed loudly and replied "you'd be better off studying how Nicaraguans discriminate against Costa Ricans, not the other way around!"[2] As I later found out and will discuss later on, this Mayor expressed the same attitude towards several individuals who participated in the present study.

Aside from being offensive, this instance served to remind me of the widespread xenophobic attitudes present in Costa Rica. I struggled to better understand this phenomenon: how were such negative and discriminatory attitudes towards its Nicaraguan neighbours (the ones in Costa Rica, at least)

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[2] Most of the interviews and conversations about this investigation that were held in Costa Rica were in Spanish. I have personally translated all of this material into English to the best of my ability and will only quote the translated versions here.

so deeply engrained in a country often praised for promoting peace, equality and human rights (Biesanz, Biesanz & Biesanz, 1999)? Dictatorship, war, devastating earthquakes and hurricanes and other disrupting events have contributed to Nicaraguan emigration over the years, but how did they become targets for discrimination, seen as inferiors in Costa Rica? More importantly, I wanted to know how to react to that immediate situation and how, as a future social worker, I was going to confront these attitudes in the field of immigrant and refugee work. This provided the fuel for much of my work, as well as being at the heart of this investigation.

This experience of anti-Nicaraguan attitudes in Costa Rica was by no means an isolated event, and some events are well known throughout the country. For example, an incident known as the Canda case: on November 10th of 2005, Nicaraguan immigrant Natividad Canda Mairena illegally entered a private property and was subsequently attacked by two guard dogs, while a group of civilians and policemen watched from a distance. The press covered the case with an almost morbid intrigue, emphasizing Canda's Nicaraguan nationality and claiming Canda to be a common thief in the small town of la Lima, Cartago, where he lived and ultimately died. More concerning still, popular reactions to the event were strong: as if rising up to defend Costa Rica, offensive jokes, emails and text messages about Natividad's death became widespread throughout the country (Image 1, Appendix A).

While the Canda case is still currently in court and the repercussions of this event are not known, it has made for lively discussions and debates regarding national security, rights to private property, and the right to life in Costa Rica. A day later, a Costa Rican man killed José Ariel Silva as well as severely hurting two other Nicaraguans during a discussion around Natividad Candas' death (Sandoval, 2007). Recently on a national radio channel, a Costa Rican citizen complained about the fact that this case was in court and the two police officers present at the time are in trial for murder, stating "next thing you

know, criminals will unionize and force police officers to be disarmed so as to not interfere with their doings!" (Valle, 2008: ¶ 5).

Clearly, xenophobic sentiments can have devastating consequences for peoples' lives. Costa Rican sociologist and scholar on this issue, Carlos Sandoval (2007), warns against more subtle manifestations of xenophobia — like jokes— that can be more effective in converting symbolic violence into an everyday matter. In this sense, xenophobia becomes a concern that goes beyond discrimination and reveals how the way we perceive others is intricately related to the way that we perceive our own selves and our society.

The "nicas"[3] in Costa Rica

A metropolitan survey in Costa Rica's capital, San José in July 1999 showed that 35.2 % of the population supported the statement "Nicaraguans only bring problems to this country", while 51% agreed that: "The entrance of Nicaraguans into Costa Rica should be prohibited." (Instituto de Estudios de Población [IDESPO], 1999:17). A similar study performed 7 years later showed that 77% of those surveyed believed Nicaraguan immigrants in Costa Rica were discriminated against, although only 58% reported the level of discrimination as being "high" and only 22% of those surveyed felt that Columbians were discriminated against, which underlines that Costa Rican society is aware that Nicaraguans hold priority on the scale of discrimination (IDESPO, 2006:15; Castro, 2007).

Since the 1980s there has been a growing influx of immigrants in Costa Rica, mainly Nicaraguans who came initially for political reasons, then for economic reasons and natural disasters or, more commonly, a combination of these (Varela, 2003; Lundquist & Massey, 2005). These harsh conditions have

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[3] "Nica" is short for Nicaraguan and is commonly used within Nicaragua to refer to a citizen. In Costa Rica, however, the use of this term is controversial and signifies "undesirable otherness" (Sandoval, 2004a).

forced thousands of Nicaraguans out of their country in search for more stability and hopes for a better life. Based on the most recent national census (2000), Nicaraguans form the largest group of immigrants in Costa Rica, constituting 226 374 people, (5.9%) of the population (INEC, 2001:5) and 76.4% of the total number of migrants in Costa Rica (Castro, 2007). Moreover, it is argued that, in harvest season in Costa Rica, the number of migrants coming from Nicaragua rises up to around 400 000, or 7.8 % of the population, compared to 2% in the 1990s (Sandoval, 2006; Marquette, 2006).

The largest movement of Nicaraguan immigration to Costa Rica occurred between 1995 and 2000, when the number of Nicaraguans in 2000 was 5 times greater than in 1984 (Castro, 2007). During the 1990s, Sandoval notes: "*Immigrant* and *illegal* became synonymous with *ni*ca." (Sandoval, 2004a: 148). Moreover, the Nicaraguans became part of the country's hegemonic project, representint what Paul Gilroy (1987: 48) describes as, "a problem or threat against which a homogenous, white, national "we" could be unified." Moreover, they reflect Costa Rican society's exclusion towards those who do not fit in with their exceptionalist concept of a nation (Molina & Palmer, 2005), itself being partially based on anti-immigrant sentiments and a lack of acceptance towards the fact that Costa Rican society is changing.

Within the slightly broader context of the general immigration experience in Central America, however, the Nicaraguan immigrant in Costa Rica forms part of a more common trend. Costa Rican scholars from the Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences (FLACSO) Abelardo Morales and Carlos Castro (2006) explain how migration issues make up one of the main expressions of a new regional dynamic, one that negotiates two opposing logics about migrants: migrants are like saviours in their countries of origin, ensuring a stream of financial assistance to their families, communities, and their national economy. Meanwhile, for their host countries, migrants are considered a cheap and

secure work force and are also stigmatized as a threat to the well being of the local population and national security (2006).

The Nicaraguan situation in Costa Rica, where the proportion of Nicaraguan workers is higher than that of the national population, reflects such double discourses, rampant with myths and stereotypes in which immigrants are wanted and needed, yet excluded and rejected (Gindling, 2008; Chomsky, 2007). It requires academics, practitioners and many others in the field to deconstruct, critique and work towards shedding light on this debate. Indeed, much of my research and interaction with participants reinforced for me that many of the arguments being circulated are based on limited and selective perspectives on the history of international migration, the law, and the reasons why people migrate. This studyintends to contribute to the current debate on immigration in Costa Rica, specifically referring to the case of Nicaraguan immigrants and their lived experiences to counter some of the unquestioned assumptions that are created and maintained through everyday discourse in society by people who depend on, yet are conveniently disconnected from the realities of immigrants.

The discourse of xenophobia

Xenophobia is difficult to accurately define, let alone to analyze. Ironically, it is with much ease that humans divide the world into *We* and *They* – a basic peculiarity of human nature and a central psychological mechanism of xenophobia (Soldotova, 2006). In this sense, xenophobia is a sophisticated term used to describe a basic phenomenon.

A standard definition of xenophobia as found in Merriam- Webster's English collegiate dictionary (1993) defines xenophobia as fear or hatred of strangers, foreigners or of anything that is strange or foreign. A further source of information on this topic can be found in cultural studies, where the

representation of the "Other" refers to the entity outside the self (Sardar & Van Loon, 2004). In practice, then, xenophobia embraces a broad range of objects, including racial and ethnic phobias, religious phobias and phobias in relation to groups differing from the majority in certain characteristics- cultural, physical, age, etc. (Soldatova, 2006). In this scenario, differences are highlighted to clearly define one group ("us") against an *other* group ("them"). Differences are feared and perceived as a threat.

Another component of defining xenophobia is not so straightforward, as it relates to the ways in which xenophobia is manifested in everyday life. At all stages of this study (but especially in the beginning) I struggled to find ways to both make xenophobia a familiar term amongst my participants, while also being able to explain (to myself as well as to others) the different ways in which xenophobic attitudes are expressed. And so, for the case of xenophobia towards Nicaraguan immigrants in Costa Rica, terms such as discrimination, negative attitudes, predjudice, racism and anti-Nicaraguan sentiments are also used to denote both the construction of the Nicaraguan "other" as well as how they are treated.

Overview

This thesis is composed of 5 chapters: this introduction, a review and reflection on my methodology, a literature review, a presentation of my findings, and a conclusion.

In chapter 2, I will discuss the methodology involved in my investigation, starting with my research question and how it changed throughout the beginning stages of this investigation, based on my initial interviews and experiences. My study was an exercise in participatory action research (PAR). This approach adds a much needed practical dimension to the issue at hand. It

enables practitioners and others to better understand and work with pressing problems in a social setting in a more inclusive manner (McKernan, 1988).

Chapter 3 reviews the relevant literature relating to this research. I will explore the relationship between Costa Rican discourses of national identity in crisis and the subsequent construction of the "other", projected onto the Nicaraguan immigrant and others who do not fit into the idealized notion of the Costa Rican citizen. In this way, this study contributes to a young and growing area of research in Costa Rica working to critique Costa Rica;s image of a democratic oasis of peace and stability, with a large middle class (Biesanz, Biesanz & Biesanz, 1999; Molina & Palmer, 2005; and Sandoval, 2007).

In chapter 4, I explore in more depth the complexities of the experiences of Nicaraguan immigrants in Costa Rica, through the lived experiences and stories of those who participated in this investigation as drawn from the interviews and subsequent analysis.

In the final, concluding chapter, I review the major issues and themes discussed in chapters 3 and 4, and I outline my contribution to understanding the experience of xenophobia in this particular historical and regional context. Given the nature of my research and the particular methodology of PAR that I chose to adopt, I will focus this part of the discussion on the advantages, challenges and also setbacks that this strategy of inquiry presents for social workers and other practitioners who work with immigrants, or other groups that are deemed as "marginalized" or excluded from society in a community or international development setting. Finally, I discuss the need for further research on the topic.

<u>Relevance to social work</u>

Beyond my personal interest with the issue of anti-Nicaraguan sentiments in Costa Rica, and the growing concern with anti-immigrant

sentiments in the world in general, it is crucial to situate this piece of research within the realm of social work. During the initial stages of my research, it was important for my own orientation with the topic that I was able to see how issues such as immigration and xenophobia are analyzed in social work.

I consider social justice to be at the heart of social work praxis (Barker, 1987). Discrimination, exclusion, marginalization and other outcomes related to xenophobic sentiments are a social injustice, and a violation of human rights. Work with immigrants has been a foundational to the history of social work as a profession, precisely because of the injustices and difficulties that immigrants have faced.

Within social work, the immigrant has been problematized as a particular subject, sometimes with harmful consequences. As Yoosun Park (2006: 170) notes from her research on representation of immigrants in the U.S, "Social workers, as significant producers of discourse of immigrants, had and do have a much greater range of influence and responsibility than that which we still want to credit ourselves." This observation emphasizes the responsibility to produce research that challenges negative stereotypes around migrants and contributes to shaping the society and profession in which we live and work.

CHAPTER II

Operationalizing the research:

<u>The process</u>

This chapter deals with the methodological considerations involved in this investigation that were by no means clear to me from the onset of this study, but rather were experienced through an evolving process of reflection and action. This is consistent with the theory and spirit of my chosen strategy of inquiry. As such, I want to emphasize that my methodology formed part of (instead of dictating) my research process. I will begin by outlining how this process started, moving on to the changes that took place that led me to reformulate my questions, and then focusing on my qualitative research paradigm and strategy of inquiry, participatory action research. I end this chapter by outlining the methodological details that help set the tone and contextualize the chapters that follow.

<u>Passion and how I found my topic</u>

"In the beginning was the dream. In the eternal night where no dawn broke, the dream deepened. Everything had its beginning in possibility."

- John O' Donahue

The earliest conceptions of this investigation trace back to a general craving for social justice —a desire to *dream* for something better. In my academic experience, however, the practice of exploring our motivations and inspirations is rare. It is possible to get by without doing so. We are often asked, in a first class perhaps, to introduce ourselves and talk about why we chose a certain course, career, or topic, but not many tools are provided to students to help them figure this out. When do we really take the time to figure out these matters?

It was precisely this question —and the lack of an answer to it— that had me quite confused at the moment of choosing a thesis topic. I arranged an appointment with my thesis supervisor, asking for guidance: my professor knew my study interests and had taken the time to ask me about my life history, work experiences and volunteering. We sat down at a desk, and he asked me for a blank piece of paper.

We both knew that I was interested in international migration. He scribbles this across the page. "What is it that really interests you about migration? What *gets to you*?" he asked me (F. Tester, personal communication, December 12th, 2008). "Disruption" was my reply. He scribbled down that word, too. "Tell me more", he pried. After about 10 minutes of engaging conversation, we had figured out a basic outline for a thesis – something I had not been able to do throughout the entire semester. I thanked him, grabbed the sheet, took it home, stuck it on the wall, and began to write out a proposal.

The core of the investigation became clear to me from that moment on, which, in my opinion, was the result of a combination of atypical moments in my academic experience that involved establishing relationships with professors, and thinking about my passions and dreams. Throughout this process, I discovered that I am moved by a particular desire, which is also a right: a person's right to belong and to feel safe. In a general sense, this has led me to focus much of my work (both inside and outside of school) with issues related to immigrants and refugees. Hence, I am connected to this issue through a sense of solidarity and understanding with those who have been uprooted, moved, disrupted. Of course, there are elements of some peoples' experience that I do not directly relate to, such as the experience of war or other armed conflict, which strikes me as one of the most devastating disruptions that can take place in a person or a community's lifetime. With time immersed in a field

of work and education that joined the structural with the individual, the personal with the political, and the local with the globalized, I have been able to critically analyze the experiences of the people I have worked with from a perspective that moves beyond my own experience.

Accepting change and more recognition of process

When I arrived in Costa Rica in May of 2008, thesis proposal in hand and ready to begin my thesis investigation, there was a clear plan for how this project would work itself out. Prior to this I had defended my proposal and I had the green light from the research ethics board.

At the beginning of this project I wanted to deepen my understanding of xenophobia towards Nicaraguan immigrants through newspaper articles of two widely read newspapers in Costa Rica: *La Nacion* and *El Diario Extra[4]*. I would interview journalists or others who wrote articles on the topic, inquiring on various aspects of their position as writers for these media, their sense of responsibility towards how they represent the population of Nicaraguan immigrants in Costa Rica, and how they felt that they were either perpetuating, resisting or otherwise counteracting the strong negative stereotypes already diffuse throughout the country (Sandoval, 2006). Meanwhile, through filmed interviews with Nicaraguan participants in 3 different regions of the country (the Central Pacific town of Jacó, the south Caribbean area of Puerto Viejo, and downtown San José), I would look into their own lived experiences of discrimination and perceptions of how they were being represented in the media and in society. The result of those interviews would be a short video,

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[4] According to CID-Gallup's Opinion Poll in Costa Rica (April 13, 2000), of the people who reported reading a paper the day before they were surveyed, 39% reported reading *La Nación*, while an additional 25% reported reading *Al Día,* a subsidiary of La Nación. In second place was the periodical *Diario Extra*, with 31% of the readership. Other papers each polled 2% or less.

which I would then show to my initial interviewees-the writers- in a subsequent interview and analyze their resulting reaction.

Aware of the past accusations that Costa Rican newspapers have received for their negative portrayal of Nicaraguans (Bishop 2001; Quesada 1998; Sandoval 2000), I expected that the participants who wrote in *La Nación* and *Diario Extra* would be particularly sensitive to the topic of media coverage of Nicaraguan immigrants and express a desire to minimize the negative impact of such coverage in their writings. At the same time, knowing the significant role of the media in creating and sustaining stereotypes, and knowing that journalists tend to show a lack of training about minorities' cultures or backgrounds (Wilson, 1989; ter Wal, d'Haenens, and Koeman, 2005), I wanted to highlight the relationship between the content of newspaper articles and the negative stereotypes in society about Nicaraguan immigrants. I hoped that journalists and writers (and Nicaraguan participants as well) might become more aware of this situation and their own role in it. I was open and curious to see how they would respond, and to deal with that when I got there. Except that I never got "there", exactly.

Instead, I went somewhere else. Although I was not asking the wrong questions *per se*, I realized that what I was asking did not reflect what I really wanted to know. I will reflect on my research questions later on in this chapter.

First interviews

The first setback was that journalists and other social intellectuals who wrote analysis and opinion articles in the newspapers were largely unavailable to participate in the study. They were also very reluctant to see themselves as being part of the problem of perpetuating a negative discourse on Nicaraguan immigrants. I interviewed journalist Alvaro Murillo, who wrote an article in *La Nación* newspaper, the most read paper in the country, headlining (in Spanish)

"Nicas overflow Tico[5] consulates", referring to the large numbers of Nicaraguans forming long lines at the Costa Rican consulate office in Managua, Nicaragua (Appendix B). When asked about his use of terminology, he did not agree that the term "Nica" or the metaphor of "overflowing" carried any offensive connotation whatsoever; instead, he claimed that he was portraying a realistic view of the overcrowded situation at the consulates in Nicaragua, and that, since Nicaraguans often use the term "Nica" to refer to themselves, there was no problem using it, adding that there were strict limitations to the space available for headlines, making "Nicas" a more efficient option (A. Murillo, personal communication, July 2nd, 2008). Alvaro demonstrated great interest in the topic, stating that anti-Nicaraguan sentiments were indeed a problem in the country and he was in fact a supporter of solidarity initiatives between both nations. He was not willing, however, to have a subsequent interview in which he would have to watch the filmed interviews or discuss the potential of holding a brief workshop or screening of my work, or the topic of xenophobia towards Nicaraguan immigrants in the Costa Rican mass media. According to him, staff at *La Nación* had received a number of workshops and lectures on the topic already. Actually, this made sense to me, given that in 1998, CODEHUCA (Commission for Human Rights in Central America) accused Costa Rican media for their portrayal of Nicaraguan immigrants, stating that it encouraged xenophobia and discrimination towards this group (Quesada, 1998:5). I left this interview and went straight into the next one, with the newspaper's editor, which was similar: the editor was willing to talk about the topic and was indeed very interested in it, but he did not want to talk about his own part in it. I left the large newspaper headquarters wondering what could come out of this.

Another instance involved my attempt to contact José Luis Vega, a social scientist who wrote a journalistic piece in *Al Día* newspaper (a popular

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[5] The term "*Tico*" is a short, colloquial form of referring to a Costa Rican person (Biesanz, Biesanz & Biesanz, 1999:1). While it does not carry any negative connotation, as is the case with the use of *Nica* in Costa Rica, it has been used in such a way within Nicaragua.

subsidiary of media giant *La Nación* in Costa Rica). In his commentary, which was written in 2003 but had come up in my archival searches, he encouraged the government to stop chaos in the country:

> Why not begin to banish the anarchy [immigration and customs] that threatens our social system, undermines our traditions, unbalances our job market, reinforces criminality and increases poverty, by stopping the arrival of undesirable groups and persons? Why not stop the undermining and loss of our national identity and physical border. (Excerpt from *Al Día*, January 13th, 2003 [translation my own]).

When contacted, José Luis refused the offer for an interview, stating that he knew nothing about the topic of immigration, and that I must be mistaken. When I mentioned this specific newspaper commentary, he insisted that this was a personal opinion he expressed at a time when government was not taking migration seriously, but he did not feel he was the right person to interview on the topic.

In any case, I was not getting a good intuition about where the investigation could go under such circumstances. As a folk saying in Costa Rica states, it was "like looking for hair on an iguana" (An impossible task for anyone familiar with this scaly reptile). There was certainly something to be said, however, about my encounters with these individuals who, in my opinion, were perpetuating a negative discourse related to immigration and immigrants. Aware of my inexperience in the field of communication and media studies[6], it was clear to me from the interviews that there was a resistance, or perhaps denial on behalf of these individuals to accept the weight and responsibility that

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[6] I have to thank committee member Dr. Riaño-Alcalá for her sound advice and warning on the complications I might encounter when immersing myself in media and cultural studies. Despite this, however, I insist that these fields are related to social work in many important ways, and that social work students (and curricula) would generally benefit from overlapping more with such subjects. Due to the change of direction of this research, however, I will omit a more lengthy discussion on this matter.

their work entailed. Perhaps their jobs are structured and defined in such a way that they feel they are only "deliverers" of the news, reflecting events that have been defined as "reality" by someone else, higher up in the chain of power at the newspaper headquarters. But then, in their interviews, they seemed to assume responsibility for their work. And of course this was not the case for social scientists or others who expressed their opinions in the newspaper. Either way, I was deviating from what I wanted to learn from this project, so I avoided getting trapped into this idea simply because it was what I had planned. I learned that sometimes, what we propose to do in a research project does not work out, and we have to decide whether to insist on it, or to make appropriate changes. Fortunately, my chosen strategy of inquiry, action research, helped me to make this transition smoothly, almost naturally.

(Re)considerations on the research question and the beauty of chaos

"Questions come in many varieties. Some, one can try to say something about. Others, one can only stare at in bewildermint. Perhaps they are too hard, the kind that come up constantly in scientific inquiry, which, at its most serious, is pressing the boundaries of always limited understanding. Perhaps they are too easy; the answers can be put in a phrase."

- Noam Chomsky

For the particular research concerns of this study, a qualitative research paradigm was chosen, which is useful for a variety of reasons: it places importance on the "lived experience" of participants, acknowledge the role of various contexts, challenges the status quo, and encourages new ways of understanding the world by acknowledging multiple perspectives (Barnes, 1992; Sandelowski, 1996; Smith & O'Flynn, 2000). In addition, qualitative research in general treats "messes" within the research process –like the one I found myself in– as opportunities for creation and learning. As Mary Brydon-Miller, Davyd Greenwood and Patricia McGuire (2003: 21) put it: "It also helps to be able to handle a certain degree of chaos, uncertainty and messiness." Still, I struggled with reconsidering my central question, keeping in mind Joseph

Maxwell's (2005:65) advice that "In many works on research design…research questions are presented as the *starting point* and primary determinant of the design. Such approaches don't adequately represent the interactive and inductive nature of qualitative research…for this reason, qualitative researchers often don't develop their eventual research questions until they have done a significant amount of data collection and analysis." This contrasts with other views, such as Hanson and colleagues' (2005) assertion that one should place more importance on the research question than what method to work with or theory and paradigm to operate from.

My work up until that point had not been in vain. I needed only to harness my learning into a constructive next step. I understood what Victor Friedman meant that it helps to have "a preference for learning from experience and especially from engaging in uncertainty/complexity" (as cited in Brydon-Miller, Greenwood & Maguire, 2003: 21). I had failed to grasp the ubiquitousness of the problem I was dealing with: xenophobic attitudes went far beyond the scope of newspaper articles, and in the absence of any large "event" or "crisis" in the papers involving Nicaraguan immigrants; the issue did not feel relevant enough at the moment. This was reinforced by the fact that I found most Nicaraguan participants, although they agreed about the negative stereotypes towards them in the newspapers, did not want to discuss their representation in the newspapers, but preferred to talk about their everyday encounters with discrimination, their experiences as immigrants in general and their own perception of Nicaraguan immigrants in the country. On top of this, as mentioned earlier, the journalists and writers were not as cooperative as my interview methodology demanded. In this sense, if I had strictly adhered to my initial proposal, I would have not been able to include many of the interesting facets of the anti-Nicaraguan phenomenon in Costa Rica that were revealing themselves to me.

A further consideration towards the relevance of my focus was also intellectual and practical: to contribute to the discipline of social work and to improve my practice in the area of immigrant and refugee issues. Noam Chomsky (1997:55) discusses the notion of intellectual responsibility, interpreting it as "…a moral imperative to find out and tell the truth *as best as one can,* about things *that matter*, to *the right audience*." During the early stages of this study and precisely when I decided I needed to consult with others in order to reconsider my research question, I was fortunate to have a meeting with sociologist and director of social investigations at the University of Costa Rica, Dr. Carlos Sandoval.

Sandoval wrote his Masters thesis as well as his Doctoral dissertation on the topic of Nicaraguans in Costa Rica, and this continues to be his area of research. After introducing my academic interests, I told Carlos about my original proposal and the subsequent challenges I had encountered. His advice, although perhaps obvious, was significant and critical given where I was at with my research: Carlos noted that there have been some recent studies concerned with mass media and their representation of Nicaraguan immigrants in Costa Rica (for examples see Bishop, 2001, and Ramirez, 2007), and thus the media's biased portrayal of this group was well-established. In his opinion, given my area of study, it would be useful to contribute to the scarce amount of practical studies available on this topic, working with Nicaraguan immigrants and/or Costa Ricans in order to find effective ways to intervene and address this problem in society (C. Sandoval, personal communication, July 10th, 2008). This meeting reassured that my decision to move away from focusing on newspapers made sense in light of the broader research context on the topic. I would spend my time working more closely with Nicaraguan immigrants (which is what I really wanted to do all along), and to come to more collaborative and organic ways of addressing the problem at hand.

With this in mind, I formulated my research questions to address the broader context of Nicaraguan immigration to Costa Rica, and the more specific issue of xenophobia towards Nicaraguan immigrants. I narrowed these concerns to two main questions- those that to me were most pressing. First, I wanted to know how Nicaraguan participants experienced their migration and how this challenged xenophobic discourses about them. Second, I asked: what are participants' experiences of xenophobia in Costa Rica and what factors did they consider to reinforce or lessen xenophobic attitudes?

<u>Action Research and Participatory Action Research (PAR)</u>

"We come together to investigate reality in order to transform it"

-Orlando Fals-Borda.

The term *action research* denotes the centrality of *action* in the research process, posing a tension with traditional research, both qualitative and quantitative (Herr & Anderson, 2005). As an untraditional concept, action research is a commonly used term with more than one way of being defined. For example, recently disciplines including social work as well as nursing and teaching, have adopted the term *practitioner research* (particularly in the U.S), thus implying that the researchers are insiders to the setting (ibid). This stance has been criticized, however, arguing that other important subjects (clients, community members, etc) get pushed outside of the focus of research. In most other varieties of action research the investigator is, as Herr and Anderson (2005:3) mention "…an outsider who collaborates to varying degrees with insider practitioners or community members." Since the degrees of such collaboration do indeed vary, the issue of positionality holds particular importance for the way the research is carried out. I will revisit this aspect later in this chapter.

Despite the many different ways of defining action research and the continuous debate on many key issues, there are some basic points of agreement:

Action research is collaborative: Action researchers take a post-positivist view of research in that they reject the ideas of separation of the researcher and the researched, and the assumption of researcher as expert (Rodriguez, 1999: 420; Small, 1995). Emphasis is placed on the collaborative nature of action research, which is done *by* or *with* insiders to an organization or community, not *to* or *on* them, involving others who are stakeholders in the setting under study (Herr & Anderson, 2005; Kemmis & McTaggart, 1987; McCutcheon & Jung, 1990). And, depending on the positionality of the researcher, the collaborative nature of this research must be balanced with what Herr and Anderson (2005) refer to as the individual nature of a dissertation or thesis. Drawing on Geertz's (1983) work on "local knowledge" in anthropology, Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993:45) apply the term in action research to mean "both what [researchers] come to know about their own knowledge through research and what communities…come to know when they build knowledge collaboratively." Thus, it is meant to address the needs of people in a specific context, and it is this type of knowledge generated by action research that is one of its major strengths.

Action research involves reflection: Although any form of research assumes an ongoing reflection on behalf of the researcher, reflective processes form a systematic part of the methodology undertaken by action research. As such, this reflection is not "isolated, spontaneous reflection" (Herr & Anderson, 2005: 4), but rather a deliberate process, which informs further research, and hence subsequent action. Another way in which action research differentiates itself from traditional research is that the reflection process can also be undertaken by the participants and other collaborators of the research process, which was

the case with the participants of this investigation, as I will discuss in more detail.

Action research is an iterative process: The "action" component of action research is the result of a series of repeating steps that make up a spiral of action cycles that the action researcher undertakes (Avison, Lau, Myers & Nielson, 1999:94).

Some other characteristics that stand out include the goal of social justice (e.g. Kemmis & McTaggart, 1987) and the centrality of intervention to action research (Argyris & Schon, 1991), but this does not hold a general consensus, as they are more endemic to the specific discipline in which action research is applied, varying from business-oriented action research on one end of the continuum to research aimed as "emancipatory knowledge" on the other end (Herr & Anderson, 2005: 9). In the case of this study, I draw from the general characteristics above as well as embracing the goal of social justice (which, I believe, must be part of all social work research), drawing also on one category of action research known as participatory action research (PAR), which emphasizes participant collaboration (Avison et al., 1999; Fals-Borda, 2001).

Speaking specifically of PAR, it is defined as a combination of community participation and research that acknowledges and uses the insights and abilities of community members to resolve issues that they have identified as salient (Rains & Wiles-Ray, 1995). Assumptions of the approach include the belief that PAR: (1) requires equal participation between researcher and participants (Fals-Borda, 1991); (2) promotes people's ability to change their immediate social and political milieu in favourable ways (Wallerstein, 1992); (3) stimulates local or indigenous wisdom (Hatten, Knapp, & Salonga, 1997); and (4) aims to create positive social change (Rahman & Fals-Borda, 1991).

Inspired by the legacy of radical Latin American thinkers Paulo Freire[7] and Orlando Fals-Borda, educator Timothy Pyrch from the University of Calgary, describes PAR as a "methodology of liberation strongly influenced by a Latin American pedagogical tradition", also adding that "PAR's current challenge to action oriented intellectuals is to recover the passion and commitment to creating social justice in partnership with the marginalized and oppressed peoples of the world in face of the new onslaught of manic capitalism, including co-opting forces aiming to reduce our passion to just another commodity." (Pyrch, 2007: 200). During the last few decades, PAR has been done all over Latin America and the rest of the "third world" (Brown & Tandon, 1983; Fals Borda, 2001; Hall, 2002). That said, both the geographical context of my research project and the social weight of the topic make action research - and PAR in particular- a valuable methodology for deepening my understanding of the problem at hand and promoting action.

Positionality: situating myself as a researcher within PAR

"The self today is for everyone a reflexive project- a more or less continuous interrogation of past present and future."

- Anthony Giddens

How action researchers position themselves vis-à-vis the setting under study will determine how one considers power relations, research ethics, and the validity of the research's findings (Herr & Anderson, 2005). Thus, speaking in terms of my *positionality* as opposed to my *position* is intended to reflect how my stance as a researcher is not fixed or static but rather constantly shifting and flexible in response to the circumstances of the research and the

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[7] The appearance of PAR is largely credited to Brazilian Paulo Freire, whom, after the military coup in 1964 in his home country, went into exile to Chile. During the late 1960s and early 1970s, Freire and a group of Chilean literacy educators began a series of *thematic research* projects, which Freire viewed as a highly inductive process in which research is seen as a form of social action. (Herr & Anderson, 2005: 15).

involvement of the participants at different stages. This investigation represents less of a "pure" attempt at PAR in the sense that it is closer to the outsider end of the positionality continuum. Instead of joining an ongoing PAR project, I initiated my own project and then negotiated ideas and themes in collaboration with the participants as well as with others who held an interest in my project. PAR studies in which an outside researcher initiates a project and works collaboratively with a group or individual participants often focus on democratic validity (i.e. that the results are valid to those who participate in the research) and aim at at what Jurgen Habermas refers to as emancipatory knowledge interest (Habermas, 1971). In this regard, Habermas argued that knowledge production is never neutral, but rather always pursued with some interest in mind, hence communication in any public sphere is always distorted though the relations of power within this context (Habermas, 1971; Carr & Kemmis, 1986). The notion of emancipatory knowledge interests leads to the potential for critical reflection and the problematization of current practices as well as one's own unexamined assumptions (Tripp, 1994). This research qualifies as PAR because participants were involved in other phases of the research and because participants' understandings of the topic at hand were also deepened and moved to action (Herr & Anderson, 2005).

I was able to appreciate this aspect of the process while the study underwent some major changes towards the beginning. I was encouraged to maintain a sense of flexibility with the research questions and to have a collective setting to bounce ideas off each other. This allowed Nicaraguan participants and other community members to have a role and a voice in the research, reflecting democratic validity (Akbar, 1991). Their input, and the dialogue between myself as researcher and the research participants is expected to enhance the authenticity and utility of the research findings (Mock, 1999).

The following anecdote that took place in the initial phases of my fieldwork provides one example of how I negotiated my role as a researcher "with an agenda" while encouraging a collaborative and democratic research process.

In the Central Pacific beach town of Jacó, I worked with my participants both as a group and individually, and met with them on our first day of research together as a group. We had set up tables and chairs by the nearby river, where we later decided to film individual interviews. Prior to this, I had advertised my study with a poster invitation (Appendix D), as well as provided a list of some of the main questions I was interested in (Appendix E). On the day of our meeting, I brought food and drinks and two of my siblings came along to help with childcare. Expecting some 5 participants to show up, I was surprised to see 12 women as well as one man who stood by at a distance but participated fully in the discussion. After explaining my ideas for the study and discussing the issues of ethics and consent, I eventually posed my pressing question: "what are some experiences of discrimination you've experienced as a Nicaraguan in Costa Rica?"

It was as if I had dropped a bomb. Total silence. The women looked down, then at each other, and back down again. I was confused by their lack of response. Although I usually avoid embracing concepts such as "having participants' voices heard", which I see as promoting powerlessness and lack of agency, failing to acknowledge the ways in which they resist. In this instance, though, I felt like their silence did not reflect a disinterest in the issue, and I was reminded of Freire (2004:35)'s account of meeting with a group of peasants in Chile, and how the group fell into "a disconcerting silence", not because of lack of interest, but rather because of the peasant's perception of a lack of their own power, and the protocol to listen to the teacher, or speaker (i.e. the one with "knowledge" or "power" in the scenario). I pried into their silence, and eventually one participant said *"I try not to look at it that way, because I am thankful and*

lucky to live in this country, even if they don't treat us well. So that's why I prefer not to think about that."

This could have taken the discussion in several directions, but I turned the issue to the group to get a better grasp as to what issues were most pressing within the topic of anti-Nicaraguan sentiments. Balancing the reluctance to "bite the hand that feeds you" with the desire to defend their rights as immigrants and human beings was one of the issues that came up. Further into the study, this same participant would tell me how she would stay up at night writing about different experiences of discrimination that would come to mind. Although painful to remember at times, this gave her a different perspective on her experience living in Costa Rica for 8 years. Nevertheless, this experience was a concrete reminder of my positionality as both a figure of power within this context, and the person who is the enquirer, but not the holder of the knowledge and experiences of the participants. The themes were not simply "there"; they would emerge through our evolving collaboration and conversation.

My positionality within the context of this study, however, was not one of a complete outsider, although I position myself closer to the outsider end of the PAR continuum (see Anderson & Jones, 2000). First of all, I arrived at this study through a puzzle in my own practice with immigrants and refugees in general, where I have faced the question of how to confront racial, ethnic or cultural stereotypes in larger society. As Kathryn Herr and Gary Anderson (2005: 105) point out in their discussion on insider action research, it is not uncommon for practitioners to be informally problem solving or trying out various interventions in their work site and "action research moves this problem solving process to a more formal level involving systematic data gathering and analysis." Although I did not work from within a particular institution for my investigation, thus not qualifying "insider" action research, the issues I dealt

with have provided valuable knowledge and experience for facing these issues in my work-in the "real world".

Furthermore, I have lived in Costa Rica (particularly in the 3 geographical areas under study), and am a Spanish speaker and born in Latin America, giving me an advantage in terms of being more easily accepted into the culture of the participants I was working with. Throughout the course of the study, I had to constantly remind myself to distinguish this acceptance from collaboration, and to be aware of power dynamics.

From the beginning I knew that this project must serve the needs of the participants if it was to be legitimate in any way. Drawing from the critiques emerging from feminist research literature, which emphasize political commitment in research and the need to challenge power disparities between researchers and participants (Sangster, 1994; Kennedy and Davis 1996), my interest and responsibility was not to mine data from these individuals and use it for my own purposes, but rather to engage in a conversation, and to learn something that would benefit everyone involved.

As part of recognizing my positionality within the study, I also struggled with notions of "participatory" and "empowerment", questioning my attitudes and actions. Outside of the interviews, I was providing assistance to participants in some way or other. This was not my idea, but rather something that came up in some interviews, as well as a feeling that I wanted to "give something back" to the communities. In all cases, I offered a financial honorarium (between ten and twenty U.S dollars), as well as bringing food and beverages to every interview. In some cases I offered computer skills training or practice in speaking, reading and writing English for some Nicaraguan participants. I felt indebted to all of the participants, but I did not consider that I was "empowering" anyone, nor did I want to in that way. One piece of work that I did perform at the end of the interviews either in a group format or individually

was to offer a mini workshop on the myths around immigrants in Costa Rica. This was based on a brochure by the Jesuit service for migrants in Costa Rica (see appendix F), as well as drawn from the preliminary findings of this investigation. The workshop lasted 1 to 2 hours, and provided an overview of 10 of the main myths about immigrants in Costa Rica, supplemented with findings and facts, which contested such views. In some cases, participants did not have time for the workshop and were provided with copies of the brochure. In the case of these workshops, I reflected on what "empowerment" meant to me and to this study.

Empowerment has become a contested concept provoking widespread debate among those engaged in participatory, collaborative and emancipatory forms of research (Lennie, Hatcher & Morgan, 2003; Scheyvens & Leslie, 2000; Truman, Mertens & Humphries, 2000). At the same time, words from Canadian researchers Leslie Brown and Susan Strega (2005:10) resonated with me: "Research that empowers resistance makes a contribution to individually and collectively changing the conditions of our lives and the lives of those in the margins". I can't ignore the fact that, as a social worker, I am committed to a goal of social justice and, in this particular context, my goal was to explore anti-Nicaraguan sentiments in Costa Rica to better understand how they manifest themselves, and to find ways of minimizing them. Despite being aware of my goals, issues of empowerment are controversial and continue to be constructively problematic for myself and my research.

Interviews

Semi-structured initial interviews (with open ended questions), approximately 1 to 1.5 hours in length, were used to explore Nicaraguan immigrant participants' experience of xenophobia in Costa Rican society. In two instances, initial interviews took place in the form of group sessions with 10 and 6 participants in each group and experiences and personal stories were shared

and discussed by members. Otherwise, initial interviews were carried out with one participant and myself. In an effort to minimize the stress of the interview experience and to help participants prepare, I provided each participant with my list of questions several days to a week prior to the interview (a technique borrowed from Matsumoto, 1996). Although the interviews were only semi-structured and questions were broad, participants could get an idea of what the interview would be like. The open-ended format of the questions not only attempted to encourage participants to reflect, recall and respond freely regarding the experiences they had, but also allowed for individual variations to emerge. Moreover, since there were no predetermined responses, I was able to probe and explore issues within the interview guide (Hoepfl, 1997).

I also gave each participant two informed consent forms, one to be filled out and returned to me and the other for their own record (forms were in spanish, and an English version can be found in Appendix E). In all cases there were follow up interviews, ranging from 1 to 4 subsequent meetings, lasting from 30 minutes to 1 hour each. In each meeting, I would give a brief overview of the previous session inviting comments, clarifications or both from participants. Following this, I either suggested we take up a question or an issue raised from previous conversations or I requested that we work on issues related to the research topic.

All of the Nicaraguan participants involved were invited to participate in planning and taking part in individual filmed interviews in which they could speak of their experiences of xenophobia, their lived experience as immigrants in general, and their opinions of ways in which xenophobia towards Nicaraguans could be mitigated in Costa Rica. By filming these interviews it was easier to engage the group to participate further and have more involvement with organizing their input for the study. Much of details around filming and using film were a new to the pariticipants as they were to me, so filming gave us an opportunity to work and learn together.

Interviews took place in 3 regions of Costa Rica: Jacó on the Central Pacific coast, San José in the Central Valley, and Puerto Viejo on the Southern Caribbean coast. The interviews took place between June and September, 2008. All interviews were audio recorded or film recorded and transcribed verbatim, then translated by myself from Spanish into English. Subsequently they were presented to the participants for their feedback during the data analysis stage. Surprisingly, none of the participants requested changes, although some added on to the existing interview as our review would trigger new thoughts, opinions and reflections.

In addition to this, I held interviews with 5 journalists and 11 academics (2 social workers, 5 professors/ researchers, 1 doctoral student, 1 specialist from the International Organization of Migration, and 2 lawyers) connected to the topic of Nicaraguan immigration in Costa Rica. These interviews were also semi-structured with open-ended questions, recorded and transcribed but only translated when used within this thesis. Due to institutional ethical standards of confidentiality, which are beyond my own control or that of the participants, the names of all the valuable individuals who participated in this study must remain anonymous.

After completing the filmed interviews and organizing them into a video, I decided to have a screening of the film and a subsequent group discussion. The audience for this film was a group of 6 students recruited from the senior class of a local high school in the town of Puerto Viejo on the South Caribbean coast of Costa Rica. Although I was hoping to show the film to more groups, and gather their reactions, I was limited to this group due to time factors, so I will use this experience as a pilot study and will discuss this in my results.

Recruitment

　　As a general standard, qualitative inquiry encourages a relatively small purposive participant sample that will provide rich, in-depth information which captures participants' experiences. In this regard, the present study aimed at choosing a range of participants that would provide insightful information on the central questions of this research, and different perspectives were welcomed so that they could later be compared and contrasted (Patton, 1990; Polkinghorne, 2005).

　　In addition to this, it is often recommended to use snowball sampling for recruitment when access to participants is relatively difficult (Polit & Hungler, 1995). In my case, since I was recruiting participants from within different regions of the country, and since the immigrant participants were not all in one place (centre, organization, etc) snowball sampling was particularly useful. In each of the three communities pertinent to my study, I had met at least 2 Nicaraguan immigrants already, which already made up a diverse group of individuals. I printed out several recruitment posters (Appendix E) and posted them in public spaces (community advertisement walls, supermarkets, etc.). Those who responded to the poster and participated in the interview were asked to invite other Nicaraguan immigrants to participate, and were given a recruitment poster to hand out. To avoid coercion, participants were asked to directly contact me on their own behalf.

Reflective journal

　　According to Peshkin (1988), it is important during qualitative research for the researcher to record thoughts and reflections in a journal to capture personal biases and reflections on what is emerging from the data. This process has been called reflexivity (Berg, 2001), and implies that the researcher understands that she is part of the social world that is being

investigated. To ensure that reflexivity occurs, it is necessary for the researcher to have an "ongoing conversation with one's self" (Berg, 2001: 139).

Throughout the data collection and analysis process, I made regular journal entries and field notes in which I monitored my activities, my immediate reactions to events, my emotions, doubts, and other observations (See Sanjek, 1990, for examples of fieldnotes). As a regular task, this practice serves to maintain a temporal dimension to my reflection process, so I can remember how I positioned myself then, in comparison to now, when I write, and rewrite. However, looking back at the research process, I believe I could have better documented many details of my observation and experiences by more consistently recording them in my research log.

Analysis

Data analysis was a constant and evolving process. Indeed it was part of my own personal transformation as a researcher, reflecting on my experience of personal and theoretical growth. As such, I drew no firm distinction between collecting data and analyzing data, or between lived experience and theorizing about it. Various steps suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994) were applied that encouraged this evolving process, cyclical in nature, thus reducing the information load, and in this sense promoting what they refer to as "accuracy", but which I saw as guidance. The authors suggest using a type of "contact sheet" for each participant for coding and analysis, used for "focusing or summarizing questions about a particular field contact [participant]" (Miles & Huberman, 1994: 51). Questions included: What people, events or situations were involved? What were main themes or issues with the participant? Which research questions and which variables in the initial framework did the participant focus on? What new hypotheses or speculations about the field situation were suggested by the participant? Where should the researcher place more energy and what kind of information should be sought?

Analyzing interview transcripts was somewhat more structured on my part, as I constructed a series of documents through organized interview excerpts based on selected words, phrases and sentences that were meaningful, and later coding them. Coding is the main categorizing strategy in qualitative research, but it is very different from the traditional, quantitative way of coding which consists in utilizing a pre-established set of categories to the data (Maxwell, 2005). In qualitative research, the goal of coding is to "fracture" (Strauss, 1987: 29) the data and re-sort into broader categories. Codes have different levels of analysis that lie on a continuum, from descriptive to inferential and general to specific levels that evolve as the research process and data gathering proceed. Strauss and Cobin(1990, as cited in Miles & Huberman (1994)) recommend that the written data be read line by line and codes generated by hand that will be contained within a paragraph by the side margins. All transcripts in this research were transcribed by the research and hand-coded. In order to understand the complex nature of what themes might be inherent in codes, I referred to Bogdan and Biklen's (1992) scheme as recommended by Miles and Huberman (1994), which I organized into the table below (p. 61):

Table 1- Thematic scheme (based on Bogdan & Biklen, 1992).

General codes	Examples
Setting/Context	General information on surroundings that allows you to put the study in a larger context.
Definition of the situation	How people understand, define, or perceive the setting or the topics on which the study bears.
Perspectives	Ways of thinking about their setting shared by informants ("how things are done here").
Ways of thinking about people and objects	Understanding of each other, of outsiders, of objects in their world (more detailed than above).
Process	Sequence of events, flow, transitions, and changes over time.
Activities	Regularly occurring kinds of behaviour.
Events	Specific activities, especially ones occurring infrequently
Strategies	Ways of accomplishing things; people's tactics for meeting their needs.
Relationships and social structure	Unofficially defined patterns such as cliques, coalitions, romance, friendships, and enemies.
Methods	Problems, joys, dilemmas of the research process-often in relation to comments by observers.

Throughout the process, I contemplated the interview transcripts many times, exploring their rich complexities, always in conversation with other forms of data. I also applied connecting strategies, which function quite differently than categorizing strategies such as coding; instead of "fracturing" texts into discrete segments, connecting analysis aims to understand the data in context, using a number of methods to identify the relationships among the different elements of a text (Atkinson, 1992; Mishler, 1986). In my case, the identification of connections among different categories and themes was not a separate process, but rather a connecting *step* in analysis (Dey, 1993), used with the results of the prior categorizing analysis. And, while this way of using connecting analysis cannot account for the contextual ties that might have been lost in the original categorizing analysis, a purely connecting analysis for this study would be limited to understanding particular individuals or situations, without developing a larger idea of what is going on. Hence the two strategies compliment each other to provide a well-rounded account (Maxwell, 2005: 99; Maxwell & Miller, n.d.).

Although these guidelines and ways of analyzing are well practiced and sound, my analysis was not performed alone, and so it is not limited to the results of these methods. Themes were also created in collaboration with participants through reflection over numerous meetings and interviews. In his own PAR work, Freire (1970) referred to the themes or issues that the community gave priority to as *generative themes*. In the case of this collaborative research the themes were not solely decided by the community, although I tried to make sure that my own conclusions were always discussedwith participants (also referred to as *member checking* (Lincoln & Guba, 1995)) and that the findings reflected the issues that were deemed as salient to the participants, within the context of the topic that I had chosen.

With this in mind, findings for this study were not conceptualized as propositional pieces of knowledge, but rather a combination of emerging themes as well as reflections on process. Reports of action research often tend to focus more on process (Anderson & Herr, 2005: 86).

Looking for validity(ies) and ensuring trustworthiness of data

In order for my research to be considered "valid", there were several aspects that needed to be addressed. I considered issues of validity within the context of action research. Many proponents of action research suggest that the validity of this approach should be judged by different criteria than that with which we judge positivistic and naturalistic research (Herr & Anderson, 2005). There are different suggestions for validity criteria in action research that could not all be addressed here (see Herr & Anderson, 2005). I will discuss one such criterion put forward by Reason and Bradbury (2001) that developed out of their experience with PAR and view of action research as a worldview as well as a methodology. They identify five categories, based on what they call a "participatory worldview which they believe is emerging at this historical moment [and that] undercuts the foundations of the empirical-positivist worldview that has been the foundation of Western inquiry since the enlightenment" (Toulman, 1990:4). These categories and their relation to action research and questions of validity are summarized in the following table:

Table 2 Broadening the bandwidth of validity

Dimension of a Participatory Worldview	Characteristics	Questions for Validity
Participatory evolutionary reality	Emergent developmental form	Questions of emergence and enduring consequence
Meaning and purpose	Human flourishing	Questions about significance
Extended epistemology	Knowledge-in-action	Questions ofplural ways of knowing
Practical being and acting	Practical issues	Questions of outcome and practice
Relational ecological form	Participation and democracy	Questions of relational practice

Source: Bradbury & Reason (2001).

While I only offer a summary here of this ambitious post-positivist view of validity, I found it to be interesting in how it offered an alternative way of considering validity within action research, while still being compatible with some traditional validity criteria. For example, in terms of knowledge generation, Reason and Bradbury (2001: 12) consider action research as an "emergent, evolutionary and educational process of engaging with self, persons and communities that needs to be sustained for a significant period of time." This, in turn, leads to questions about validity and quality that center on emergence and enduring consequences of the research for self, persons and communities. These authors also promote a version of outcome validity that frames quality as questions of outcome and practice. This idea of *relational practice* overlaps with what Herr and Anderson (2005: 259) have called *democratic validity,* which requires "honoring the perspectives of all parties who have a stake in the problem under investigation." Another version of this is referred to as local validity by Cunningham (1983), focusing on the problems that emerge from a particular context and how the solutions are appropriate to that context as criteria for validity. Similarly, Watkins (1991) uses the terms 'relevancy' or 'applicability', discussing the relevance of findings and how they relate to the needs of the problem context, and Tandon, Kelly and Mock (2001) refer to 'ecological validity' as a criterion for the degree to which the outcome of the research is relevant to the participating group. In any case, reviewing and apllying these different conceptions of validity helped me to think outside of conventional parameters of validity and to look for more practical justifications and goals.

Going back to Bradbury & Reason (2001: 12), they also see action research as producing not only conceptual knowledge, but also producing different ways of knowing. In this sense, validity is related to "different forms of knowing in themselves and the relationship between [them]." Finally, they emphasize the importance and meaning of the research in terms of whether it

has addressed questions about significance, and making the research meaningful (as opposed to more positivist stances of "getting it right").

While doing fieldwork, participating in interviews, filming and also while writing up this thesis, I thought of validity in this way, that is, focusing on procedural and relational considerations, and how they are relevant to the participants of the study. This was made easier by the frequent meetings and interviews held (either individually or as a group), the subsequent involvement of participants and then the filming. As for the conceptual aspect, my literature-based research was guided by aspects that arose from interviews, stories, and other research on the Nicaraguan immigrant community in Costa Rica.

A final consideration on validity emerges from what is traditionally known within qualitative research as "external validity" or "generalizability", namely how findings are applicable to other settings. In some ways, I found my focus on ensuring my research was relevant to the participant communities contrasted to this broader, more positivistic concept. Still, I knew I had to think about this for my study to offer some applicability beyond the immediate setting I worked in. My participant sample was small relative to the number of Nicaraguan immigrants in Costa Rica, and was clearly nowhere close to being quantitatively representative, although the three regions I studied each held their significance in terms of Nicaraguan migration. However, the experiences, situations, and social-economic conditions of the participants were not drastically different from recent demographic research on Nicaraguan immigrants in Costa Rica (Morales & Castro, 2007).

Baydon-Miller et al. (2003: 25) recognize this tension, commenting: "One of the weaknesses of action research is its localism and the difficulty we find in large scale social change efforts. The bulk of action research takes place on a case by case basis, often doing great good in a local situation but then failing to extend beyond that local context." At the same time, the general

salience of the central issue of this research in Costa Rica reassures to me that findings can be helpful within the general context of xenophobia in Costa Rica. Nevertheless, I consider different aspects of generalizability and specificity or locality of my findings throughout this thesis depending on my analysis, focusing more on the latter during my literature review and the former during the deeper discussion of my findings.

<u>Putting it all together: writing this thesis</u>

Precisely because of the ongoing, iterative and reflective rhythm inherent to the action research approach, any study embracing this particular methodology will subsequently echo this process in its form and presentation. It was not possible for me to write up the entire undertaking of this investigation, but rather just a piece of the understanding that came about through my inquiry. For example, the screening of my film subsequent to its finalization, and the feedback I received from Costa Rican participants who saw it gave an added dimension in terms of this study's applications, forms of interventions, and the usefulness of film as a catalyst for change and as an element within action research. The temporal, spatial and financial limitations to this particular aspect of this study did not allow me to fully represent the experience gained through this research. In this sense, the study is not yet finished, but rather must be seen as a work in progress, this thesis essentially accounting of the research thus far.

Herr and Anderson (2005) discuss the style of writing for such PAR studies in theses or dissertations, noting that they take a more qualitative, self-reflective and narrative approach. Personally, I consider that my own learning is best portrayed through the story of how this research unfolded itself, and to be as aware as possible of the ways in which I have manipulated and steered this unfolding. Writing from this active, first person point of view is an effective way of maintaining this stance and being transparent about my experience.

Sociologist Howard Becker (2007), in his book "Writing For Social Scientists" criticizes writing texts that insist substituting active verbs for passive ones and adds that active verbs add a personal, intentional character to writing. As he puts it, "Almost every version of social theory insists that we *act* to produce social life. Karl Marx and George Herbert Mead both thought that, but their followers' syntax often betrays that theory" (80). So, while some parts are more descriptive by nature, I try to portray this style as my telling of this study unfolds. Despite these considerations, I found it at times to be extremely challenging to put the overall experience of this investigation into words. The experiences always seemed just beyond the reach of words, and yet, words are the tools we use as the primary means of expression. My words, therefore, are only limited, incomplete, partial.

Many of us researchers do not know how to place ourselves as researchers within PAR, which puts us at a disadvantage as to how to speak when presenting data. By writing in the first person I am reminded that my writing, and thus my interpretation and analysis too, reflects *my own* perspective, while also helping me break through one of the barriers of qualitative interpretation which is that of 'voicelessness' (Savin-Baden, 2004). That is, instead of trying to attribute my perspectives and views to the participants, my voice in this writing will clearly differentiate between what is the interpretation of participants, and what interpretation is my own.

CHAPTER III

Exploring the literature

The case of anti-Nicaraguan sentiments in Costa Rica is in some ways particular, but in other ways representative of global transnational migration issues and the contradictory challenges posed by nation states attracting migrants while also promoting a discourse that excludes them. I will begin this chapter with a discussion of the former, describing how xenophobia towards Nicaraguan immigrants in Costa Rica is, in some ways, a product of the particular political, economic and social histories of both Costa Rica and Nicaragua, and the relationship between the two. This will include a section on the history of immigration to Costa Rica, and how the Nicaraguan community has become increasingly stigmatized in Costa Rica. Overall, the idea is to show how a Costa Rican national identity was created and then threatened due to certain changes in Costa Rican society, with Nicaraguan immigrants ending up as the scapegoats for many of society's frustrations. I will bring this chapter to an end with some reflections on the literature.

<u>The Costa Rican nation(ality): rise and demise of the welfare state</u>

The attitudes of the Costa Rican people are related to the way they have grown to perceive and define themselves in comparison to their surroundings. This, in turn, is rooted in a history and imagined past that stands out for its uniqueness relative to the rest of Central America. In addition to this, the historical formation of Costa Rican national identities and that of the Nicaraguan as "the other" will be explored as processes that are mutually constituted (Sandoval, 2006). Three particular time frames in the history of the Americas shed some light on such attitudes: the colonial period, the formation of the state, and neoliberalism. The official, historical versions of these formative moments for Costa Rica have been generally more stable, less violent and less unequal than many other countries in Central America. Where

relevant, I will also compare the development of Costa Rica with that of Nicaragua, in order to emphasize similarities and differences.

As with any interpretation of history, these accounts must be read with a critical eye. To some extent, however, Costa Rica has indeed experienced a noticeably different formation in comparison to its neighbouring countries. Therefore, I want to focus on the emphasis given to Costa Rica's uniqueness and discuss how this has given way to racialization and exclusion over time, situating the problem of anti-Nicaraguan sentiments not as a product of simple immigration, but rather as a process profoundly related to these particular forms of racialization, exclusion and nationalism.

Colonial period: a slow and painful conquest.

" I arrived in the land of Cariay [in 1502], where I stopped to mend and provision the ships, and to give some rest to the crew members who were quite ill…. There I heard tales of the gold mines in the province of Ciamba that I was searching for."
      -Christopher Columbus, letter written in Jamaica, July 1503.

Many of the attributes considered to be exceptional about Costa Rica are commonly dated by historians and others to the country's colonial past (Molina & Palmer, 2004; see also Molina, 1991; Fernandez, 1978; and Cardoso, 1975). This period begins with the Spanish arrival in the 1500s and continues until the independence of Central America in the 1820s. At the early stages of the Spanish conquest, the encroaching Spanish colonial hegemony over political, economic and social life left little room for differentiations to emerge that might encourage individual state development. Costa Rica, however, was more isolated geographically than Nicaragua from the Viceroyalty of New Spain and the Captaincy General in Guatemala City. Thus, Costa Rica developed in a more independent manner, and it is precisely around this time that the myths around how Costa Rica was formed began.

For example, the Costa Rican education system has propagated the idea that there were virtually no indigenous people in the territory when the Spanish arrived. Along this line there are several explanations, or constructions of history, that dominate the debate: One construction is that when the Spanish *conquistadores* arrived, they found such a small indigenous population and a lack of precious metals in Costa Rica, that it became an unattractive option to stay. The second construction states that the Spanish conquest was a relatively peaceful one, evident and reinforced by pop feature films such as *1492 Conquest of Paradise,* starring Hollywood star Gérard Depardieu[8]. A third construction claims that the scarcity of indigenous peoples who could serve as labourers, along with a poor mining potential, left Costa Rica as a poor and marginal colony giving rise to a society of homogenous farmers without any significant class or racial divisions. These became the base for the humble origin of a rural democracy that remains a central attribute of this nation-state today (Molina & Palmer, 2004).

The first two of these constructions can be very easily challenged. In fact, historians have proved that prior to the 1502 arrival of Columbus in Cariari (known today as Puerto Limón), the region was home to around 400, 000 indigenous people, who were divided into 19 different chiefdoms comprising as a mix of Mesoamerican (Aztec and Maya) and South American influences (Biesanz et al., 1999). Despite beliefs that the popukation was small, this number would not be matched by the Hispanic populace of Costa Rica until the 1920s (Fernandez, 1978: 67; Molina & Palmer, 2005: 19). Subsequently, the Spanish conquest of Costa Rica lasted more than half a century, with this phase resembling that of most other Conquests. Beginning with an attempt to consolidate a Spanish settlement on the country's Caribbean side, the

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[8] This movie was filmed in the Costa Rican town where I grew up– and we would frequently re-enacted the story for our school plays using some of the original porps and costumes.

Spaniards reduced the indigenous population to the point of extinction through disease, war, relocation and brutal exploitation. This occurred despite local indigenous resistance (which is often overlooked and undermined by historians), which had prevented earlier conquering attempts. This served as the backdrop to the region's first economic boom between 1536 and 1540, based on the what some historians have referred to as the "genocidal enslavement" of the indigenous groups of Nicoya and Nicaragua, exported as slaves to the Caribbean and other parts of the Americas (Molina & Palmer, 2005: 20). By 1675, there were a mere 500 indigenous persons left -hardly an outcome that can be said to have been a peaceful conquest (Molina, 1991). Hence it is within this context that the Spaniards focused on the more heavily indigenous populated Nicaragua, once again providing the people of Costa Rica (largley mestizos and Spaniards by this point) more liberty to make decisions.

The third construction-the myth of the rural democracy- requires particular attention. Even some historians who have been critical of this peaceful conquest fairy tale end up accepting the main assumptions of the rural democracy, which has ultimately made it complicated to understand Costa Rica's history and contemporary culture (Cardoso, 1975). For instance, although Costa Rica was not as impoverished or dormant as conventional historians have portrayed, it has been made clear by a more contemporary wave of historians that the country was also not an economically dynamic country. Unlike other countries in Central America, elites that were tied to the Church, the Spanish bureaucracy and colonial exportation in Costa Rica were not as comparatively significant as they were elsewhere. This, in turn, had two consequences. Frst, the country managed to largely avoid the conflicts between secular liberals and religious conservatives that were the cause for violence for much of the rest of the surrounding countries. Secondly, the lack of such conflict permitted a more rapid modernization process of the economy and an earlier entrance into the coffee market in the 1830s, as opposed to the

1870s and 1880s in Guatemala and El Salvador (Cardoso, 1975). Out of sheer necessity, the residents of Costa Rica made most decisions and thus developed a sense of independence earlier than Nicaragua.

Another factor contributing to the myth of the rural democracy in Costa Rica was the physical distance between different social classes in the country. By the mid 1600's, basic divisions were established which separated the region into three zones- the Central Valley or *meseta central*, the Pacific center and north, and the Caribbean side (Palmer & Molina, 2004; Fernandez, 1978). These spaces were dominated by Spanish culture, yet Costa Rica was on the margins of the colonial world due to a lack of precious metal mines and the scarcity of indigenous survivors (and therefore a lack of exploitable labour). As a result, in late colonial Costa Rica's Central Valley, prior to the coffee boom, the population's elite and lower classes were not separated from each other to the same extent as other countries in the region. Not surprisingly, this arrangement contributed to a more inclusive concept of "the people". The Spanish rule failed to build a society similar to that of their neighbors, which was based on exploitation of indigenous and slave labour. Moreover, this failure equated to the development of a peasant economy, which became the principle social group in the Central Valley during the eighteenth century. Author Rodrigo Facio (1975) reinforces this view, stating, "…all the *Ticos,* in general, were land owners." (42), even though land parecels were small. When Costa Rica became independent in 1821, it was the Central Valley- not the Caribbean or the Pacific- that provided the basis of Costa Rica's national experience (Palmer & Molina, 2004). Iván Molina, author of Costa Rica's colonial heritage, observes:

> "The cultural abyss which –in nearly all of Hispanic America- separated the direct producer from the wholesaler, from the bureaucrat and from the hacienda owner, did not exist in Costa Rica with the exception of the indigenous peasantry. The *meseta* was distinguished by the existence of a culture (secular and religious) shared by the agriculturist and the merchant (Molina, 1991: 163)."

These key factors – geographic isolation and fewer indigenous people in Costa Rica than Nicaragua – were to be the beginnings of Costa Rica's national identity.

As the colonial period progressed more marked differences began to appear. Nicaragua possessed a larger indigenous population than Costa Rica, which had a series of significant outcomes (Stansifer, 1998; Booth, 1998). The Spanish landowners took advantage of the indigenous labour, and thus "a new class structure developed, marked by extreme inequality between the wealthy [Spanish] landowners and the poorer, lower-status mestizos and the abused Indians." (Booth,1998: 120).

In order to ensure the continued economic success of the Spanish in Nicaragua, they needed to suppress the frequent resistance put up by the indigenous peoples, especially the Miskito tribe on the Atlantic coast that had allied with the British. Thus, the second effect of the large indigenous populace was the installation of military forces to subdue indigenous uprisings. According to John Booth, "[U]pper-class culture rationalized violent coercion of the poor to preserve the economic order." (Ibid.) A third consequence of the strong Indigenous presence in Nicaragua was the arrival of Catholic clergy (Stansifer, 1998). Spanish officials saw Nicaragua not only as having the potential to grow economically, but also as virgin ground to convert thousands of indigenous to the Catholic religion. Thus, they built a large cathedral in León and placed the bishopric there as well. Once more, Costa Rica, in addition to being isolated politically, was also isolated from the religious conversions by the Spanish clergy.

Two other important events took place in the colonial era that shaped Nicaragua's course in history. First, the Spaniards established a university in León in 1811, which contributed to its feelings of cultural superiority over Costa

Rica at the time (indeed, many Costa Ricans used to study in León when there were no universities in Costa Rica). Second, the proximity to Guatemala and El Salvador and their need for meat encouraged a cattle industry to emerge in Nicaragua (Stansifer, 1998).

According to this literature, then, the foundation of Costa Rica's so-called exceptionalism was but a certain regional development whose rural structure resembled that of other parts of Latin America. However, in contrast to other areas, which developed as local or regional particularities, the differentiated-yet-integrated world of Costa Rica's Central Valley became the foundation of its nation-state. Yet, there is a process here that arguably runs in contrast to the development of a rural democracy. That is, it can also be seen as a period that marked the beginnings of a society made up of peasantry and a colonial elite (i.e. merchants, owners of large estates, military, civil and religious functionaries). The elite's wealth came from the unequal exchange with the peasantry through a form of exploitation based on the different market position, and thus, status, that each group held. Merchants would acquire surplus for lower than it's market value, and then export it to Nicaragua or Panama (Molina & Palmer, 2005). They would then import manufactured goods sell them at inflated prices to the peasants. In other words, while merchants could no longer take goods using ethnic differences or brute force, they still coexisted with the lower classes through a highly exploitative market relationship.

Formation of the State: 1820s to 1920s

 "San José is among the most enchanting of Central American cities. Its women are the most lovely of the five republics, and its society one of the most European and North American in style."
                    - Nicaraguan modernist poet, Rubén Darío, 1891.

During this period, projects of nation-building and representing nationality were of important concern. The political, economic, and social differences between Costa Rica and Nicaragua intensified even further when the colonies gained independence in the 1820s (Stansifer, 1998: 121). As newly freed countries, leaders from Central America rallied to form a new confederation that would assemble the five countries together under one government. Costa Rica's isolated position allowed it to remain outside of the political struggle and continued to enjoy its autonomy. Nicaragua, however, closer in proximity to Guatemala City, separated into two groups: the conservatives of Granada and the liberals of León. Nicaraguan conservatives and liberals possessed dissimilar ideas about the future political direction of Nicaragua. The political schism was fueled by two rival family groups who went at great lengths to inculcate their political ideologies and agendas throughout Nicaragua. The division took its toll economically and socially and sent Nicaragua plummeting into economic hardship and social unrest.

Costa Rica, on the other hand, entered independence with relatively fewer large estates, a smaller oligarchy, a weaker clerical establishment, and a more equitable distribution of land than Nicaragua. These circumstances allowed Costa Rica to ease into national independence without the political strife and *caudillismo* of its neighbors (Stansifer, 1998). In 1838 both countries withdrew from the Confederation and once more, continued down different paths.

After Central American countries gained independence from Spain in 1821, the ruling class in each particular region began to develop strategies to build loyalties to each individual state. They believed that loyalty, whether genuine or forced, would reinforce states' sovereignty, promote progress, and later provide the means to advance their ideological ideas over neighboring states. The process of nationalizing a country, or in other words, creating a

nation with a particular identity, came to be known as the period of state formation.

Several questions emerge when asking how a country's identity and image are created. First of all, *what* creates identity? The creation of an outsider or enemy can be the force that compels a nation's people to rally, unite, and ignore individual differences within the country.   When such a threat is felt, there is a tendency to make one's country appear superior to others. According to Michael Hechter, "Social theory has approached nationalism as . . . [the] production of beliefs that one's own country is the best, and the invocation of national unity to override internal differences." (as cited in Ritzer, 2005: 519) In this sense, it is necessary to make distinctions between groups of people, between "us" and "them."

A second question that emerges is *who* creates identity? Despite the belief that Costa Ricans have always lived on relatively egalitarian terms, it was the elite ruling classes –who possessed governmental and monetary powers- that shaped the country's image. By 1800, the Central Valley of Costa Rica accounted for the vast majority of Costa Rica's population, and it was economically and socially the most important region in the country, with San José emerging as the capital of Costa Rica's "agrarian capitalism" based on coffee, also becoming the capital of the state of Costa Rica, and then of the Republic of Costa Rica proclaimed in 1848 (Molina & Palmer, 2005).

In Central America, coffee was first cultivated in Costa Rica as a way to diversify exports as the modern industrial boom replaced many primary exports and raw materials with synthetic goods. By 1843, Costa Rica was producing 50 000 pounds of coffee annually, which continued to increased and also boomed with the construction of the railway in 1855 (Woodward, 1999). Soon after, Nicaragua started planting coffee, although it was not able to match Costa Rica's production. This boom marked a dramatic shift in Costa Rica's economic

and social success, while the Nicaraguan economic market staggered behind and eventually plunged into economic strife in the late 1800s.

As a result of the agrarian capitalist growth, the Central Valley area became home to most of the country's elite class. It was during this time also that liberalism became prevalent in political thought and practice (Ameringer, 1982). For example, at the end of the nineteenth century in Costa Rica, there was a push among the elites towards creating a democratic government. Among them existed a unique group of Costa Rican education advocates who simultaneously held government positions that allowed them to funnel government monies and support into education. Mauro Fernández, an effusive advocate for education who is affectionately referred to in Costa Rica as "the father of education" was heavily influential in this regard, with his educational reforms and democratic political ideology (Rodriguez, 2001).

Indeed education was influential, also evident in Felipe Molina (1851)'s well-known *Outline of the Republic of Costa Rica,* which was written in spanish and translated into several different languages in order to promote Costa Rica to the United States and Europe. This outline summarized the earlier interpretations of the emerging identity. According to this view, Costa Rica was made up of a white and hard working people that were isolated from its neighbours due to the geographical characteristics of the country (1851: 28). Molina's book became mandatory reading in schools after 1862, thus introducing these representations into children who received a formal education at that time (Taracena, 1995). In addition to this, the 1960s saw a generation of university professors and other social thinkers who again reproduced and idealized the discourse of a rural democracy, but this time in a more academic and philosophical way, claiming to a certain essence of the Costa Rican people, as if things had always been this way (Ferrero, 1971; Sandoval, 2006).

The economic, political, and social situation in Costa Rica contrasted sharply with Nicaragua. In contrast to Nicaragua's Zelaya dictatorship, the election of 1889 in Costa Rica "is generally considered the first genuinely free election in Central American history." (Stansifer, 1998: 152). Scholars often note this as the birth of democracy in Costa Rica (although it would not be until 1949 when women received voting rights, and 1994 for indigenous peoples[9]).

Discussing the formation of identities, scholar Benedict Anderson (1991: 6) supports the view that national identities are indeed a construction, rather than a genuine representation of the people, writing:

> I propose the following definition of the nation: it is an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign. It is imagined because even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion. Communities are distinguished . . . by the style in which they are imagined.

Hence the image that a person holds of their own nation and of themselves (and of others, too) is but an imagined one, created and influenced not only by powerful people but also by institutions and their discourses, such as schools, government propaganda, and the mass media. Ernest Gellner adds to this argument, stating, " Nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it invents nations where they do not exist".

A final question emerging when discussing national identity is *why?* That is, what are the reasons behind and influencing the creation of such identity? Max Weber and Emile Durkheim consider nation building to be "a crucial component of developing an effective modern society, one capable of political stability and economic development." (as cited in Ritzer, 2005: 518). In the late

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[9] In fact, the constitutional court of Costa Rica did not recognize indigenous peoples as "citizens" until 1993 (Sandoval, 2006: 147).

1800s, ideas from the Enlightenment period in Europe trickled across the ocean to Central and South America. One key concept of a "modern society" was the idea of progress. In order to have progress, a nation needed cohesion, which would generate political stability. Political stability, theoretically, would lead to economic development resulting in the overall well-being of a nation. And so it happened that when Costa Rica began its political transformation in the 1870s, spurred by the dictatorship of General Tomás Guardia (1870 -1882), it also underwent a social transformation (Molina & Palmer, 2005). Despite being authoritarian in character, the time during the rule of Guardia and his successors saw an expansion of public services, and the rise of a group of politicians and intellectuals (in other words, a ruling elite) who had a clear plan of reform: to create a modern state and society.

Anderson, Weber, and Durkheim speak of nation building as a collective effort. Pablo Vila (2003: 113) concurs and goes on to contribute another dimension to the theories of the construction of nations. He agrees that a particular identity (composed collectively) exists, adding that beyond propaganda by the ruling elite and the media, each person further disseminates identity through their own self-narrative and the narratives they hold of others. As Vila puts it, "I start my work from the theoretical premise that each set of individual and group identities is 1) constructed within a culturally specific system of classification and 2) with the help of narratives about oneself and "other.'"

In sum, the construction of national identities can be thought of as a means through which the ruling class engenders solidarity and mobilization of the masses in the name of economic and social progress, distinguishing between one group ("us") and the other ("them"). As such, nations and national identities cannot be conceptually separated from the rise and existence of modernity and the modern state.

Starting in 1860, Costa Rica's coffee bourgeoisie had consolidated control over credit with the creation of Central America's first banks and began to diversify economically by investing in sugar, bananas, cacao, ranching, mining and other ventures (Molina & Palmer, 2005). Alongside this capitalist diversification came growing social conflict. Workers on the newly implemented railway track on the Caribbean side led a number of strikes (the Chinese in 1874, the Jamaicans in 1879 and 1887, and the Italians in 1888); banana workers struck in 1910, 1911, 1919 and 1920; and there were a number of peasant protests in the other areas of the country. The violence in the peripheral areas of the country was uncommon to the Central Valley, which had its own set of urban struggles such as minor labour disputes and land reforms (Edelman, 1999).

For the following decades, Costa Rica experienced an economic collapse (1929-1932), eventually leading to heavy social reforms, and a civil war in 1948 that imposed the famous decree of abolishing the army, an act of great symbolic importance to the country, closing off avenues for future military conflict and contributing to the identity of a peaceful nation. For example, in 1983 when the U.S pressured to militarize Costa Rican territory to serve as a southern front in the counter-revolutionary ("Contra") war on Sandinista Nicaragua, Costa Rica's president-at-the-time Luis Alberto Monge (1982-1986) invoked the symbolic weight of this aspect of the country's history, declaring neutrality.

All of this set the stage for a period marked by the growth of a strong middle class, and by 1978 Costa Rica could boast social indicators far better

than those of its neighbours (Molina & Palmer, 2005; Biesanz et al., 1999). This social improvement was also the result of the expansion of the global economy after World War II, increasing the demand for bananas, coffee and other Costa Rican goods. As yet another sign of peace and progress, President Oscar Arias (1986- 1990) promoted a peace plan in the Central American region, winning him the Nobel Peace Prize in 1987. However, now largely dependant on the global market, the oil shock and a decrease in the international prices of coffee led to an economic crisis that lasted for the entirety of the 80s, commonly known as 'the lost decade', characterized by loans and structural adjustment plans under the direction of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) which typically cut public spending and encouraged heavy privatization (Paus, 2005). The country soon after had an economic 'boom', prompted mostly by tourism (which again, attracted foreigners based on an already established discourse of peace and democracy). The other side of this boom, however, was serious social deterioration. Indeed, according to historian Iván Molina (1991: 129):

> The government of Rafael Angel Calderón (1990-1994) was the initiator of 'shock therapy'…the middle class got poorer, the poor fell into indigence and the so-called informal sector expanded dramatically. Extreme poverty rose almost 50 percent between 1987 and 1991…diseases that had once been eradicated reappeared, and school drop-out rates rose.

Naomi Klein (2007) in her recent book " The shock doctrine: the rise of disaster capitalism", describes how governments, usually backed by the U.S, take advantage of crises in a country to legitimize and implement ideas that would otherwise be unacceptable to a society, and to cause a dramatic change in policies that serves their own interests. This doctrine was applied to the case of Costa Rica in 1995, when Costa Rican president José María Figueres and his predecessor Calderón signed a pact which meant approving a series of reforms that would dismantle the last remnants of the welfare state (Molina & Palmer, 2005).

To further demonstrate the current situation in Costa Rica, the American government's CIA world factbook (2008) gives a general socio-economic and political description of all the countries and the world, and has the following to say on Costa Rica (economic review section):

> Costa Rica's basically stable economy depends on tourism, agriculture, and electronics exports. Poverty has remained around 20% for nearly 20 years, and the strong social safety net that had been put into place by the government has eroded due to increased financial constraints on government expenditures. Immigration from Nicaragua has increasingly become a concern for the government. The estimated 300,000-500,000 Nicaraguans estimated to be in Costa Rica legally and illegally are an important source of (mostly unskilled) labor, but also place heavy demands on the social welfare system. Foreign investors remain attracted by the country's political stability and high education levels, as well as the fiscal incentives offered in the free-trade zones. Exports have become more diversified in the past 10 years due to the growth of the high-tech manufacturing sector. Tourism continues to bring in foreign exchange, as Costa Rica's impressive biodiversity makes it a key destination for ecotourism. The government continues to grapple with its large internal and external deficits and sizable internal debt. Reducing inflation remains a difficult problem because of rising import prices, labor market rigidities, and fiscal deficits. Tax and public expenditure reforms will be necessary to close the budget gap. In October 2007, a national referendum voted in favor of the US-Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA).

The factbook excerpt offers an official American perspective of Costa Rica's general situation, but it is valuable for the purpose of this section as it mentions the complex issue around the valuable and needed labour of Nicaraguan immigrants, as well as the perceived strain that this immigration is thought to have on a deteriorating social system. It also describes the neoliberal context of the country, highlighting foreign investment, free trade, debt, inflation and the recently approved CAFTA.

Debt, reform and other neoliberal incentives mentioned in this brief excerpt show that Costa Rica is not exactly the most egalitarian and middle class place, but rather it has experienced much of the same economic trends as other capitalist countries in Central America, and the world. For example, the recent ratification of the CAFTA in Costa Rica was a highly controversial event as many Costa Ricans were opposed to this agreement and what it would entail for the country. As a result of the protests and public pressure, it was decided that a referendum would be held, marking the first time in history that a country would vote on a free trade agreement. For months preceding the referendum, the country saw itself divided amongst those who said "yes" and those who said "no" to CAFTA- about a 50-50 split. In the end, the deal was passed in October of 2007, with a vote of 51% in favour, and 49% against. Despite the final outcome, the mere experience of seeing the country so divided over this issue challenged the idea that the Costa Rican people hold a hegemonic set of values and shared a common vision for the future of their country.

This brief review of the historical development of Costa Rican nationality shows how certain circumstances and conditions shaped the particular self-image that continues to be reinforced today. The landscape of the Central Valley displays the impact of *neoliberalismo* on Costa Rican culture: it hosts over two thirds of the country's population (IDESPO, 2006) and has become the urban centre of the country. Despite the struggles presented by the neoliberal agenda, most of the issues troubling contemporary Costa Rican society are the effects of the even more encompassing phenomena of globalization. Moreover, Costa Ricans have been able to maintain the democratic system that they built, and to achieve some sense of social justice in a region where government oppression and sharp inequalities have tended to be the norm (Molina & Palmer, 2005). Seen that way, it is indeed an "exceptional" achievement that Costa Rica has been able to do this and must certainly be acknowledged for what it is.

The flipside is when it becomes acknowledged for what it is *not.*
That is, it becomes unrealistic and dangerous when a nation's discourse gets engrained into the imagination of the people and serves to justify or dismiss exclusive, discriminatory attitudes. Indeed, in the context of neoliberalism and its influence on national identity, migration issues also play an important role, as one of the major consequences of neoliberal policies (and capitalism) is the movement of persons across international borders (Chomsky, 2007). So it is often the case that immigrants, who are outsiders and hence excluded, by definition, from the nation and the community that inhabits it. In this next section, I will review the role of immigration throughout the history of Costa Rica, which naturally leads into a discussion of how Nicaraguan immigrants have become demonized and racialized throughout this process.

Immigration and the nation state: the case of Costa Rica

"Nadie nos contó la historia
un dia
detrás de la tarde
la encontramos
vestida de multitudes
en las manos de mi abuelo…"[10]

- Shirley Campbell

The excerpt above is part of a poem, "De Frente", written by Shirley Campbell ((1988), born in Costa Rica in 1965 from Afro-Costa Rican immigrant parents. Her poem speaks of the frustration of her generation of immigrant descendants, whose history remains hidden in the shadow of the country's past (Harpelle, 2001). In light of the exclusive view of Costa Rica, identity, there was

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[10] "Nobody told us the story/one day/behind the afternoon/we found her/dressed with crowds/in the hands of my grandfather."

no room for identities like Campbell's, or that of many others. It is also clear that the "real Costa Rica" (Biesanz & Biesanz, 1946) portrayed by many does not even come close to grasping the complexity and heterogeneity of this country.

The migration experience of Costa Rica clearly challenges the view that there is one way to define and represent this nation. When migrants move to another nation, they change the composition of this space in a way that affects the nation's image. In this sense, Roger Rouse (2002: 163) echoes a view similar to that of Anderson mentioned earlier on, stating:

> "Migration has always had the potential to challenge established spatial images. It highlights the social nature of space as something created and reproduced through collective human agency and, in doing so, reminds us that within the limits imposed by power, existing spatial arrangements are always susceptible to change."

When an immigrant arrives to the host country, the adjustment is not unilateral with the migrant person having to assimilate or adapt. As Vila (2003) points out, immigrants take their culture with them to the host country, forming a type of "third culture" which is a mix of both countries' cultures. In turn, this type of manipulation of culture poses a threat to the host country's ability to promote and maintain solidarity, hegemonic political ideologies, and desired collective images.

A look into the history of immigration into Costa Rica helps to reveal some of the diversity that has marked this country's make up over the years. The following overview will also help illustrate some of the spatial and regional dynamics of immigration in Costa Rica.

During the later decades of the nineteenth century up until the middle of the twentieth- the same period in which the Costa Rican national identity was

consolidated- the Costa Rican state promoted various endeavours focused around immigrant workers and colonial peasant farmers. Although these projects had little success overall, they were important in generating a discourse of immigration and the Costa Rican nation that also solidified the creation of national identity.

Following this, the second half of the twentieth century has seen migratory trends of immigrant workers to Costa Rica that show how the Costa Rican state has prioritized immigrants in different ways, depending on the state's own economic needs and desires.

A brief history of immigration to Costa Rica

During the second half of the nineteenth century the migratory processes in Latin America promoted the concept of an "ideal race" (Alvarenga, 2006: 3) through massive immigration from Europe as well as immigrants that would provide cheap manual labour in order to produce goods that could sell in the rapidly expanding european market (Hammett, 1992). During the colonial period, immigrant labourers brought to the region were mostly of African descent. This was especially the case for countries with a reduced indigenous population such as Costa Rica. This strategy had temporarily solved the need to have a vast supply of cheap labour until, at the end of the nineteenth century, slavery is abolished as a result of the participation of the black and mulatto populations' involvement with the processes of independence in Latin America, and a growing difficulty controlling slaves after the British decision to prohibit slavery. Nevertheless the Caribbean region did see a large migration of blacks that would be essential in filling the cheap labour gap in Central America, especially for projects such as the building of railways, the expansion of banana cultivations and the interoceanic canal (see Murillo, 1995: chapter III).

Despite the need for their work, these immigrants were not easily accepted into the host country. As Costa Rican sociologist Patricia Alvarenga (2006: 4) writes, this group was "only tolerated as a 'necessary evil' when it became indispensable for the development of certain economic activities." The ones who were really desirable and recruited strongly were the white population from Western Europe (Euraque, 1996). Selective policies towards this particular group throughout all of Latin America is partially explained by social Darwinist theories and eugenics, which saw the white race as being superior. Subordination of races had occurred prior to this with indigenous peoples, but within the transitional context of Latin America's independence and the formation of nation states this issue became of great concern, for the very concept of the nation state is based on delimited geographical borders and those who are in it, which often boils down to an issue of ethnicity.

By the end of the nineteenth century the Costa Rican population integrated into the "national project" (Alvarenga, 2006: 5), located in the heart of the Central Valley, are considered to be racially homogenous, and predominantly white. However, the population was growing at a slow rate, which led the government to support some colonial projects: in 1850 the Costa Rican government created a group to protect the colonies and to encourage more to come from Europe and, in 1862, under the colonization law, the colonization of "Chinese and African races" was prohibited, and any immigrants from those ethnicities would be limited and controlled (Murillo, 1995: 73).

Along the Caribbean side of Costa Rica, two large companies -the railway, and the transnational banana corporation United Fruit Company- demanded and brought in immigrants mainly from Jamaica and also China. This was the only pool of labour that was willing to move to the area this particular area, very remote at the time, and the government did not prohibit this instance of "non-desirable" immigration (Alvarenga, 2006: 6). Instead, the government continued to focus strongly on attracting european immigration

through various contracts and projects. Patricia Alvarenga (2007) notes that these projects promoted by the state had no mention of other Central American populations, and that these immigrants were barely tolerated in the country, reflecting their reluctance to look towards this group as a solution to the problem of a scarce population.

Following this, between 1880 and 1950 there were few major migratory projects promoted by the state, although the few that did exist were quite ambitious. For example, in 1881 Costa Rican president Tomás Guardia signed a contract with a Spanish man by the name of Esteban Perera who would bring immigrants in to populate the areas where the new railroad allowed access (and thus economic potential). Perera was to introduce "… a number of immigrants of white race that would not be lower than eight thousand and five hundred people of both sexes, apt for farm work" (Costa Rican national archives [ANCR], 1881: f: 5, translation mine). It is inferred from this contract that the main goal of the government at this point was to counter the large amount of black Jamaican immigration encouraged by Minor Keith's railroad and banana plantation endeavours (Murillo, 1995).

While most projects failed in bringing immigrants to the destinations of the government's choice, most immigrants that came tended to settle in the Central Valley, particularly in the urban centres. Furthermore, those European immigrants (i.e. "desirable" immigrants) in the Central Valley were not interested in farm work, but were drawn to craftsmanship and other city-like vocations (Barriati, 1987). Smaller in number, the province of Limón was largely made up of immigrants (again here, with most concentrated in the city) although these were of Jamaican, Chinese, Nicaraguan and Panamanian indigenous origin[11].

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[11] Rita Bariatti (1987) points out that one major problem with the immigration phenomenon in Limón is that many people were born there, from black immigrant families, yet considered "foreigners" (205).

Hence, the association between Costa Rica as a prosperous nation and "desirable immigrants" was well established. In 1916, the "blue book" of Costa Rica was written in spanish and english, in yet another effort to bring in a specific kind of immigrant. In the introduction it states:

> " …one of the peculiarities of this country, which gives it its exceptional condition, superior to many other countries, consists in it's ethnic element, in the race that constitutes the totality of it's population, a select race…In every part of the country a type of pure iberian-celtic race can be seen, a thoughtful and strong race, that has been the principal creator of the world's current civilization" (1916: 2).

Despite all efforts, however, it was immigration from the Caribbean region and the rest of the Central American isthmus that predominated in Costa Rica during the twentieth century. Census data from 1864 to 1984 shows the largest groups of immigrants to be Nicaraguans, followed by Jamaicans, Panamanians and then Europeans. Over the years, the Jamaican population went from being the most important immigrant population in 1927, and then saw an abrupt decrease, later predominated by Nicaraguan and Panamanian immigrants (Alvarenga, 2006). In any case, these migratory tendencies stood in contrast to the projects and policies that were headed by the Costa Rican state- Jamaican labour was deemed a "necessary evil" needed on the Caribbean coast, and the Nicaraguan and Panamanian immigrants were drawn to the country for social, economic and family matters (see Morales, 1997).

In light of this trend, the Costa Rican government not only tried to create conditions favourable to attracting "desirable" immigrants, but it also began to use migratory legislation as a means of rejecting "non-desirable" immigrants. For example, in 1897 the government prohibited the entrance of new immigrants that were Chinese, and in 1914 Arabs, Armenians, Turks and gypsies were added to that list (Alvarenga, 2006: 13). Beyond ethnic

discrimination, the Costa Rican national archives show a 1905 immigrant legislation which restricted the entrance based on physical traits, more specifically of "indigents and people with permanent physical disability" unless they were able to completely self sustain themselves, as well as prohibiting the entrance of "manifest anarchists" (ANCR, 1905:f.9).

As a result, the strict selection processes imposed by the government in regards to immigrants became a limiting factor for the population and economic growth of Costa Rica. By 1920, worsened by the migration of some migrants from the Central Valley to the Atlantic coast, there was a huge lack of labour to work in the coffee plantations. In light of this contradictory position the state found itself in, policies were readjusted in order to re-allow entry of "non-desirable" groups of immigrants.

During the 1930s there were two major events that influenced migratory patterns: the country fell into an economic crisis, and Registry for Immigrant Identification was created in 1930 (Alvarenga, 2006). Instead of loosening control over selective immigration, the introduction of the new registry imposed a new level of bureaucratic and police enforcement that did exactly the opposite. Under this new system, all foreign persons had to carry an immigrant card and undocumented migrants were to be expelled from the country immediately (Registry for Immigrant Identification, 1931).

These strict measures were not imposed onto all immigrants, however. Diplomats, institutional representatives, international corporations or anyone of a "distinguished" position did not have to meet these requirements, and police and other judicial authorities held the power to play with these rules based on their "judgment of the immigrant's perceived honorability" (Ibid). In this way, then, the law establishes a crucial distinction between immigrants who are welcome into Costa Rica, and those who are not. This leads Alvarenga (2006: 15) to ask "where do you draw the limits between one group and another?".

Indeed, the line between these two groups being somewhat vague and left to the discretion of authorities allowed for ethnicity to serve as an easy criteria of differentiation.

Within the context of the failure of such projects, the state basically abandoned the colonizing projects and focused on promotion auto-immigration. A demonstration of this is that in 1936, President Ricardo Jiménez decided to bring in polish colonization, but the Costa Rican people appeared to be vehemently opposed to this decision. Jiménez responded by stating "…I see that nationalist exaggerations are on the rise, in my eyes, one of the most repulsive features of this historical moment" (Jiménez in Soto, 1999: 94). Internal colonization projects were put forward, offering transport, a home and land to immigrant families that had a Costa Rican citizen at its head (Soto, 1999). This also meant improving conditions in the country in terms of healthcare and infrastructure, which, as Sandoval (2006: 151) sees it, worked under the premise "that the population to reproduce more quickly would be the white one."

These economical and labour hardships also resulted in legislation aimed at curtailing immigrant workers. This was indeed the situation with the banana company, which saw its white and black workers pitted against eachother. Jeffrey Casey comments on this, noting that white workers pushed legislation to impede further black immigrants from entering Costa Rica, as well as massively deporting those that were there, which included those who were born in the country from black immigrant parents (for these individuals to obtain nationality they had to do a "complicated paperwork that costed five colones" (Casey, 1979: 129)[12]. This competition also fuelled some reactive violent encounters spurred by white workers. Further on, when the banana company expanded to the Pacific coast, black people were not allowed to go work there,

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[12] Five colones was close to a week's salary, but workers in banana plantations were paid in tokens redeemable at United Fruit Company's general stores, instead of cash.

according to the 1934 decree that held: "It is prohibited that people of colour occupy the Pacific zone in aforementioned jobs [banana cultivation and exploitation]" (as cited in Meléndez, 1982: 92).

Despite the underlying economic factors, it is difficult to think that such discriminatory practices were caused by labour competition. It must be analysed within the context of an official discourse adapted by the state which systematically excluded "inferior" groups of people and defended its own interest through the classical racist discourse of "the other"(Alvarenga, 1997; Alvarenga, 2006). In this particular respect, Costa Rica was no exception.

Within the context of this violent and racist discourse against the black population in Costa Rica, Nicaraguans gained an important place in workforce scene, particularly within the expansion of the banana plantations. Francisco Ibarra (1948:9) discusses the Nicaraguan in Costa Rica during the 1940s, commenting on the "hard and traitorous plight of the Nicaraguan worker first on the Atlantic and then on the Pacific coast". Phillipe Bourgois (1994), who studied the struggles and conditions of the banana plantations throughout Central America, notes that amongst those banana workers labeled as "latinos", it was Nicaraguans who underwent intensive labour tasks such as clearing trees along the mountains and preparing for cultivation. Furthermore, far from being an occurrence from the past when there were no established labour rights, this trend of subcontracting Nicaraguans to do the hardest and most dangerous tasks has remained commonplace in the case of banana plantations as well as in the areas of coffee, sugar cane and citrus plantations (Samandú & Perera, 1996).

It is difficult to determine when exactly the Costa Ricans from the Central Valley and on the Caribbean side expressed xenophobic attitudes towards Nicaraguan immigrants, yet the stereotypes around this group that were strong in the 1990s were already generalized by the 1940s (Alvarenga, 2006).

According to Ronald Soto's (1998) research, in the 1920s there was a diffuse image of the Nicaraguan man as violent. These prejudices were also shared by other minority workers along the Atlantic coast, such as the Bribri indigenous and blacks. Ibarra (1948:11) remarks on the "…sad belief of the Costa Rican population that all Nicaraguans are delinquent and pernicious". Carlos Sandoval (1999: 119) notes that in the progressive literature of the 1940s "…Nicaraguans are frequently the 'others' who are associated with national anti-values such as violence and crime."

Another occurrence of this decade was that the anti-communist sentiment that prevailed in Costa Rica post-1948 went hand in hand with the growth of xenophobic attitudes, causing a growth in the hegemonic anti-Nicaraguan sentiment (Alvarenga, 2006). According to James Wiley (1995: 426) this border was not only a political border, but a "political frontier [that] was transformed into an ideological frontier as well".

In the 1950s the state makes its last attempt at colonizing the land with European immigrants, and the Italian government offers 3000 immigrants from one of its ex-colonies in Libya (Alvarenga, 2006). In this way, the projects that were systematically initiated throughout the first half of the twentieth century were aimed at homogenizing the population and separating Costa Rican culture from the rest of Central America and closer to that of Europe. However, the growth of the Costa Rican population was such that the state was able to fill vacant land and, by 1970 there was no more areas with a demand for farming. Between 1950 and 1973 the number of immigrants tended to decrease, though the absolute number of immigrants born in Nicaragua doubled between 1930 and 1950, representing 2.4 % of the total population of Costa Rica (see table 1 in appendices) (Castro, 2007). From this point on, Alvarenga (2006: 20) notes that the "dream of populating the Costa Rican countryside with white farmers imported from Europe dies."

In a sense, the opposite of this dream occurred. As people continued to concentrate in the cities, there was also a scarcity of labour to work in the coffee fields, and farmers faced the threat of losing a good part of their harvest. In the 1980s and 1990s there is a large influx of foreign immigrants who were fleeing political violence and poverty in their home countries, Nicaraguans being the largest group among these. And it is only thanks to this group that coffee owner's were able to solve their labour problem, especially during harvest time (Alvarenga, 2000).

Authors Hamilton and Stoltz-Chinchilla (1991: 75) explain that Nicaraguan migrations presently range from "cyclical, temporary or permanent". Thousands come during harvest seasons to work in the fields, harvesting coffee, bananas, melons, and sugar cane, then return to Nicaragua in off-season. More permanent migrants work for construction businesses, and in security job positions, and many women work in the domestic industry, serving as maids, nannies, and cooks (Sandoval, 2003).

From Nicaraguan to "Nica": the consolidation of xenophobic attitudes

Although this historical overview so far provides a good idea of the role of the Nicaraguan immigrant and how this had given way to certain discriminatory hostilities, the development of xenophobic attitudes amongst Costa Ricans goes beyond the fact that they are the largest immigrant group in the country. As I mentioned earlier, when discussing xenophobia it is useful to keep in mind that the perceptions towards the "outsider" are intricately related to the perceptions of one's self, society and nation. Thus I will close with a discussion of two important factors that have contributed to the stigmatization and consolidation of the Nicaraguan immigrants as the "other" in Costa Rican society: the rise of anti-communist sentiments towards the Sandinista government and the sudden decline in public investment, particularly in healthcare, housing and education (Sandoval, 2004).

The first factor begins with the rise of the Sandinista regime in Nicaragua, which replaced the Somoza dictatorship and had significant support from Costa Rica. According to historian Imelda Umaña (1989), the then president of Costa Rica Rodrigo Carazo (1978-1982) publicly supported the Sandinista government and their insurrection, and surveys showed that close to 55% of the population also supported them, too. Following this, however, the ensuing economic trouble within Costa Rica and the imposing tension from the invading American contras eventually transformed the Sandinista government into a "communist threat" (Sandoval, 2006).

As hostilities between Costa Rica and Nicaragua grew during this time, there was simultaneously a rise of right-wing or so-called "patriotic" groups in Costa Rica, the majority of which were descendants of politicians or the national elite, such as *Alerta* (alert), *Comité civico pro-defensa de la dignidad nacional* (civic committee in defense of national dignity), amongst others, all of which shared a strong anti-communist mentality and held regular publications in the local Costa Rican newspapers (Echeverría Brealey, 2006; Umaña, 1989). In this way, communism and democracy were portrayed as polar opposites, and thus communism threatened Costa Rica's peaceful, "rural" democracy. For example, the vice-minister of security in 1984, Enrique Chacón, stated in *La Nación* newspaper, "I do not believe that every person in Costa Rica should be neutral…that is cowardness. You are either a democrat, or a communist." (as cited in Echeverría, 2006: 56).

Over the years, however, with the Sandinistas' loss in the 1990 elections and the changes in Eastern Europe, this stark opposition of concepts weakened, and the Cold War tensions became replaced with political racialization (Gabriel, 1994; Sandoval, 2006). And so "Nicas" became a racialized and politicized term in Costa Rica, even though it is used as a form of collective auto-identification amongst Nicaraguans themselves (Sandoval, 2006).

Various sources of literature (e.g. Umaña, 1989; Sandoval, 1985) discuss how Costa Rica, newspapers and many Costa Ricans in the everyday lives started to use "Nica" in a stigmatizing way, defined through a series of different ethnic traits such as dark skin, violence, poverty, and a sub-standard use of spanish entonation and accent (all of which, of course serves as a lovely contrast to how the Costa Rican would racially define herself). As Mijaíl Bajtín (1981: 401) also explains, when we try to understand a word, it does not matter so much what the direct meaning of the word is, but rather that meaning given by the signifier and the way in which it is expressed by its speaker, also dependant on the position of the speaker (i.e. social class, profession, etc.) and the concrete situation in which the word is spoken. That is, *who* speaks and under *what* conditions is what truly determines the meaning of a word.

Class and ethnicity distinguish between who is a "Nica" and who is a "Nicaraguan", and there is clearly a difference between, say, Nicaraguan business owners and intellectuals, versus lower class workers, which form the majority of Nicaraguan immigrants in Costa Rica, or "Nicas". As Sandoval (2006: 262) puts it: "An investor or an intellectual is represented as an individual, while "Nicas" appear as an anonymous collective, as a 'wave', they do not have a name or a personality. While the former are welcome, the latter are required to perform low paid jobs."

The second factor which contributed to the stigmatization of Nicaraguan immigrants in Costa Rica is related to the material deterioration of Costa Rica's public services, a decrease in hegemonic patriotic values, as well as a rise in crime rates -all of which ultimately challenge Costa Rica's exceptionalism. Nicaraguan immigrants have become a main source of blame for such changes, although it can (and will) be argued here that they are actually used as a scapegoat, rather than being the cause for these dislocations.

Not surprisingly, it is frequently the case with immigrant host countries that internal problems are blamed on immigrants. As Stuart Hall (1981: 20) discussed in the context black immigrants in England, one way of framing this issue is through playing what he refers to as "the number game". Playing this game serves to quantify immigration in a positivistic and objective manner, and therefore justify harsher measures of controlling such numbers (Sandoval, 2006). Nevertheless, numbers will always be relative, with Nicaraguans making up approximately 8% of the Costa Rican population (Morales & Castro, 2006: 26), whereas Elias (1996: 304) notes that Jewish immigrants only consisted of approximately 1% of the German population prior to the holocaust.

Another reason to blame Nicaraguan immigrants for internal problems is by arguing that they are responsible for the majority of crimes in the country as well as the country's rising crime rates, arguments which are often supported by Nicaraguans' allegedly violent character (and a similar argument is now held towards Columbian immigrants in Costa Rica, the second largest immigrant group). Certainly the newspapers have emphasized such crimes, and it is one of the most common anti-Nicaraguan sentiments that I have encountered at the everyday level. There are a few interesting points that challenge this view: first, during the last decade there have been more suicides than homicides in Costa Rica (Judicial Investigation Organism [OIJ], 2001, as cited in Sandoval, 2006), which in itself begs the question of a deeper analysis of the social factors that may be causing crime. Secondly, as it also came up as an issue in my interviews, reports from the national institute of criminology [INC] shows that the present number of Nicaraguans in Costa Rican jails is less than 5%, which does not correspond to the number of Nicaraguans in the country (INC, 2007).

In line with the research of Stuart Hall and colleagues (1978: 146)' in "Policing the crisis: mugging, the state and law and order" This fear of crime occurs alongside an erosion of moral values and the middle class way of life (Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke and Roberts, 1978). In Costa Rica, corruption

rates have increased by…In addition, divorce rates in Costa Rica went from 9.9% in 1980 to 21.2% in 1997 (cited in Molina, 1999). Thus, the decay of values in the household was symbolic of the decay occurring to the nation as a whole.

Nicaraguan immigrants, who since the 1990s have mostly migrated to Costa Rica looking for cheap labour (Gatica López, 2007), pose a serious threat to a declining public investment. Furthermore, as the middle class has decreased over the years in Costa Rica, the perception of scarce resources, the struggle for jobs and the cost of social services such as housing, healthcare and education is such that many do not want to share it with the large population of mostly poor Nicaraguan immigrants (Sandoval, 2006).

A closer look at this issue, however, shows that in fact Nicaraguan immigrants have played a primary role in the transition of Costa Rica's economy (from a large agricultural sector to the public and service sectors), where they have replaced the voids in construction, coffee picking and other jobs in the primary sector (Samandú & Pereira, 1996; Morales & Castro, 1999). Moreover, there is no evidence of increasing unemployment, and data shows that unemployment rates have remained stable over the last decade (Sandoval, 2006).

Another interesting factor is that, despite the reality that the presence of Nicaraguan immigrants and their cheaper labour does indeed lower the wages for some jobs, some areas of the Costa Rican economy depend on these low costs in order to be competitive in the global market. In the 1980s during Costa Rica's period of economic crisis, structural adjustment plans (SAPS) were enforced by the World Bank promoting a number of non-traditional exports such as citrus, melons, ferns and ornamental flowers (Paus, 2005). In order to be successful and competitive with other countries, wages in these areas had to be reduced, and in this sense, then, the arrival of Nicaraguan immigrants and

their insertion in these labour markets allowed Costa Rica to hold a regional advantage, and regardless of immigrants the costs and wages in these areas would have had to be cut. As Sandoval (2006:290) notes, the focus on Nicaraguan immigrants in this regard is on "costs", and there is no talk of the capitalist expansion and accumulation on behalf of Costa Ricans that results from this. As some participants in my research said "If it weren't for [us], who would pick the coffee in this country, who would clean the houses and watch the children?" and, "Without [us] construction workers, who would have made this town a luxury tourist resort?".

A final factor commonly brought up when discussing the impact of Nicaraguans in Costa Rica is the cost of their presence in terms of education, housing and healthcare. Again here, in the face of scarce and declining resources, Nicaraguans are perceived as a threat, and it is common to hear that they are draining the social service system in the country.

Costa Rica has been proud of its education system, boasting a high literacy rate of over 95% and almost all children attend primary school (Rosero-Brixby, 1986). Research on Nicaraguan children in the Costa Rican primary education system, however, showed a national problem with students failing first grade (Purcell-Gates, 2006), and more than 30% of students do not finish highschool (INEC, 2001). While Nicaraguan students make up approximately 3% of the primary school population, thus making it doubtful that they pose a heavy drain on the educational system, they are still a target for stigmatization and exclusion. For example, Vicky Purcell-Gates' (2006) research showed how there existed a false perception that Nicaraguan children were largely to blame for the rates of failing first grade, and that Nicaraguan kids were discriminated against in the classroom by both students and teachers (ibid; Fleming, 2007). Sandoval (2006) also discusses how each year, the Costa Rican government offers a small scholarship to poor children (about $28 US dollars), and in 1999, when some officials tried to prohibit Nicaraguan children from being eligible for

this scholarship, the issue ended up in court, spurring a debate over the social costs of Nicaraguan immigrants, although finally (to the dismay of many), the court decided that such a prohibition was discriminatory, and was therefore removed.

The housing sector is also an area of dispute, as there is clearly a deficit in basic housing, which has been increasing every year (Ministry of health, cited in Sandoval, 2007). For example, a study by Edgar Perlaza (1984) noted that approximately 36 000 of all households in Costa Rica qualified as "slum housing" (cited in Carvajal, 1994: 46), and this was before the larger instances of Nicaraguan immigration that took place in the 1990s, showing that this deficit is not a consequence of Nicaraguan immigration. Instead, it seems that there is reluctance on behalf of the Costa Rican population to admit that poverty is a real phenomenon in their country, even though the strong middle class is one of its strongest national symbols (Sandoval, 2006).

As far as healthcare goes, Nicaraguans are considered a huge cost, mostly because many of them do not pay their social insurance fees, perhaps not out of choice, but because their low-wage jobs do not offer coverage, or because they do not have proper documentation. It is important to keep in mind, however, that the changes put forward by the SAPs required less investment in public services, evident by the decline in public healthcare investment by 50% between 1980 and 1992 (Bonilla-Carrión, 1997).

To conclude on the discussion of the decline in public resources in Costa Rica, and the resulting stigmatization of Nicaraguan immigrants, the literature reviewed here shows that, while there are many official and discursive arguments for blaming Nicaraguans for Costa Rica's societal demise, the process is more complex than this, as it precedes massive Nicaraguan immigration, and the statistics are not proportional to the number of Nicaraguans currently in the country. Instead, these changes have more to do

with the implementation of neoliberal policies that have been in place since the 1980s, which have benefited a small few, and negatively impacted a large amount of the Costa Rican population, simultaneously eroding the once prevalent middle class.

Critical perspectives

Overall, this section has exposed and reviewed a variety of different discourses and literature that are relevant to the case of xenophobia towards Nicaraguans in Costa Rica. Although it is clear that there is a mainstream hegemonic discourse which is biased to serve the historical and present interests of those who are the protagonists of this version, it is also evident that there are pockets of resistance that contest this discourse and that there is no one voice or version.

Research on Nicaraguans in Costa Rica published in the 1970s and 1980s focused largely around the Nicaraguans as a political refugee population, slowly giving way in the mid 1990s to a still-growing academic literature on Nicaraguans as migrant workers (Alvarenga, 1997; Araya 1997; Samandú, 1996). Research concerned with Costa Ricans' popular attitudes towards Nicaraguan immigrants and the experience of discrimination of the Nicaraguan immigrant community as its central focus are more recent still, and this literature is sparse and relatively narrow in focus, mostly analyzing popular sources of discourse (Bishop, 2001). In terms of the present research in Costa Rica, Sandoval (2004: ¶7) explains, "The current debates are not aiming so much to 'discover' the 'Costa Rican' as to deconstruct the modes by which 'Costa Rican exceptionalism', so laden with narcissism, has been built over time." Nevertheless, uncertainty about the Costa Rican identity has grown out of this important shift in academic research on nationalism, particularly triggered by Steven Palmer's historic research, and also more recently, spurred by university research in the 1970s (Sandoval, 2004c; 2007). The trend towards

this orientation within the academic realm can be attributed to the general influence feminist and post-modern literature, as well as more recent events like 9/11 and the debate it has opened on patriotism, the nation and immigration (Adams, Fryberg, García & Delgado, 2006). Drawing on the literature on Costa Rica in particular, rather than considering the construction of national identities in Costa Rica and their rationalization as a matter of cause and effect, it seems like these two have both fed into each other in a self-perpetuating way.

Critiques of the mainstream representation of the Costa Rican nation, however, are not only a thing of the present. For example, during the decades of the 1940s, the portrayal of the Costa Rican nation was crystallized. Around this same time, some realist novels began to question this image. Most of these works were based in rural areas where injustices and social struggles were the norm (Sandoval, 2006). For example, Adolfo Herrera (1939) published his novel *Juan Varela,* in which the main character, Juan, tries to earn his own piece of land, but eventually ends up in jail. Yolanda Oreamuno (1961: 71), who is known for her critique of patriotic values, noted that Juan Varela defies the idealized past because he is "the first tear in this religious myth of a well distributed land, with it's white and blue house with pigs and hens." Following this, the classic novel *Mamita Yunai* by Carlos Fallas (1941) depicts everyday life in the banana plantations and discusses the social injustices in rural areas, particularly during the construction of the railway on the Atlantic coast. Although these texts are read extensively throughout Costa Rican elementary school, discussions on issues of race and class do not form part of the curriculum.

The above examples illustrate that there is not only one, unquestioned representation of nationality. However, historical interpretations and popular literature tend to be taken into consideration as separate domains, with different validity claims and this, in turn, discredits the fact that the rural democracy has been challenged at different points in time.

A more manifest and academic example of such historical criticism, hence, can be found in a particular case study carried out by Lowell Gudmunson (1978), revealing the attributes of "Villa de Baraba" -a small community in the Central Valley – which did not coincide with those of a rural democracy: in 1838, 74% of the peasant farmers who lived there did not own their own farms but rather lived in communal form, and 43% of the peasants did not work their own land and were on a salary. No empirical evidence was found to make the rural democracy claim, and Gudmunson concluded that even before the coffee boom, there were significant social differences and instances of capital accumulation.

As I will now show in the next chapter, the experiences and information gathered in this project reflect the prevalence of these discourses, and also the different ways in which participants have interpreted and responded to the issues discussed in the literature. Indeed, a deeper understanding of the issue emerges from the interplay between the literature and the real, embodied, and lived experiences of Nicaraguan immigrants in Costa Rica.

CHAPTER IV

Sharing the findings, thus far

Chapter three mainly focused on the history and social development of Costa Rica and Nicaragua in order to shed light on the origins of the perceptins and attitudes presently held by Costa Ricans towards Nicaraguan immigrants, thus providing a background which will compliment the view of this phenomenon as told by Nicaraguan immigrant participants of this study, as well as my own analysis, made partially in collaboration with the participants. After a brief discussion about how the analyzed data will be represented, this section will go over the demographics of the participants of this study and discuss how the participants are thus situated within the general social layout of Nicaraguan migration to Costa Rica. The next component of this section will analyze the interviews held with the Nicaraguan participants of this study, both the ones that were held in private as well as those that were filmed. This analysis will include aspects of the participation and collaboration between the participants and myself in order to also analyze the PAR process. Following this I will discuss in some depth the process of filming as a qualitative research method for inquiry, as well as its potential for PAR and its uses as a tool for advocacy and raising awareness amongst Costa Ricans, on this particular topic of xenophobia towards Nicaraguan immigrants in Costa Rica.

(re)presentation of findings

Exploring the concept of xenophobia as it has manifested itself towards Nicaraguan immigrants in Costa Rica through this PAR project, while simultaneously exploring the PAR process as it applies to this case, as well as experimenting with audiovisual (film) as part of the methodology itself results in an array of findings, often intermingled, which the participants and myself have had to make sense of in a variety of ways. One challenge lies in determining how these different ways of "sense making" are represented.

Within written reports of traditional qualitative and certainly within quantitative research studies, findings tend to be presented as discrete themes or categories of some sort. The implication of this, as Herr & Anderson (2005: 86) point out, is that the intended audience demands "a concise explanation, presented as propositional knowledge of the findings." Since most traditional research is carried about in this way, it is not necessary to explain in great length what this method looks like. Nevertheless, this idea that knowledge converges on findings has been repeatedly challenged, and it is this counter perspective that is more relevant to discuss here. For example, Lindblom (1995: 172) argues that social science research "often moves toward divergence rather than convergence, toward identifying a bevy of possible scenarios rather than one or a few propositions that social scientists might judge to have won a degree of acceptability." This argument encourages the researcher to move beyond traditional paradigms of research, and to simultaneously search to expand the realm of possibilities that the research can reveal. In this sense, the results, and how they are subsequently represented, make a good starting point.

Moreover, moving beyond traditional ways of finding and showing is significant for action research, which offers a possible alternative to this method of presentation, since much of its content is intricately related to its ongoing process of action and reflection (Herr & Anderson, 2005). It is easier to imagine alternative methods, as discrete categorical representations would fail to reflect what is precisely at the core of action research. In turn, this has important implications for how action research theses and dissertations are elaborated.

In the case of this study, it was important for me to report on my findings in a way that captured several dimensions of this investigation: for one, I wanted to be able to demonstrate that I gained a deepened understanding of the problem at hand, and I wanted to portray this depth in a way that was satisfying to the required academic standards of a master's thesis, while also

preserving a sense of the thick description of the setting in which this study is situated. Secondly, I wanted to reflect the PAR process in a way that would illustrate the participants' input into the project as a whole, as well as their involvement with thematic development and analysis as the project moved forward. In addition to this and related to the ongoing nature of action research, it was important to show that the project was a work in progress, rather than a completed task with a clear beginning and a clear end, hence I wanted to show what the findings have been *thus* far, and not necessarily in their entirety. Finally, I wanted to use film as one way to explore and complement the discussion around what was produced from this research. Overall, this alternative view is what I intend to work with as I present the findings that ensue.

Research settings and demographics

Nicaraguan immigrants in Costa Rica tend to be dispersed throughout the country in ways that reflect familiar patterns of past immigration, which in turn is usually explained by cheap employment availability and accessibility to and from Nicaragua. Most literature on Nicaraguan migration to Costa Rica recognizes that migration chains exist and play a key role in the settling process as well as for ensuring employment (Rosero-Brixby, 2002). That said, the Costa Rican government possesses no official records or data on the regional origins of Nicaraguan migrants as well as where in Costa Rica Nicaraguans establish themselves (Bonkiewicz, 2006). Notwithstanding, recent studies shed light on this regional migration dynamic, and in this way this qualitative project also contributes to this growing body of knowledge, even though it contains a small sample and a qualitative focus.

What little is known about the regional distribution of Nicaraguan immigrants in Costa Rica shows that there are key areas in Nicaragua and Costa Rica where Nicaraguans leave from, and migrate to. For example, research collected by the *Consejería en proyectos para refugiados*

latinoamericanos (Advisory council on projects for Latin American refugees [CPRL]) in 1996 cites various originating towns in Nicaragua and provides explanations for migrations from these places. According to this research, the impetus for emigration from the western Nicaraguan cities of Managua, Granada and Rivas occurs because the region is marked by having many socio-economic difficulties. The lack of jobs and the impoverished material conditions thus motivate this migration. Residents of the San Carlos area and other border towns such as those along the San Juan river likewise experience harsh economic and social conditions, and Costa Rica is a close and accessible option. Another area noted by the researchers is far from Costa Rica, in the northeastern coastal area of Nicaragua, Puerto Cabezas, and Nicaraguans have historically made the journey to Costa Rica due to the area's diminishing agricultural crops such as cotton (CPRL, 1996: 6).

In terms of areas of Nicaraguan settlement in Costa Rica, the research of Abelardo Morales and Carlos Castro (2006) provides thorough and recent data on the subject. According to them, the urban centres of the country such as San José and Alajuela, as well as the central northern border towns such as Los Chiles are the main areas of Nicaraguan settlement. The authors also commonly refer to the most recent (2000) population census (INEC, 2000), which recorded the number of immigrants living in Costa Rica according to provinces, showing that the percentages in San José, Limón and Alajuela possess the highest percentage of Nicaraguan immigrants.

These numbers are relevant to situate the participants of this study, who were interviewed in the provinces of San José, Puntarenas and Limón, and therefore cover at least two of the areas where there is a relatively high concentration of Nicaraguan immigrants. Puntarenas, although it has one of the lowest percentages of Nicaraguan immigrants as a whole, does hold concentrated pockets of Nicaraguan immigrants in tourist zones such as Jacó (in the Puntarenas province), where some of my research was performed.

Not surprisingly, as I later discovered through my interviews with participants, reasons for migrating were often more complex than what can be portrayed from this limited statistical data. The majority of the participants had moved around Costa Rica and lived in two or more locations throughout the country before settling in one of the three locations in which this project took place, often moving around due to seasonal labour opportunities, family ties, and other factors.

The specific research setting of this project focused on the towns of San José, Puerto Viejo and Jacó, which were significant not only for containing a large Nicaraguan immigrant population, but also for the familiarity and social connections that I held with these places that eased the recruitment process and the subsequent entrance and acceptance amongst the participant community. All of them migrated to Costa Rica between 1983 and 2004, with the average year of migration being 1990.

Eighteen Nicaraguans participated in this project (9 women; 9 men) were interviewed; some as a group (6 individuals) and the rest as individuals. In Jacó, 5 women and one man participated; in San José 3 women and 3 men participated, and in Puerto Viejo one woman and 5 men participated. To maintain confidentiality of participants, demographic information is reported in ranges and general terms. The ages of participants ranged from 22 to 50 with an average age of 35. 14 of the participants held "resident" status in Costa Rica, while the other 4 held an irregular status (of these, 2 individuals did not try to obtain documents due to fear of deportation and lack of knowledge of the immigration system; 1 individual had given up on trying after several attempts to obtain residence by paying high legal and other government fees, and one individual was in the process of obtaining formal residence after 6 years of residing in the country). Only one of the participants had lived in another country (Spain) aside from Nicaragua and Costa Rica.

Thirteen of the participants had 34 children in total, ranging from 1 child to 7 with the average number of children per participant being 2. As the participants recounted, a large part of the struggle that their migration entailed involved leaving some or all of their children behind in Nicaragua, sending remittances home to Nicaragua to support their children and then eventually, sometimes over several trips, managing to bring their children to Costa Rica with them. Not surprisingly then, living arrangements amongst the participants were variable, and in cases such as these, were fluid and unstable. At the time of this research, 11 participants lived with an extended family that included either one or more siblings and/or parent, 4 lived alone and 3 lived with their spouse, 2 cases of which there were also children.

The levels of education of participants also varied from no formal education in the case of 2 participants, to one participant who was in the course of completing her second Master's degree in literature. Half of the participants had attended school up until 6th grade, and 6 participants (one third of the total sample) had a university degree or a technical certificate. This variation caused some differences in the level of participation of the individuals, since some could read and decided to compliment the interviews with written reflections, poems or other documentation, while other individuals could not read or write. In either case, individuals were never asked to produce such material, and the only document that needed to be read was the consent form, which I read out loud and explained to all participants regardless of their literary abilities. Types and positions of employment were even more variable. Two women participants did not have a paid job and instead stayed home watching their children; 2 participants (1 female; 1 male) were currently unemployed and looking for a job in the service sector as a domestic worker and gardener. Two male participants held garden maintenance jobs and two males worked in the construction sectors. Four females worked in the domestic service sector, either for hotels, institutions or private homes, although one of these females

used to be a schoolteacher in Nicaragua. Two participants (1 female; 1 male) were journalists; one male worked in the banana plantations training farm workers; one female was a university student; one male worked in the social service sector with Nicaraguan immigrants, and one male was an artist and art instructor.

Overall, the demographic information of these participants shows a wide range of ages, living arrangements, education and employment levels, and immigration status. I did not make a conscious effort to recruit any one type of participant profile (other than being over the age of 19, Nicaraguan immigrant, and being interested in the topic of xenophobia towards Nicaraguans), so the fact that such a wide range of demographics was obtained served to illustrate how common the experience of xenophobia was for these participants alike. Of the 18 participants, 11 chose to participate in the filmed aspect of this project, which required more commitment in terms of time and availability, as well as a desire to talk more in length about their experiences.

Interviews

The interviews varied between 30 minutes to one hour and thirty minutes long, and there were between 1 to 7 interviews per participant. The experience of these interviews varied with each participant as much as the participants varied themselves. In general -and one of the most interesting aspects of this aspect of the research- as the interview process deepened I noticed two trends in the interview dynamic: the trust and mutual interest between those in the interview grew stronger, which allowed for more private and emotional sharing on behalf of the research participant, and secondly, the participants tended to deepen in their reflection and recall instances that were relevant to the topic that did not previously surface in the interviews. Participants told me how they would go to bed thinking about the topic, how they would talk about it with other Nicaraguans at their work place or at home, and several participants (5 that I

know of) were inspired to paint, write a poem or make notes of their reflections on the topic. I remember one participant, Mariana, approaching me one morning, telling me that she had gone to bed the previous night thinking over and over about the topic, and was excited to tell me that she had remembered a specific incident in her childhood, which was one of the first times that she had felt discriminated against for being Nicaraguan: a male family friend was asked to give her a ride to school, and instead drove her to a hidden area and tried to touch her and kiss her. When she defended herself and demanded he took her home, "or else", the man replied that she could not do anything, because she was just an illegal "Nica", and if she complained to the authorities they would deport her. Although the recollection of the event was somewhat sad for her, she said:

> *It was hard for me, you know? To remember that time, after I had forgotten about it for so many years. The hate I felt for that man came back, and it's painful. But now I'm thinking about being Nicaraguan and how we struggle being here [in Costa Rica] and experiences like this prove how mean people can be, and how worthless Nicaraguans seem to them, and I want to tell people about all of this.*

Something similar to this recall experience of Mariana's happened with other participants as well, and it speaks to the advantages of the emphasis on reflection as well as the time component of action research.

Interviews were held in three towns: one on each coast (Jacó on the Central Pacific, and Puerto Viejo on the Caribbean) and one in the capital of the country, San José. I had chosen these locations out of previous work experience as well as social connections that would hopefully help me to find participants. Statistical data on Nicaraguan immigrants show that the provinces of San José and Limón (where Puerto Viejo is located) are amongst the 3 provinces with the most Nicaraguans (Castro, 2007), and Jacó has recently

become one of the most touristic zones in the country (Costa Rican Tourism Institute [ICT], 2007), thus attracting Nicaraguan immigrants because of the construction, domestic service and other jobs that are in demand there. Throughout the interviews, attention was organically drawn towards regional subtleties that impacted participant's overall migration experience as well as their perceptions and experiences of xenophobia. I inquired into what brought participants to where they presently lived, and we discussed the any moving around that had taken place prior to the time of the interview. More than just factual information on jobs, opportunities or otherwise, I was interested in learning about how participants' felt accepted or otherwise treated in the different areas where they lived.

Interviews were analyzed according to several different methods, including a "contact sheet" developed for each participant, taken from Miles and Huberman (1994); a thematic code scheme based on Bogeden and Biklan (1992); and participant perspectives influenced by Freire (1970)'s concept of *generative themes*. The overarching analytic perspective, however, is a combination of themes, along with personal and collaborative reflections on the research process itself.

Filming the interviews

Because of the link in action research between generating knowledge and social change, many researchers have turned to alternative mediums (Herr & Anderson, 2005). As such, action research dissertations increasingly include a video component (Asten, 1993; Brown, 1993).The initial idea behind filming interviews was to provide a visual component to this investigation, and to act as a medium and space within which to implement a PAR project. Eleven out of the total 18 Nicaraguan participants were involved with the filming, thus forming the sample included for the PAR aspect of this study. Meetings with these participants were held on a regular basis between May and September of 2008,

and meetings subsequent to the filming were held either in person, by telephone, email, or a combination of these.

Prior to filming, participants were interviewed in the same way as the remaining participants. At the same time, they were invited to be involved with the filming. Aspects of the film production with the participants included content (what will participants discuss?), location (where would interviews be filmed?), organization (how will the interviews be coordinated amongst participants?) and analysis (what meaning can be attributed to the material, and what themes emerge?). To a lesser extent, due to issues of location, timing, and technical difficulty, aspects related to the final presentation and editing were largely handled myself along with a professional hired for the task of technical assistance.

After the initial 2 interviews with participants, I coded these interviews and made a list of codes and topics that had emerged so far. I also gave each participant a transcribed copy of our interview for them to code, along with an example of how this could be done. From this it was determined that the movie should begin with their stories of why and how they came to Costa Rica, followed by their general experiences as immigrants in Costa Rica, leading into their stories of xenophobic encounters or thoughts and reflections on xenophobia towards Nicaraguans in Costa Rica. The final section would show their thoughts, comments and stories on how to combat xenophobia, including messages to Costa Rican society. Subsequently, we discussed how to film the interviews (and where, etc.) and it was decided that each person would prepare for the interviews and be filmed separately, touching on the areas just mentioned.

The filmed interviews were analyzed in the same way as the other 7 interviews, thus their content is also included in the thematic analysis. While editing the film and preparing to show it to an audience, edited clips were

arranged according to the different categories already determined, and then further refined and analyzed through subsequent meetings ansd discussions. The first section emphasizes the diverse migration experiences of the participants, followed by particular stories, experiences and comments revolving around xenophobia as it has affected them personally or Nicaraguans in general. The third and final section of the filmed interviews shows the different thoughts and messages aimed towards Costa Rican society that the participants wanted to state.

The film successfully serves as a visual compliment to the thesis, as it shows interviews with the majority of the participants, and touches on the important themes that emerged from the PAR project overall. Moreover, since this project was held in a different country and in a different language, it helps to have this alternative form of documenting the findings. Perhaps most importantly, the film served as a visual tool to introduce the theme of Nicaraguan immigration to Costa Rica and xenophobia. Being a spanish film, it serves as an interesting medium through which to inform, advocate and trigger discussion in general on this topic. For the purposes of this thesis, I only showed this video formally to one group of 6 adult students who attend a satellite highschool in the town of Puerto Viejo, Limón province. The discussion on using film as a tool for advocacy, therefore is limited here to the data from this single showing of this film, as well as interviews with other academics in Costa Rica who have similarly used film as a visual tool in their research on the topic and other relevant literature. Hence this small sample served as a pilot and gave an idea of how this film could be used in the future.

Before showing this film to the students, I went to the highschool and told students about my study and my intentions to show the film and have a small discussion before and afterwards. The discussions would be audio recorded and I also was going to provide a snack and refreshments. I left a sign up sheet in the classroom (only those in the final grade met the age

requirements). Of the 9 students who signed up, 6 arrived at the day and time of the film. The meeting began with a review of the consent form, which also outlined the nature and procedure of our encounter. Subsequently the participants clarified any questions and signed the forms. Discussion prior to showing the film involved brainstorming ideas about what Nicaraguan immigration in Costa Rica looks like. We looked at questions such as who comes from Nicaragua to Costa Rica, why, to what areas of society do Nicaraguan immigrants contribute the most, how are they treated and what, if anything, did the students consider could be changed about the situation of Nicaraguans in Costa Rica. As it is usually the case when this subject is brought up, the students were very opinionated and open to discussion and debate. Three students (50% of this group) were particularly adamant about the case, and not surprisingly thought that, as one student participant put it,

> *"Nicaraguans are a big problem for this country. Perhaps not all of them, but most of them are criminals, thiefs, and violent. Obviously there are good ones, too, but really it's a problem and there are too many of them, and so you end up getting a lot of the bad ones."*

The other 3 students were relatively quiet and neutral in opinion. One student participant said she did not know enough about Nicaraguans. I asked everyone what they considered to be their primary source of information on Nicaraguans in Costa Rica, and found that 4 out of 6 stated the media (they said "news" and clarified that it included newspapers and television), and other peoples' stories, although every participant knew at least one Nicaraguan living in Costa Rica. After this discussion, I made a 10-minute presentation, first introducing some facts about Nicaraguans in Costa Rica, then giving some details of the research I had performed so far, and presenting my preliminary findings. The film was then played and paused after each category or at any other time that a student might have a question or comment. At all times, questions, comments and discussion was encouraged. Following this, there was an open discussion on the topics, and participants were asked to each give

their opinion on the subject in general and the research in specific. Conversation was heated; voices were raised, and debates emerged. The excerpt from one student offers an example of this:

> *"Well, I appreciate this information because it reminds us that we shouldn't discriminate towards one Nicaraguan because of things that other Nicaraguans do. Sure, not every Nicaraguan comes here to kill, but a lot of them too. When you read the paper, you can see that for yourself how most of the petty crimes involving stealing and violence is on behalf of Nicaraguans here. I think it's just part of their nature as being a poorer country that has suffered from violence, dictatorship and disasters...I don't know…it's just that I'm a Costa Rican, and I'm super patriotic and proud.*
> *I think that Costa Rica is a calm, peaceful country and in order for it to stay that way, some certain Nicaraguans need to stay out."*

Another student with a different opinion on the issue said,

> *"In fact, I think that [this presentation] shows us that those images we have of Nicaraguans is based on stereotypes that aren't really valid. I don't know, I think I learned something today and that I will definitely think differently about Nicaraguans."*

While another student of a more ambivalent position stated,

> *"I agree that we should be nicer and be more understanding of our neighbours and everything, but when I hang out with my friends and they tell a joke about Nicaraguans I'll probably laugh and make jokes too, but you know just jokes about their accent and funny things like that…innocent jokes."*

Data collected from this meeting was transcribed, translated, coded and analyzed. Nicaraguan participants were invited to see and also comment on the transcripts, although there was no formal analysis done with the participants for this component. Instead, transcripts were coded and analyzed as with other

interviews. Although this analysis was taken into account for the overall analysis, the importance of this component as a pilot project merits separate analysis as well.

The overall conclusion on this component of the project is that the film and discussion opened up a debate on a subject that is rarely critiqued at the everyday level –rather, it is generally reinforced in academic and popular discourses (Sandoval, 2004c). Costa Rican Giselle Bustos (2002) made a small documentary on Nicaraguan immigrants in Costa Rica as part of her master's degree in social communication at the University of Costa Rica. She comments that using audovisual material provides an alternative option for reflection, which in this case may contribute to the formation of a critical opinion of Costa Ricans towards themselves as well as their relationship with xenophobic and racist manifestations.

Nevertheless, it is not clear to what extent the film and presentation were able to have an impact on xenophobic attitudes. Comments that arose in discussions show that 3 participants said they had learned something new and been impacted how they felt towards Nicaraguans. That said, from other comments made it was clear that at least for some, the content of the filmed interviews was not enough to change the pre-established ideas towards Nicaraguan immigrants.

In order to better evaluate this film and how it can be used as a tool for informing and raising questions and thoughts on the subject, I referred to 2 recently made documentary films on Nicaraguan immigrants in Costa Rica: Giselle Bustos's "Objeciones a una novia nica" [objections to a Nica girlfriend] (2002). Bustos put together an elaborate docudrama, which shows a fictional scenario of a Costa Rican dating a Nicaraguan and is also mixed with interviews and scenes that challenge the dominant

discourse on Nicaraguan immigrants. Bustos parts from the premise that xenophobic practices towards Nicaraguans are derived from how Costa Ricans have portrayed themselves throughout history (a premise based largely on the research of Carlos Sandoval (2000)). Based on a personal meeting with Giselle, her documentary and an article related to the documentary (Bustos, 2002), I was able to draw several points of advice. To begin, Giselle also tried to show her docudrama to a group of people, and found that amongst those she recruited, those who showed up for the screening were those that had already expressed favourable attitudes towards immigrants, whereas those who were recruited precisely because of xenophobic attitudes they had expressed did not show. In terms of my experience, based on the transcripts of the screening of my film it was clear that those who did attend where open to discussing the topic and being challenged. At the same time, I agree with Bustos (2002), who commented that film is insufficient in meeting such an expectation when faced with an established discourse that has been constructed and perpetuated over time. In my case, it was clear from the beginning that this film and presentation do not pretend to solve the problem, or provide a solution; they are just one way in which to question some existing premises.

In conclusion, the filmed component of this project was a new challenge that triggered new ways of learning as well as for diversifying research methods. It served as an audiovisual option for portraying some parts of this research as well as to elicit discussion and reflection on the topic of Nicaraguan immigrants in Costa Rica and xenophobic attitudes towards them. There were also limitations that need to be recognized and taken into account. In terms of content, this film was limited to interviews, which in turn could not show faces of the participants because of

confidentiality requirements set out by the university ethics board. Had that not been the case, Faces would have been shown (if participants wanted to, of course), as well as scenes from where they lived, worked, etc. Constraints of time, budget and technical experience limited the amount of footage and editing that could be put into the film, although more facts, statistics and images may have been helpful to further reinforce the messages that came across through the interviews.

Emerging themes

1. Diversity of participants and their journeys as a crucial aspect of understanding their overall experience:

Although the distance between the two countries is short, the journey from Nicaragua to Costa Rica has been long and strenuous for many participants, and relatively simple for others. Ultimately, the journeys were diverse, happening in different ways and for different reasons for the participants involved in this study. A decent understanding of these variations is critical to countering some of the xenophobic attitudes that circulate discourse in Costa Rica –a discourse that rarely, if at all, acknowledges the complexity involved in the initial phases of the migration phenomenon. Given the importance of such experience, it is no surprise that the emergence of this theme was part of my personal analysis through coding as well as one that arose as part of the collaborative analysis.

The presentation of this theme is organized to first review the different motivations or "push factors" (Chomsky, 2007; Stalker, 2001) behind migrating from Nicaragua to Costa Rica, or in other words, the *why* component. Then it looks at the details involved with the *how* aspect of the migration process, including details involved in the transition from one country to the other.

Subsequently, the experiences of trying to "settle" or find job and living stability is discussed.

The interviews, especially the first ones, largely consisted of the researcher and participants getting to know one another, and discussing which issues were important in order to better understand the experience of Nicaraguan immigrants in Costa Rica, how they are treated, and how to address xenophobic or otherwise negative attitudes. During these discussions, we would often spend a long time asking and telling about the reasons why the person left Nicaragua to come to Costa Rica, and the details surrounding that journey. I found that, although every participant was interested in discussing this topic, not everyone brought the topic up. Fear and embarrassment were some of the main reasons given when I discussed this with participants later on in the course of this research, and others had not considered it as part of their experience as an immigrant here, or had simply not thought about it during the interview. Nevertheless, many participants would make a point of mentioning this experience. As one participant stated in an interview, "I came here for reasons very different than most…I came to get an education." This lies in constrast to another participant's comment, who said: "I came here just like every other Nicaraguan in this country: illegally."

Of the 18 Nicaraguan participants, 11 (7 females; 4 males) decided to travel to Costa Rica in order to search for employment, due to economic difficulties in Nicaragua, including 2 female participants that came as children with parents who migrated to work. Among this group of 11, 8 participants came to work in the agricultural and/or service sector (e.g. picking coffee, bananas, and domestic service or factory work, and jobs of the like), while one participant came specifically to work as a live-in assistant for a Costa Rican ederly citizen. All of these 11 participants entered the country without formally crossing the border, in what is referred to as irregular status, although 9 have since obtained

resident status, 1 is in the process of re-engaging in the process for obtaining residence, and 1 person remains in an irregular condition.

Four of the 18 participants (males) came to Costa Rica due to political reasons related to the Sandinista revolution and the subsequent Contra war in early 1980s, and all 4 of them came as refugees, in order to avoid military inscription or other forms of involvement in the war. Two of these participants spent time in refugee camps, but only after they had fled to Costa Rica and had been detained for working illegally in Costa Rica without any documents, and sent to refugee camps as a result. At the time of the interview, one male was working as an entry-level trainer at a banana plantation; one worked in construction, one worked at a farm, and one was a professional artist and art teacher.

The remaining 3 (2 females; 1 male) of the 18 participants entered Costa Rica as students, all at the post-secondary level, and are subsequently working and living in the country as students and professionals. One female was in the process of obtaining her second master's degree in literature, one female was a journalist and the one male was also a journalist and owned a small-scale newspaper.

The motivations that triggered the participants of this study to migrate were thus economic, political/military and academically oriented in nature, coinciding with other research on the subject that tends to emphasize political and economic factors (e.g. Chaves, 2005; Sandoval, 2007), with the added component of academic motivation that only further highlights the differences amongst Nicaraguan immigrants in Costa Rica. Research performed by Erika Chaves (2005) asked Nicaraguan immigrants what motivated them to leave their countries, and found that 44% of respondents left to look for work, while 33% left due to "unstable" circumstances in Nicaragua, 10% for reasons related to education, and 10% due to family links.

Expanding on this theme of diverse migration experiences, the actual, physical trajectory from Nicaragua to Costa Rica offers valuable insight. It could be said that for many of the participants of this study, and especially those who have not yet become residents in Costa Rica, the migration trajectory is still taking place, yet other participants seemed more settled, perhaps owned a home and/or had a family. 14 of the total 18 participants came "through the bush" as they often referred to it during interviews, referring to entering Costa Rica through the northern border with Nicaragua through a mountainous area that avoids police checkpoints or other formal immigration encounters.

In 10 cases, this journey was done by boat and by foot, and usually required spending at leat one night sleeping in the forest. Immigrants must first cross the San Juan River separating Nicaragua and Costa Rica (a controversial body of water which has been the cause of both dispute and friendship attempts between the two countries). The second part is walking through dense forest, ultimately arriving (usually 2 days later) in the town of Los Chiles- the Costa Rican town with the third largest Nicaraguan immigrant population (Morales, 2006). Participants discussed their experience of traveling this route, often in the company of other immigrants they didn't know, and how the crude conditions of the forest combined with the fear of getting caught by police or other authorities made the journey particularly stressful. As one participant recalled,

> "We came without papers, without anything. We came one part through the mountains, and another part by taxi. The taxi took us, but we had to pass the police checks through the bush, hidden at night…we threw ourselves into the bushed at 2 in the morning, and that's how, through bush and through water, we got out. But I was determined to have [the police] take me back, because I couldn't run anymore at night."

In the 4 other cases, another route was taken, which begins by boat along the Atlantic coast, pulling into the Barra del Colorado town in the northern part of the coast (Harpelle, 2001). This route is more commonly taken by those who live in the eastern parts of Nicaragua such as Puerto Cabezas and Bluefields, as was the case of these participants. Two of these 4 participants entered with a safe passage permit granted by the military power during the war in Nicaragua, so they did not "sneak in" per se, but as one participant put it, *"The permission to go to Costa Rica was for two weeks, but I knew that I wasn't going to go back [to Nicaragua], so that was just a formality that helped us get in."*

The remaining 4 participants crossed through the northern border either by bus (2 females), car (1 female) or airplane (1 male). With these participants, when discussing the transition from Nicaraguan to Costa Rica, conversations focused on the difficulties faced by participants in terms of gaining acceptance and feeling comfortable among the Costa Rica community.

Participants' decision to move to Costa Rica (instead of Honduras, El Salvador, or the United States, for example) was not made in isolation of other factors, but rather depended on connections to friends or family members who had previously migrated, and the ease with which they could enter the country. 11 (6 females; 5 males) of the 18 participants had an immediate family member in Costa Rica, ranging from parents, to spouse, to brother-in-law, cousin, or friend. These connections were crucial in terms of where the participants ended up living and where they ended up working in Costa Rica, as well as any other support they may have received during the transition, as was the case with 3 participants that had their family member or friend pick them up at the border, and let them live with them for as long as they needed. The remaining 7 of the total 18 participants did not have family members in Costa Rica, but they

migrated together with their family members, which was an important source of emotional and financial support.

Despite these personal networks, however, most (12 of 18) participants moved around the country looking for jobs or avoiding immigration authorities. For 7 participants, movements seemed to follow seasonal labour opportunities such as coffee and banana picking, as well as sugar cane cutting, all of which last about 6 months and then close down until the next season (Morales, 2007). One female participant illustrates this process well, explaining how:

> *"We came through Los Chiles and there we got a job planting tiquisque. We had been planting for about 6 months at the time after a friend called us and said to go to Pérez Zeledón to pick coffee because we could make more money. So my husband said ok and so there we were, and thank God it was quiet and we didn't get caught so my friend said "ok you can stay here". We picked coffee for a while, but when picking time was over we went to San Vito. There in San Vito we worked for almost 4 years, picking coffee and in the off-season cleaning the coffee plantations. And then that was over and [my husband] decided to come to Palmar Sur, to the banana plantations. He got a job there and after working there for three months I got a job too at the factory. Later, after about 4 months of working they cut off our jobs because there wasn't enough work. So he came here, to Jacó. Once he got here I stayed behind for about 2 months and he stayed here working. Then he called me and told me to come, so I did."*

Three participants moved between tourist zones looking for domestic service jobs or construction jobs, while 2 participants also worked in construction zones but had to move around because of deportation threats by local police or lack of jobs. A female participant interviewed in Puerto Viejo recalls her trajectory in this regard,

> *"My sister in law was in the country and she came because she had to run from the war. She came illegally through the*

mountains. Then it was over ten years before my husband was able to track her down. Then left Nicaragua because the situation was very bad… very hard. The year that he left was 1999, around the month of February…And then I came but in the month of August, with one child, and then little by little I could bring my other children because the situation there was harder and harder, which is why there is no work and it's too much. Then, since then we are here. We were living in San José living, and my husband would travel from there to Limón, in this area, and I would stay with my sister-in-law and every 15 days he would come to San José from here because he worked here. But after I decided to move here to see if I could find a job but since I didn't have residency, I couldn't work. I worked but as we say "chambeando" working in odd jobs so the situation was a little tough. That's what we dealt with here and since I didn't work or have a steady job we had to leave here. Because everything is so expensive and since it's a tourist zone and even today prices are still going up. But on the other hand it is difficult to get a job if you don't have papers. For example, in San José they ask for a lot of things like residency papers and recommendation letters. That's why we had to get out of here and we went to Puntarenas to work. Where I worked was a small shrimp factory and it was miserable, they paid us like 80 colones per kilo of shrimp we would peel, and so we ended up leaving there too… And since then we have been here. I think it was since 2004 that we have been living here."

The finding that many of the participants had family or other personal connections in Costa Rica prior to immigrating is a common phenomenon, as well as being a general trend in international migration (Borges, 2005; Stalker, 2001). As Peter Stalker (2001:40) mentions, "Migrants have a world to choose from, but they tend to follow well-established routes, based on historical ties and on the networks created by earlier pioneers." In other words, that Nicaraguan immigrants have followed this well-established south-to-south migration pattern is to be expected within the social and historical contexts of both Nicaragua and Costa Rica (Sandoval, 2007). Dalia Borges (2005) performed research on Nicaraguan immigrants and their social networks in Costa Rica, confirming that the presence of formerly settled family and friends

is a key component in assisting new immigrants to arrive and settle in Costa Rica, sharing their households and helping newcomers to obtain jobs at their own workplaces.

In conclusion, the migration to Costa Rica from Nicaragua was more difficult and stressful for some participants, namely those who came through the water and forest route to avoid official border crossings (where they would surely be rejected due to a lack of "proper" documentation). Overall, there was great diversity among participants' stories of migration to Costa Rica, although some similarities were also found. The majority of the participants migrated for either economic or political reasons, which situates them amongst the majority group of Nicaraguan immigrants who come to Costa Rica. The majority of participants also crossed the border without informing official authorities, which is also common for many Nicaraguan immigrants, although there is of course no official data in this regard (Morales, 2007). These trends show that the challenges and issues related to Nicaraguan migration must be considered within the broader context of the regions' economy, labour market, and political dynamic (Chaves, 2007).

A recent analysis of the labour situation in Central America (Del Cid & Trejos, International Labor Organization [OIT], 2005) revealed some alarming realities, which directly or indirectly may impact some of the participants of this research. Results showed that, from the 40% of the Central American population that actively participates in the labour market in the region, just over half of these workers receive an official salary, while the remaining 48% of the workers do contract jobs or work as a family business. Around 10.9 million people – 6 out of every 10 active workers- have jobs in the informal sector such as small scale farming, which the study notes "are usually precarious jobs without any security or rights" (Del Cid & Trejos, 2005:17). This refers to the sector in which the majority of the participants in this thesis project work. In general, the lack of rights in this area of work leads to further gender inquality,

which is also excacerbated by the "dichotomy between rural and urban areas, amongst the Caribbean coast, indigenous areas, poor areas, urban centres, and the Pacific coasts of these [Central American] countries." (Del Cid & Trejos, OIT, 2005: 18). In the case of the participants of this study, the majority is further exploited because of their condition as a migrant, especially in the cases where formal work permits or residency papers have not been obtained.

Despite these similarities and trends, the participants' experiences in this particular regard challenge some existing stereotypes around the type of Nicaraguan immigrant that comes to Costa Rica, and what they come here to do (for example, that they are all poor, low-class people with little or no education (Molina, 1991; Goldade, 2007)). Throughout the research process, as this theme emerged and were later discussed with participants, looking at why these aspects of the migration experience were important for the intended purpose of this research, it became clear that being aware of the diverse motivations, journeys and overall migration experiences of Nicaraguan immigrants was a key component of deconstructing the myths and stereotypes that undermine the variability and the complexities described here, which in turn makes it easier to consider Nicaraguan immigrants as a homogenous group- a bunch of "others".

2. Socioeconomic conditions are a determining factor of xenophobic attitudes.

All of the participants involved in this study had experienced xenophobic attitudes towards them, but they varied largely in how these attitudes were expressed, in what context, and how often. One determining factor of such experience was the socioeconomic conditions of the participants, making xenophobia partially an issue of class in this case.

Despite the fact that most participants migrated to Costa Rica in order to improve their situation in some way or another, the crude reality is that those

who came to improve their socioeconomic conditions found that not much changed for them, and they continued to struggle financially. While even the slightest improvements in some participants' financial situation made significant differences in their lives, the point that must be emphasized here is that their social class (poor, working class, middle class, high class) did not change for those who were already poor, and in fact, in some cases participants moved down the class ladder after coming to Costa Rica.

Once the participants of this study settled in Costa Rica, there were marked differences in their living situations, which also coincided with the town they were living in. In the case of Jacó, a popular tourist zone, the cost of living is significantly higher than the low salaries the participants make, thus forcing them to live in slum-like enclaves, often in small households with 5 or more family members. This was the case with all of the 6 participants that lived in Jacó, 4 of whom held jobs related to the tourist industry (1 male in construction; 3 females in cleaning jobs), 1 (female) with a cleaning job at a public intstitution, and 1 (female) who stayed home with her 5 children, and 1 grandchild, who sporadically held a childcare job for a foreign, North American family (arguably related to the tourist industry, and certainly to the global industry).

The living conditions of the participants from Jacó, materially speaking, were the grimmest in comparison to that of the participants other locations of this study. The rapid growth of tourism in Jacó has caused businesses to raise prices and cater to a tourist market, which has made it increasingly harder for those who were already struggling financially prior to this expansion. Like most places that have grown as a result of globalization, only a few benefit from this growth (getting richer), while many others feel the weight of such inequality in light of the higher cost of living (Ritzer, 2007).

Social class intersected with experiences of xenophobia as the participants from Jacó expressed that, in addition to being poor, they faced further difficulties because they were poor Nicaraguans. The slum area where the participants lived lies along a riverbed which easily gets filled up during the heavy rains brought on by the wet season (roughly April to November), which enters their homes (most of which have dirt floors), causing floods, ruining their furniture and other household items, and at times even blocking their ability to cross the river and get into town. The people who live in this community (including Costa Ricans and Nicaraguans) own these houses and so have demanded help from the government. In the filmed interviews, one of the participants from Jacó discusses how the local municipal mayor has personally told her and other Nicaraguans from the community that they should go back "to where they came from", when asked how to deal with this housing problem. Eventually the mayor sent someone to put together a list of families that needed to be relocated, but still then there were problems. The Costa Rican families who live in the neighbourhood objected to the fact that Nicaraguans were included in this list, and since then there has been an increased tension between the Costa Rican and Nicaraguan in this small community. Albeit the small size of this neighbourhood, the scenario is reflective of the general attitude towards Nicarguans, and the fear that they will deplete Costa Rica's social resources. In Jacó, then, the participants felt excluded from society, and to the extent that the mayor, local health workers at the clinic, and others had directly offended them or deprived them of a basic service and right, the type of discrimination they received was open, institutional, straightforward, and part of their everyday life.

Puerto Viejo is also a tourist destination, yet on a smaller scale than Jacó. It is currently undergoing several large constructions and developments, just recently having opened its first mall in November 2008. Again here, as conditions and lifestyle improve for those who can afford it, those who cannot afford it are faced with higher prices.

The 6 participants living in the Puerto Viejo area complained about the high cost of living, yet 2 of them (1 male who worked picking bananas for a transnational company and 1 male who worked as a construction foreman) had been able to build a small home on a small piece of land bought with their extended family, "when prices were still low". One participant (female) had a job cleaning high-end rental homes, and was simultaneously taking care of a property. She received a small piece of land in return for this caretaking, on which she and her family were building a small house at the time of this research. Two other participants worked in maintenance jobs and lived in a small house at the workplace, and one participant also worked in maintenance but was renting a small cabin, and having trouble making ends meet. In all cases, the homes were outside of the main part of town, although the homes were not in slum areas.

Overall, the experiences of xenophobia that these participants shared were related to aspects that had to do with their socioeconomic status. That is, comments or instances of discrimination were related to variables that, in turn, were related to the lower/working class position of participants. For example, 3 participants had experienced xenophobia at their work place, or related to jobs. Amongst these, one participant recounts this experience in the filmed interviews, telling how the contractor for a construction job stated: *"The job is for capable Costa Ricans, not for dumb nicas."* In the interviews taken off camera, another participant living in the Puerto Viejo area recounted:

> *"And the other experience was working at a residential home. The lady owner of the house started looking around and examining the [construction] job and was amazed and said she saw the job was well done and everything and said she liked the people working there, but that she would not allow a Nicaraguan bastard to work in her house. And so that filled me with anger and I asked her if a Nicaraguan had ever done something to her. She answered no, but that her friends had told her that Nicaraguans were bad people and*

they were stupid and things that I won't repeat. That's when I stood up and said 'Ma'am, you are going to have to forgive me but I am a Nicaraguan and very proud.' "

Aside from being discriminated at work, 3 participants from this area also experienced discrimination because of their undocumented condition –that is, their illegality- or their immigration status. As Kate Goldade (2008) discussed from her recent research in this area, the illegality of Nicaraguan immigrants becomes a political identity for them, which the state uses as an apparatus to sustain immigrants' vulnerability. One participant discussed the difficulties he faces as he tries to obtain residency, while at the same time he says he is constantly harrased by police authorities, "…*just because I look Nicaraguan…it's like I'm a criminal but I'm not, and sometimes they arrest me. So now, I don't go out, I just live here and work here and go to the bank if I have to. "*

Related to this, 2 participants discussed being discriminated against for the way they would speak (Nicaraguans have a different accentuation and entonation, which is seen by Costa Ricans as being sloppy and inferior to their own) or the way they looked (dark haired and dark skinned), in this case associating their physical traits with them being lower class and Nicaraguan. Finally, one participant experienced xenophobic attitudes related to her living situation:

"We were living in this area and didn't know anybody, and my husband was working for a lady at a farm. She didn't pay much but she had a little house there where she let us stay because we needed it and she also needed the company. So she was content with the situation and we spent time together and such. But then her grandson showed up and demanded we leave the house, and he told the lady that Nicaraguans are squatters and we would claim that house and property as our own. He didn't even know us, and we we are not here with those intentions.

> *We're here to survive. After that, the grandson let a Costa Rican man and his family move there. So he assumed things about us because we were Nicaraguan."*

As Carlos Sandoval and colleagues (2008) mention in a recent study, Nicaraguan nationality, poverty, insecurity, cultural relativism and aesthetical aspects of the body are sometimes impossible to completely isolate as they frequently overlap and intersect with one another.

In San José, participants reported that xenophobia was a part of their everyday lives, although they experienced it in different ways and there was a marked difference in the socioeconomic status of the participants in comparison to the other areas of this study. 4 out of the 6 participants worked as professionals, and did not express difficulty making ends meet on a daily basis, given their jobs (1 graduate student, 2 journalists, and 1 artist/art teacher). One other participant worked as a caregiver for an elderly woman, and lived at her workplace, and also expressed feeling "well off" in terms of where and how she lived. These 5 participants, aside from all being educated and having well paid jobs, they also happened to be fair skinned, and in 4 cases they were light haired and light eyed. Since in Costa Rica, these physical attributes are associated with the colonial elite, Costa Ricans often did not know that these individuals were Nicaraguan. This in itself was offensive for one participant, who states in the filmed interviews,

> *"Xenophobia is disguised. People ask me 'where are you from?' and I, obviously, respond 'Nicaraguan', to which they reply 'oh, you don't look like it!'"*

Another participant discussed her difficulties maintaining a job when people found out she was Nicaraguan. She explained,

> *"People hire me and everything is going smoothly, until they ask to see my i.d. So I learned not to show my i.d*

but just give my i.d number and since I am a resident that works out. Otherwise they don't want to keep me. But since I don't look Nicaraguan to them, they hire me willingly."

In effect, while these 5 participants spoke passionately against xenophobic attitudes, all of their experiences were indirect and related to the discourses that reproduced the racial and cultural stereotypes about Nicaraguans in general, rather than negative experiences directed towards them personally. Nevertheless, they were offended by how Costa Ricans misrepresented and stereotyped Nicaraguans. As our discussions and interviews intensified, it seemed as though the experiences of xenophobia of these participants had an emotional component that was different from the other experiences. That is, there was a sense of guilt and also relief. An excerpt from an interview with one participant further clarifies this point:

Participant- Well, in class at university everyone would joke about nicas, and I always responded to those things they would say. But I never told them I was Nicaraguan. Anyway, I wasn't the type of Nicaraguan they were making fun of.
Me- What do you mean?
Participant- Well, they were making fun of the the typical Nicaraguan that comes here to work, not the one here in University. They mean the dark skinned, uneducated guy…the guy who says "pue" instead of "pues" and all those stereotypes. OK maybe I don't seem like a person like that, but that shows that we are all not like that image they hold of us.
Me- And so you wouldn't say you were Nicaraguan?
Participant- I probably should have, but I never wanted to get into it. Eventually, I told some classmates, but it was like what I said, they would just tell me "but you're different, you're not like the rest of them." So, it became like an academic debate but the reailty that I was not facing was that it was also personal.

University, and the privilege that this is associated with in a country such as Costa Rica, is a symbol of socioeconomic status, in this case a status presumed that Nicaraguan immigrants did not have. A specific accent and

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entonation, dark skin colour, and dark hair colour are other symbols that are commonly associated with Nicaraguans, but are really traits that are associated with low class Nicaraguans, i.e Nicaraguans from the rural and coastal areas of their country (and it is common for Costa Ricans from coastal and rural areas to also share these traits). Apparently, however, the Costa Rican who was producing these discriminatory attitudes could be of any status, ranging from a resident in the slum neighbourhood in Jacó to the University professor in San José.

3. Multicultural settings challenge perceptions of xenophobia

Beyond social class, issues of race and ethnicity also influence xenophobia. Related to this, the cultural environment of a place contributes to either making Nicaraguans feel more included, or conversely excluding them more from society. The experiences of individuals living in 3 different areas of Costa Rica illustrates how perceptions of xenophobia held by the Nicaraguan participants varied but were related to the diversity and tolerance of the people in the different areas.

In Jacó, the perception of xenophobia was strong in the sense that all participants living there had experienced discrimination towards them because they were Nicaraguan, and these experiences were part of their everyday life. On the one hand, the economic and material conditions of these participants caused them to live in a neighbourhood that raised their visibility and vulnerability in terms of contrasting "them" with the rest of the town ("us"). On the other hand, their ethnicity as Nicaraguans was also contrasted against the rest of those who live in Jacó, which is mainly Costa Ricans as well as North American and European tourists or residents. Furthermore, although the Central Pacific region where Jacó is located is coastal and therefore the average local person from this area is darker in skin tone, Costa Ricans from this area largely see themselves as mainstream Costa Ricans from the Central

Valley area, embracing the image of the white, spanish descendent. In this context, Nicaraguans lie at one end of the cultural/racial spectrum, with their skin colour, accent, and other visible aspects of their ethnicity emphasizing their difference, with the rest of the Costa Ricans, Europeans and North Americans lying at the other end of the continuum, although they also have their cultural differences.

In San José, this difference between the Nicaraguans and the Costa Ricans is even more polarized than in the case of Jacó. Since San José represents the heart of Costa Rica and the basis for the discourse of Costa Rican exceptionalism, this difference is to be expected. Curiously, however, since 5 out of the 6 participants interviewed in San José shared many of the attributes with this image of the Central Valley Costa Rican (fair skin tone, light eye colour, blonde hair, etc.), the contrast was not so divided on along this continuum. Instead, the perceptions of xenophobia held by these 5 participants were that xenophobia was indeed very strong, yet not oriented towards them personally on an everyday level. One participant in the filmed interviews stated,

> *"My children, fortunately, have not been targets of xenophobia because they do not fit the stereotype, but their other Nicaraguan friends do, because they are darker skinned and whatnot. And this of course takes place in the schools, which is one of the cruelest things, right?"*

Despite that they (or their family members) were not direct targets of xenophobia, these 5 participants were amongst the most adamant when discussing the subject, and their perception of xenophobia towards Nicaraguan immigrants in general was strong. More than other participants from other areas, these participants made comments such as, *"Xenophobia in Costa Rica is so, so strong…"*, *"You hear people speaking badly about Nicaraguans everywhere, especially since they don't know that you are one yourself."* and, *"Here you breathe xenophobia everywhere."* So, precisely because the xenophobic discourse was so pronounced in San José, it was perceived

strongly, even by those who did not experience it directly. As for the one other participant in who did not share the same attributes as the others in terms of skin tone, accent, and such, he also perceived that discriminatory attitudes towards Nicaraguans were *"stronger in San José then anywhere else I have lived in the country."*

The case of Puerto Viejo stands out as a particularly interesting one because it is located in the most culturally diverse regionof the country. The province of Limón in general is made up largely of Jamaican, Caribbean and Chinese descendents (Harpelle, 2001) and Limón province holds 8.9 % of the country's total number of immigrants, only surpassed by the 9.3% in the province of San José (see Map 1 in appendices). Moreover, in the town of Puerto Viejo, Nicaraguans have a long history of immigration and were amongst the first to populate the land along with the local indigenous Bríbrí indigenous (Palmer, 2005). Indeed, a report by a labour recruiter, A.F. Coombs, from April of 1919, reveals that there was already a perceived problem with Nicaraguan labourers in this region. Coombs was instructed to "send only Jamaicans and to avoid sending Panamanian, Costa Rican or Nicaraguan laborers." (United Fruit Company correspondence as cited in Harpelle, 2001: 49). Nicaraguans posed a problem because it was believed that there were "already too many of them on the [regional] plantations" and the banana corporations wanted to maintain ethnic divisions among workers so as to avoid labour organization and potential strikes (Ibid). Already at this time, then, the diversity of cultures and ethnicities in this particular region is evident.

Interviews with participants from this region revealed that, overall, the perception of xenophobia in Puerto Viejo was not very widespread. All of the 6 participants interviewed in the area mentioned that they did not feel particularly stigmatized as Nicaraguans, and upon further discussion it was concluded that this was precisely because of the diverse cultural group that inhabits the region.

Moreover, the group of participants interviewed was also the most diverse, which further contributes to this argument made in this theme.

Three participants came as refugees in the early 1980s, and 2 of them had lived in different parts of the country, concurring that they had felt more discrimination in other areas. The participant who had lived in the Limón region since he arrived had originally insisted on not having any experiences of xenophobia. Upon further reflection and discussion about what kind of treatment could qualify as xenophobia, the participant reported that "Well there are 2 specific instances that I will never forget, but they did not happen here in Puerto Viejo, they were in the city of Limón. One was in 1986…". Nevertheless, his perception of xenophobia was that there was very little in the region, and he did not feel like it interfered with his everyday life or relations towards other Costa Ricans.

The other 3 participants came more recently, and their perceptions of xenophobia varied, but overall revealed similar findings. One participant was from the Bluefields region of Nicaragua, which has Caribbean and Jamaican influences similar to that found in Puerto Viejo. The participant herself was of Jamaican descendence, spoke broken english and identified herself with that culture. According to her,

> "I don't really think that there is xenophobia here. I guess in San José you feel it, but here everyone is different and everyone is generally accepted. There are tensions between the Hispanics and Blacks, but that is more an issue of the past and you don't see that being expressed anymore. And with me, I guess people think that I look like someone who is from Limón, and so most people don't even know that I'm Nicaraguan. And the same with other people from Bluefields –so since they don't know who is from here or who is from there [Bluefields], they just don't make that distinction in general."

Another participant (male) is a Miskito indigenous person from Puerto Cabezas, on the Atlantic coast of Nicaragua. This participant represents yet another diverse group present in the Puerto Viejo area, as there are about 15 more Miskito indigenous persons there- most of which are family or friends of his. His Spanish was clear but weak and he gave me the warning that he is still learning this language (I assumed he would be fluent in English, although he clarified that this was a trend only common to the Miskitos of Puerto Jimenez and Blue Fields). In his case, he did not perceive that xenophobia towards Nicaraguans was strong in the area, but for him this was not an issue, as he stated, "Nobody thinks I'm Nicaraguan anyway. They think I'm Bribri". As discussed earlier, his experience tells a different story, as he is frequently shaken down by the police and threatened to be deported. Thus, he experiences xenophobia through his undocumented condition, but his perception of xenophobic attitudes towards Nicaraguans in the region was not even mentioned as an issue (and, in his case, it was not an issue).

In conclusion, the case of Puerto Viejo stands out from the other areas of this study in terms of perceptions of xenophobia. The analysis of the interviews with the participants from Puerto Viejo showed that despite having experiences of xenophobia, they did not perceive that there was much xenophobia in the region they were in, and this was attributed to the cultural diversity characteristic of that zone. This merits special attention because it challenges both the image of *who* counts as being Costa Rican, as well as the relationship between Costa Ricans and Nicaraguans. While in San José, these definitions were relatively clear, although participants from San José challenge the image of the typical Nicaraguan when matters of social class, racial and ethnic attributes are taken into account. Jacó similarly reflects the mainstream definition of Costa Ricans and Nicaraguans, and those interviewed from there experienced and perceived xenophobia as a serious issue, which affected the services and other rights that they are entitled to as immigrants.

As discussed in chapter 3, the definitions of Costa Rican and Nicaraguan are clearly established and well supported by historical, social and other discourses. There is an exclusive concept of the typical Costa Rican linked to a specific time and place (the colonial peasant of the Central Valley), which is not able to fully account for how these concepts are negotiated amongst other identities beyond this scope, such as in the Puerto Viejo area, where even the Costa Rican feels excluded from the mainstream view, as well as holding a different relationship with immigrants from Nicaragua presently and throughout history.

4. Speaking up as one of several forms of resistance to xenophobia

The most interesting and yet complex theme that emerged from this study relates to the different ways in which participants resisted the widespread xenophobic attitudes that were directed towards them in particular or to Nicaraguan immigrants in general. While the diverse forms of resistance originally distracted me from conceptualizing this theme, it was precisely this diversity that was a central concept. This discussion will explore and grapple with this emerging theme, although more research and perhaps further interviews may be required to continue to develop these conceptual beginnings.

Participatory Action Research studies often emphasize issues of resistance and empowerment, as it keeps the focus on the participant subject (for examples, see Sandoval, 2007; Bradbury & Reason, 2001). Even though this theme was developed towards the end of this investigation after most interviews, meetings and filmings were over, it is crucial to note that all of the Nicaraguan individuals in this investigation demonstrated resistance from the start by participating in this study. That is, by accepting to be interviewed –and in some cases filmed– all of the participants were speaking up and thus actively resisting discrimination and xenophobia. Indeed, to not address this issue

would be to discredit the power and courage involved in taking the time, effort and emotional cost to participate.

Beyond the fact that every participant performed an act of resistance by showing interst and getting involved with this project, deeper interaction with and between participants revealed other acts of resistance. Some of these were not so evident from the start. For example, of the 18 Nicaraguan participants involved in the study, only 5 participants reported ever taking part in any public act of resistance such as protests, campaigns or volunteer work associated with Nicaraguan immigrants in Costa Rica. Out of these 5, 2 individuals (1 female and 1 male) held jobs with a newsaper for the Central American immigrant community and therefore were involved in organizing, supporting or otherwise reporting information on the situation of Nicaraguan immigrants on almost a daily basis. One female participant had founded an informal volunteer group to teach English and other skills to Nicaraguan immigrants and had been on the news discussing her work and the barriers faced by Nicaraguan immigrants in Costa Rica. Another particpant was a male individual who hosted a radio show and worked with Nicaraguan immigrant youth throughout Costa Rica to help them get jobs and access services. Finally, one female participant had confronted a local municipal official in order to demand basic housing rights for herself and her Nicaraguan immigrant neighbours in the community.

These participants discussed their actions as contributions to eradicating xenophobia towards Nicaraguans in Costa Rica; they were publicly speaking up to society to condemn discrimination. For example, one participant recounts his actions in response to the Natividad Canda case:

> *"For example, one time the media were trying to tarnish the image of Nicaraguans up until the point where I had to make a decision. I went to one of the TV networks and had to protest to the point that I tied my self and chained*

my self to protest against xenophobia that was happening against Nicaraguans at the time. It was the root of the death of a Nicaraguan, from Canada Nativity and he was devoured by dogs. And that's the moment I tied myself up, because they were giving out information that tarnished the image of Nicaraguans, and at that moment I made it known that us Nicaraguans are a pillar of the economy in the country, helping with labor that the costa ricans don't do."

While these forms of resistance are quite clearly actions that are directed outwards, towards a specific public in society, there were also other accounts of participants resisting discrimination that were more personal and inwardly directed. This was the case for 5 Nicaraguan participants, who discussed resistance as a personal feat that they dealt with through their interactions with Costa Ricans on a daily basis. A male participant looked back to a memory of experiencing anti-Nicaraguan attitudes in Costa Rica and notes how these experiences caused him to change aspects of his personality in order to gain more acceptance and respect from the Costa Rican community:

"That was very disappointing, it was a very strong experience, but at the same time it was just one more motivation to continue forming oneself to keep going. I think that's what it is…people have to live by what happens to them and what their lives have been, not by what other people tell them [about Nicaraguans]…discrimination lies only in situations and people and attitudes."

Another participant states that:

"*In this country I am giving my face for Nicaraguans, for I am one more human. We must become conscious of the fact that we are all human beings, independent from where we are born, and we are all people and we should respect each other. We all owe each other a little respect, and we have to give each other a chance. Albert Einstein was an immigrant and look at the legacy he left for humanity, and that same way a person's thoughts aren't*

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seen on the outside, we have to discover the internal values of a person".

His message recurs to basic human values of respect and dignity as a way to resist and ultimately eradicate xenophobic attitudes towards all immigrants. The participant was "giving his face" for Nicaraguans by being a decent human being who upheld the values necessary for a peaceful coexistence between members of society. For him, this was resistance.

This raises the question of how resistance is conceptualized in the present analysis. While some participants showed a tendency towards public acts of resistance, other participants expressed a more subtle form of resistance related to personal values. In this sense, the former, more public concept of resistance (e.g protesting, being involved in the media, etc) fits in more aptly with common notions of resistance, especially as it may be found in much of the sociological literature (e.g Edelman, 1991). Indeed, while performing this analysis, my own conceptual understanding of resistance was challenged. After going back to the data and coding for more subtle forms of resistance, I was able to appreciate another dimension of complexity in the dynamic between xenophobic experiences of participants and their reactions to them. Along this note, the methodological framework used for developing and analyzing themes (and their subsequent validity), as discussed in chapter 3 of this study, was pivotal in allowing me to broaden my perspective and to maintain a focus on what aspects of the data were most relevant to the participants.

Louise Amoore, in her book *The Global Resistance Reader,* (2005:3) distinguishes between a politicized sense and a more neutralized, depoliticized sense of resistance, also adding that resistance is "constituted through ever-changing political and social practice". Moreover, she adds, "the contested nature of resistances means that there is a need to consider the meanings we attribute to resistance is always in relation to power and to politics" (ibid). More

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politicized versions of resistance were evident among the participants that were involved with the national media, social service organizations, protests, and public institutions. These acts entail risk, courage, pride and also a strong conviction towards the cause. A sense of responsibility and social justice were also some of the aspects that participants mentioned in regards to their motivation for these acts.

While the will and tact involved in performing such acts is powerful and instrumental to demanding and attaining more serious rights for the Nicaraguan community, it does not represent the whole range of behaviours and acts that define resistance in this instance. Moreover, the risk of being involved in these activities represented a larger risk to some more than others. Participants who did not have proper paperwork or were in an irregular condition in the country did not feel that they had any right to do so, and were afraid they would get deported. One participant remarked on how he rarely left his home, as he was afraid of the police. He lived on the land that he worked on, asked people to visit him rather than going out, always very cautious of the police and immigration officials.

Looking at the other end of the resistance spectrum, then, some participants in this study were involved in more neutral and self –focused acts that were also powerful in their ability to maintain a sense of agency and self-respect. This takes place within a context where participants reported feeling "helpless" towards an unsupportive system and government both in policy and in practice. Helplessness, in turn, was related to their migratory condition in the country, where they lived in Costa Rica, their material conditions and their ability to find time to demand rights and services, amongst other factors. All of the participants who lived in the Central Valley area of San José were involved in more political demonstrations of resistance. This makes sense given that the main government institutions, protests and media are located there. In contrast, the communities of Puerto Viejo and Jacó are more rural and less politically

organized. Material conditions were overall better off for those who lived in San José, and this allowed for participants living there to dedicate time and resources to more organized and formal acts of resistance.

Power and helplessness are also states of mind which are reinforced in people over time: although participants reported that experiences of discrimination made them stronger in some way, these experiences can take their toll over time and slowly chip away at a person's sense of political agency (Essed, 1991). By focusing on their own behaviour, each participant acted as a representative of the Nicaraguan immigrant population and tried to counteract the negative image of Nicaraguans in Costa Rican society. In the case of this study, Nicaraguan immigrants in Costa Rica face the personal day-to-day discriminatory attitudes and practices in society in addition to living within a nation that has been building an image for itself that considers Nicaraguans as a historically problematic group that symbolizes the opposite values and cultural traits than that of Costa Rica. This multi-layered xenophobia leaves little room for negotiating Nicaraguan identity and inclusion (Ramirez, 2005).

To conclude, the differentiated range of responses demonstrated by the participants in this study draws attention to the different factors that affect individuals' participation in the public sphere and the other ways in which participants resist xenophobia in their everyday life. Indeed, two principal criticism of the mainstream literature on resistance hold that the literature fails to see differentiation in peasant response and that it does not distinguish between protest that challenges the system and that which allows people to just get by within it (Ranger, 1977; Scott, 1985,1990; O'Laughlin, 2002). Hence recognizing this variability contributes to validating the courage and power involved simply in being a Nicaraguan immigrant in Costa Rican society. To this end, Sandoval (2006: 443) notes:

> "However persuasive hostility towards immigrants might be, it
> is crucial to recognise small acts that intervene in the

immigration debate. Otherwise, there is a risk of overemphasising the powerful and disempowering alternatives. The challenge does not lie so much in giving voice to the voiceless, as being able to listen to those generally excluded from the public sphere. The Nicaraguan community in Costa Rica is frequently an object of debate but is rarely the subject of its own enunciation, its voice infrequently heard".

Pending thoughts

As Costa Rica continues to rapidly change to meet the increasing demand of development, trade, tourism and other global phenomenon, the relationship between Costa Ricans and other immigrant groups will take different shapes according to the needs of the population and the global market. Indeed, this has been the case with Nicaraguan immigrants over time. The inhabitants of Costa Rica's rural democracy were individuals who lived in close proximity to eachother and shared similar cultural and social values. Such an arrangement was thought to give way to peace, tolerance and equality (Molina, 1991). The inhabitants of Costa Rica today face a different reality; many of them live in crowded urban centres where competition for resources, space and services is an issue of everyday life. According to the 2000 population census in Costa Rica, 56.3% of the population is concentrated in urban settings, which only occupy 2% of the national territory (INEC, 2000). The Nicaraguan immigrant population has experienced an increasing presence in urban areas as well. Nicaraguan immigrants were mostly concentrated in rural zones during the early 1900s due to their strong presence in the banana plantations and railroad construction. As conflict rose and more strikes, repression and division took place in the banana plantations and the railroad construction came to an end, Nicaraguans migrated to urban centres in search for jobs, mainly in the areas of construction, domestic work and tourism-related jobs (Castro & Morales, 2006).

The relationship, then, between the perceptions and experiences ofxanti-Nicaraguan sentiments and how they are influenced by regional subtleties within Costa Rica at large are also influenced by the respective stressors that go along with both urban city life as well as those in rural areas. Although I did not explore these dimensions *per se,* viewing xenophobia from this perspective further supports the findings of this investigation that xenophobic attitudes were stronger in urban centres, with San José standing as the strongest example with Jacó, recently named a city by the local municipality, also reflecting some of the tensions pertinent to urban centres.

CHAPTER V

Towards a conclusion

As the field research and analysis with participants came to an end, the project entered a new step towards its completion, which involved writing, rewriting, reflecting and otherwise "wrapping up" the research process. Ironically, at this concluding stage, new ideas and issues continued to arise. While this was useful in informing the discussion on future research, it also complicated the ability to end and consolidate this latter stage of the project. Indeed, within the realm of action research it is common to treat such projects as "work in progress" (Herr & Anderson, 2005: 78). At the same time, the process embraced by action research projects encourage constant reflection followed by action and then reflection again, which inevitably serves to continuously deepen the level of engagement with the research material. From this perspective, then, it is not surprising that it was difficult to determine when to formally finish, so it was ultimately a matter of being satisfied that the results reported thus far represent the main themes as they had emerged during the analysis period, as well as keeping in mind matters of time, resources, and the space and content expectations for this particular thesis project.

Throughout this concluding stage, I continued to write in my reflective journal, as well as what Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993: 54) refer to as "checking in" with participants from time to time to informally discuss the writing of this project, and ideas or questions that arose at that time. This checking in served to uphold the democratic validity and thus further include participants in

the written aspect of this research, while the reflective journal helped me be aware of my process over time.

<u>Findings and contributions</u>

This research project has been a constant process of learning; indeed, I have learned far more than I could include in this thesis. Such, I suppose, is the nature of qualitative action research. I have tried, however, to answer two questionsthat were to me the most pressing. First, I inquired how Nicaraguan participants experienced their migration and how this challenged xenophobic discourses about them. Second, I asked: what are participants' experiences of xenophobia in Costa Rica and what factors did they consider to reinforce or lessen xenophobic attitudes?

In chapter 3, I looked at some aspects of Costa Rica's history, namely those that relate to the colonial conquest of the country, the formation of the state, and the subsequent crisis of the state. In this section, I also considered the social, economic and political history of Nicargaua and this compared to that of Costa Rica. As official versions of history tell it, the unique histories of these two countries have led them to experience the twenty first century in very different ways, holding dissimilar positions with eachother: for the most part of the 1900s, Nicaragua was characterized by harsh dictatorships, political upheavals, and often bloody struggles between parties of differing ideologies and visions fo the country's future. This political unrest led to economic instability and severe hardships for the people of Nicaragua. Costa Rica, on the other hand, with the exception of the short civil war in 1948 that lasted only 2 weeks, has been a mostly democratic and peaceful country (so the story goes). Despite being hit by the neoliberal policies in the 1980s, Costa Rica's economy is significantly stronger than Nicaragua's. These differences, in turn, are factors

that have influenced thousands of Nicaraguans to migrate to Costa Rica over the years.

This official version of history does not mention the violence that took place during the colonial conquest, the ideological divisions that marked Costa Rican society over the years, and the exclusive image of the Costa Rican that subsequently resulted from this narrow version of it all. I argued, then, that these views are constructed in such a way as to create an unrealistic and exclusive notion of Costa Rica and its people, portrayed as being white, well spoken, peaceful and, more importantly, different (and better) than all of the other countries in Central America.

Following this, the rest of chapter 3 explored the history of immigration in Costa Rica, which led into a brief overview of some of the discriminatory and xenophobic attitudes that have been present throughout that trajectory. This overview further reinforces my argument that the official representation of Costa Rican history is unrealistic, as well as being contradictory. It reveals that on the one hand, the state endorsed campaigns to bring in European immigrants that would compliment the image of the mainstream white Costa Rican population, these being the "desirable" immigrants that the country wanted to have (Alvarenga, 2007). On the other hand, the state would encourage bringing "non-desirable" immigrants from Jamaica, Panama, China and Nicaragua when they needed the cheap labour, while discouraging this type of immigration if it was not necessary for the country's advancement.

In chapter 4, I analyzed the findings of my research and discussed 4 main themes that emerged from this process. I explored the content of the interviews and subsequent collaboration with the Nicaraguan individuals that took part in this study, first focusing on their general experiences of immigration and then at their specific experiences of xenophobia in Costa Rica. The first theme discussed the diversity of experiences held by these participants in

regards to their migration to Costa Rica, which ranges from urgent economic and political reasons on one end, to more personal, academic reasons on the other end. I argued that this diversity challenges xenophobic discourses, which view Nicaraguan immigrants as being a homogenous group of poor, uneducated indivudals which come to take jobs and drain the already declining social system of Costa Rica.

The second theme explored how social and economic conditions were factors that influenced participants' experience of xenophobia, whereby participants of lower socioeconomic status experienced xenophobia directly as a matter of their everyday life, while participants in better social and economic conditions stated that xenophobia was part of their lives, but mainly as an indirect experience such as hearing Costa Ricans discriminate against "other" Nicaraguans (those who fit the predetermined stereotype) and reading negative comments or discriminatory portrayal of Nicaraguans in the printed media.

The third theme looked at how the ethnocultural makeup of the different areas of Costa Rica in which the participants lived had an influence on their perceptions of xenophobic attitudes. That is, in the more diverse area of Puerto Viejo, participants perceived a lesser amount of xenophobia in comparison to the Jacó area or San José. Puerto Viejo (in the province of Limón), standing out as the most ethnically and culturally diverse region in the country, provided an environment for Nicaraguans where they perceived themselves as one out of many immigrants, and, even though they reported having experienced xenophobia in different settings (largely at work), they did not perceive xenophobic attitudes to be engrained in the daily practices and attitudes of the people living there. San José and Jacó differ from Puerto Viejo in that they are representative of the mainstream Costa Rican citizen, which lies in opposition to the mainstream concept of the Nicaraguan immigrant. As such, those participants who lived in these areas perceived xenophobia to be strong and overt, as part of everyday life.

The fourth theme that emerged dealt with the wide range of ways in which Nicaraguan immigrant participants resisted xenophobia in their everyday lives in Costa Rica. Each participant had their own way of resisting and protesting that did not necessarily chalenge the system, but instead helped them feel more confortable with their day-to-day lives within a generally hostile anti-Nicaraguan environment. Amongst the participants in this study, those who lived in the urban centres of San José were more involved with political acts that pressured the government to change policies and service delivery. Those participants who lived away from the cities, in Jacó and Puerto Viejo often lacked the resources to go to the cities to protest or organize a larger scale resistance but also felt that to do so could result in risking their residence or otherwise irregular status in the country. While urban areas may offer a more accesible and organized structure for larger, more political acts of resistance, the main message of this analysis was that the other forms of resistance, referred to by some as "small acts" (Gilroy, 1987) or "shuffling of feet" (O'Laughlin, 2002) are equally important in understanding the broad range of practices of resistance that are undertaken by Nicaragun immigrants.

This research therefore suggests that xenophobia towards Nicaraguan immigrants in Costa Rica is related to the way in which the national identity of the Costa Rican has been defined in contrast to Nicaraguans, and thus issues of diversity, social class and individual difference amongst Nicaraguan immigrants in Costa Rica all serve to challenge the xenophobic discourse that pervades Costa Rican society. Moreover, challenging xenophobia through emphasizing diversity in one way of working towards a more inclusive Costa Rican society. As such, the contribution of this thesis lies in it's ability to do just so.

In addition to contributing to challenging xenophobia through emphasizing diversity and difference, this research also contributes to exploring

ways of working and advocating with individuals who for one reason or another are excluded from mainstream society. Often when I would discuss this research project from someone unfamiliar with the case of Costa Rica, the comparison would me made between Mexican migration to the United States and Nicaraguan migration to Costa Rica. Indeed, xenophobia is not a phenomenon unique to these two places. Xenophobia towards immigrants exists as a product of the creation of nation states and its need to define and secure itself, competition for resources, neoliberal policies and demand for cheap labour, amongst other things. It exists where people from one culture are introduced into another, dominant culture, and this engenders fears that are subsequently manifested through attitudes and behaviours.

Social workers will encounter cultural issues within their practice, and theories on multicultural practice, cultural sensitivity and the like are abundant in social work discourse. Applied to this case, as the number of Nicaraguans migrating to Costa Rica continues to grow, an ability to be critical towards the factors that promote xenophobia and to advocate against it will serve a crucial tool towards social justice. Beyond this case, in a world that is constantly becoming interconnected and globalized, a deeper understanding of these issues will become more imperative (and realistic) than ever.

Limitations of this study and future research

Time and space determined much of the conceptual and analytical scope of this research process. That said, most of the time doing this research was spent with participants and cannot be represented with the words written here. While the filmed interviews symbolize one attempt to point out the participants' words, I have ultimately been who has shaped such representations with my own biases and interpretations. In this way, the engagement of the participants as collaborators in this project did not come close to reaching its full potential. With more time, preparation and space, this

project could have gone into more depth with the collaborative process that is made possible within the realm of PAR and action research.

One aspect of this study that was not fully developed relates to the differentiation of participants in their expressions of resistance to xenophobia. While the filmed interviews briefly touch on this aspect, they admittedly only introduce it. The film attempted to capture the everyday experiences of xenophobia felt by the participants, and to explore the ways in which they contested the xenophobic discourses in mainstream society, since they did not usually have an avenue to participate in such public debates (Sandoval, 2004). Similarly, the filmed interviews were an opportunity to encourage the participants' practice of agency and dialogue, in an attempt to minimize the researcher/participant dichotomy. Still, while editing and analyzing the interviews, I failed to emphasize the importance of the participants' messages to Costa Rican society, and the ways in which they resisted xenophobia in their everyday lives. A deeper look into these ways of resisting and contesting the hegemonic xenophobic discourses in society would be essential to a deeper understanding of the participants' experience as immigrants in Costa Rica.

Another, related limitation was that this study only focused on 3 areas of Costa Rica, with some other areas being of significant relevance to the topic at hand, such as the town of Los Chiles and other areas located along the border between Costa Rica and Nicaragua that are characterized by frequent migration and interdependence between the two countries.

Having practical implications for the future, this project could have benefited from having a more practice-oriented focus. Presenting the filmed interviews to different groups of people and expanding on the presentation to delve deeper into the topic with them would add a valuable component to the work done so far in terms of being able to better analyze how filmed interviews are effective in working against xenophobic attitudes in this context. The

potential for further research on this thesis topic is substantial. Hostility, fear, or even hatred towards a particular group is a deeply engrained sentiment, and this especially holds for the case of Nicaraguan immigrants in Costa Rica, where such a sentiment is partially constructed on collective imaginations of a nation and a people. As such, research dealing with this topic must move beyond rational theories that prove the failed logic in holding such attitudes, but rather ways of dealing with irrational prejudices that are fuelled by widespread discourses.

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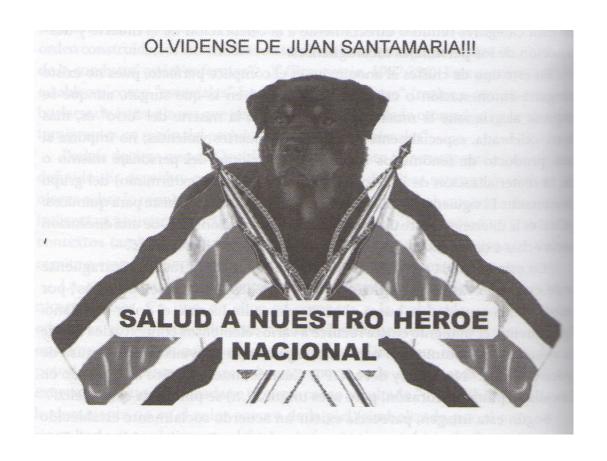
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APPENDIX A

Image 1

Source: Masis & Paniagua, 2007: 348

APPENDIX B

Image 2

TEMPORADA ALTA Y NUEVO SISTEMA DE COBRO POR VISAS
Nicas desbordan consulados ticos

■ Demanda alcanza 5.000 visas diarias, pero las 3 sedes solo pueden con 3.500
■ Diputado del FSLN urge medidas a Cancillería tica, pese a refuerzo por época
ÁLVARO MURILLO | alvaromurillo@nacion.com

Una marea de viajeros inundó en esta época las tres sedes consulares de Costa Rica en Nicaragua, lo cual provocó molestias a los usuarios y la reacción de varios diputados nicaragüenses.

Un promedio de 5.000 solicitudes de visa reciben en las oficinas de Managua, Rivas y Chinandega, pero solo pueden atender unas 3.500 por cada jornada, a pesar de los esfuerzos para ampliar el personal y el horario, reconoció el embajador tico en Nicaragua, Antonio Tacsan.

Sólo el Consulado en la capital emite por día unas 2.300 visas turísticas, aunque los solicitantes vienen en su mayoría a trabajar.

"La cantidad es abrumadora. Por más esfuerzos que hagamos, no tenemos la capacidad de atender todo", comentó Tacsan.

El regreso tras las vacaciones de fin de año se mezcló esta vez con un nuevo sistema de cobro de los derechos consulares, que acabó por molestar a los usuarios.

Ahora deben ir a una oficina del Banco de la Producción (Banpro) y llevar el comprobante al Consulado. Cada visa cuesta $20 (unos ¢10.000), de los cuales 25 centavos quedan en manos de esa entidad.

La Cancillería costarricense intentó resolver así la eliminación del timbre consular, que dejaba el 5% de los $20 en manos del cónsul Víctor Láscarez. "Respecto al pago en el banco, yo estoy cumpliendo con la instrucción, pues tengo mis reservas sobre la misma", dijo al periódico *El Nuevo Diario* .

Tacsan agregó: "El banco ha colapsado. Puso buses para llevar usuarios a otras agencias".

Los usuarios están molestos porque ahora deben hacer dos filas, denunció el diputado oficialista Agustín Jarquín Anaya.

"A veces pagan los $20 en el banco y después les rechazan la visa. ¡Y no les regresan el dinero! Eso es cobrar un servicio que no se da", comentó Jarquín a *La Nación* .

El diputado sandinista envió una carta al canciller Bruno Stagno, pidiéndole trasladar la sede consular en Managua por la incomodidad que causan los usuarios a los vecinos del barrio Serrano.

Tacsan descartó que haya por ahora un plan de traslado, pero los presidentes Daniel Ortega y Óscar Arias mencionaron en una reunió n en noviembre la posibilidad de que Nicaragua dé un terreno apto como parte de pago por una millonaria deuda.

En la misiva, Jarquín también se quejó del trato "atropellante" del cónsul general en Nicaragua, Víctor Láscarez, lo cual deteriora en parte las relaciones entre ambos países, según él.

Sin embargo, Jarquín reconoció el esfuerzo de la Embajada tica por atender a los migrantes, pues casi todo el personal administrativo está reforzando la sede consular de Managua.

SEDE EN MANAGUA

EL CONSULADO MÁS INCÓMODO
El Consulado en la capital nicaragüense es el más activo que tiene Costa Rica en el mundo, debido a la cantidad de viajeros. Eso motiva enormes filas durante ciertas temporadas (Día de la Madre o fin de año), lo cual molesta al vecindario del lugar.
Por esa razón, el Consulado debió trasladarse del barrio Batahola norte al reparto Serrano, donde los vecinos han recurrido a todo tipo de instancias para expresar su repudio. Incluso, han enviado cartas a la Embajada de Estados Unidos. Alegan que les violan derechos humanos.
Usuarios, políticos locales y la prensa han criticado también el supuesto trato que reciben del cónsul Víctor Láscarez.

Source: http://www.nacion.com/ln_ee/2008/enero/08/pais1376262.html

Table 1
Total population and population born abroad 1892–2000
(absolute and relative numbers)

Place of birth	1892	1927	1950	1963	1973	1984	2000
Total population	243205	471524	800875	1336274	1871780	2416809	3810179
Born abroad	6289	29261	33251	35605	46206	88954	296461
Born in Nicaragua	n.d	9296	18904	18722	23347	45918	226374
Percentages[13]							
Born abroad	2,6	6,2	4,2	2,7	2,5	3,7	7,8
Born in Nicaragua	n.d	2,0	2,4	1,4	1,2	1,9	5,9
Born in other country	n.d	4,2	1,8	1,3	1,2	1,8	1,8
Nicaraguans relative to total foreigners	n.d	31,8	56,9	52,6	50,5	51,6	76,4

Source: Based on national population census (INEC 2000

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[13] Percentage of the total population of Costa Rica.

Participation invitation
Una investigación exploratoria de la xenofobia

Investigadores:

Se busca participantes!

Dr. Frank Tester (University of BC, Canada–School of Social Work)
Ashley de Regil (UBC, Canada – School of Social Work)

Buscamos participantes Costarricenses y Nicaragüenses (mayors de 19 años) que quieran compartir sus experiencias e opiniones acerca de migrantes Nicaragüenses en Costa Rica.

Qué piensas??

Nota: La responsabilidad del participante involucra 2 o más entrevistas con la investigadors, y una entrevista filmada. Cada entrevista durará aproximademente 1 hora.

Quieres compartir sus opiniones sobre este tema?
Cumples los criterios para participar?

Participación en este proyecto es completamente voluntario.

Para más información, por favor contactar a:
Ashley de Regil
deregila@interchange.ubc.ca
tel: 8839-2240

APPENDIX E

T H E   U N I V E R S I T Y   O F   B R I T I S H   C O L U M B I A

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<u>Semi-Structured Interview Guide- Nicaraguan subjects</u>

(This is only a broad guideline-- it will take approximately 1hour)

The purpose Please answer <u>only</u> those questions that you are comfortable answering. You have the right to discontinue your participation in the study at <u>any</u> time.Please feel free to <u>ask</u> me questions throughout if you need clarification.

<u>Questions:</u>

Could you tell me about yourself?

How long have you been in Costa Rica as immigrant?

Can you explain the events leading up to you arriving here?

Can you tell me how it feels to be an immigrant in Costa Rica?

How do you think others in society feel about Nicaraguan immigrants?

Can you tell me about any instances where you have felt discriminated against for being a Nicaraguan immigrant in Costa Rica?
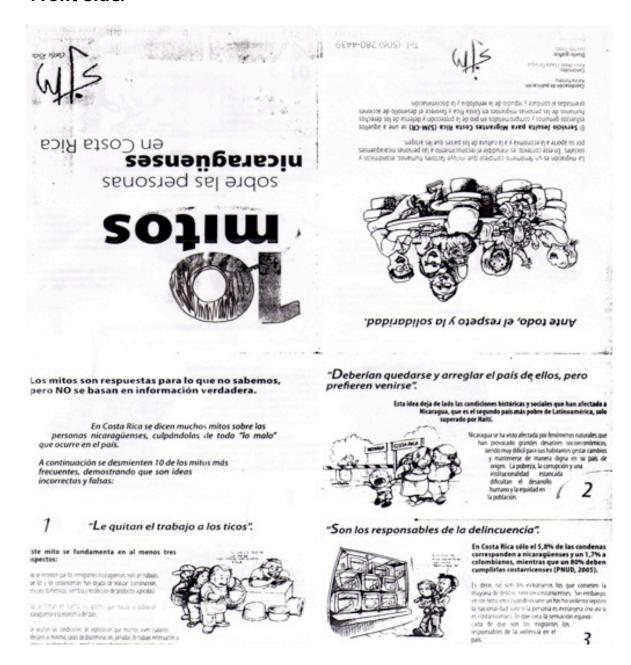
Is there any message you have to Costa Rican society in regards to discrimination towards Nicaraguan immigrants in Costa Rica?

What, in your opinion, do you think needs to change in order to address this discrimination?

Reverse side: