Refusing Erasure

Nicaragua, Nicaraguita– la flor más linda de mi querer. A land where my blood drips alongside its volcanic streams of molten lava. I've been here before. These bones know where this lineage lives in my body and remembers these ways of living from before the world's demand to fall at the colonizer's grip. Nicaragua the land of lakes and volcanoes, where pieces of my soul pose and dance with the Caribbean drums that sound throughout the humid coast. I am the daughter of volcanic jungles that shimmy with the sounds of creatures who thrive in these muddy grounds and landscape of sweaty green canopies.

I spend my 26th birthday here– *la tierra de pinol y gallopinto*. Here my body sweats, moves lyrically with the music of communal people living about their lives, and real music that seems to seep from the underground pits of mud. I feel the spirit of my ancestors from before dancing through my muscles and movements as I feel at home in their presence. They're always present, but when I am closer to the homeland they seem nearer– more enlightened, delighted, and festive, as if celebrating a grand homecoming in my honor. My mouth and tastebuds are living in ecstasy with fresh fruit picked off the trees for morning breakfast, fresh cacao sliding down my throat and into my heart. Being here feels far from gray and concrete flashes of life, because here green, purple, pink, red, orange, and blue are the colors of life that surround me. The only irritableness that can exist for me here is the itchy sensation on my body from the many bug bites one has to endure as part of visiting the tropical feeding ground for mosquitoes and critters.

I have greeted Nicaragua three times before, but this time an understanding settles and nestles into my heartspace, a clear consciousness of what it means to be able to return. I roam my Tio Enrique's finca and make my way inside the house, retreating slightly from the parrots' songs floating through the wet, sunny air. I see photographs familiar from past visits, but this time my

matured mind understands the man who fought with his life to defend this land and its people. There are photos that capture my Tio Enrique– a proud Sandinista– in uniform and in underground meetings with others who fought in proud, brown-blooded resistance against the U.S. government's 1970 attempts to militarize Nicaragua. The United States feeding another illusion that saving our people required their boastfully imposed version of democracy to tranquilize what they deemed savage.

During this time of history, the Sandinistas and Contras were two opposing forces during the late 1970s into early 1980s of the civil war in Nicaragua. The left wing Sandinistas were a group of revolutionary Nicaraguans who opposed the intervention of the United States supporting the Contras. The Reagan administration funded, trained, and armed the Nicaraguan Contras in an attempt to overthrow the Sandinista government, viewing it as a communist threat. A very similar narrative to the current United States' administration actions in present-day Venezuela. History here on its repetitive run– an archive of the 1980s existing in 2026.

During the Sandinista-Contra war, my Tio Enrique fought as a revolutionary to preserve the Nicaraguan choice to establish its own government without any intervention. Mindfully, this is not as glamorous or flawless as it may sound, as quite a bit of controversy exists on the way the Sandinistas have also gone about historically. But I find retreat, gratitude, and deep respect for the privilege to come back to the land that gave me my brown skin, my vivacious undulating hips, the rhythm that sounds throughout my soul of drums and dance, and the wise laugh that bellows from an ancient line of happy people who simply were surviving amidst the world's cruelty. To return is not a neutral act. I am aware that my ability to come back was only one generation away from a different reality: to travel with an American passport in hand– to walk this land without fear, to leave as I choose. Return carries weight. It carries gratitude and grief in the same breath. I arrive with love, but also with the knowing that many were forced to leave without the promise

of returning home. Thanks to this revolutionist in my family, there is a land preserved and a culture accessible for me to extend the bridge of repair and remembering.

I understand through my uncle's commitment to anti-imperialism and anti-colonization where this grit runs through the bloodline. He is a mirror to me of resistance, insurrection. I feel this most when he tells me on a casual stroll “Yanitsa I was not born to fall on my knees to imperialism, I am a revolutionist”. These words live in me and are written as a promise to myself, my people, and the world. I vow to always show up in this way– for my voice to always ring the same commitment as his. Imperialism is often spoken about as policy, but here it is felt in families. It has roots in stories often interrupted, and in migrations that were never necessarily dreams but necessities. The same bodies of people that claim to offer freedom– continuously decide whose sovereignty is deemed acceptable and whose resistance is more often than not criminalized.

Nicaragua, Nicaraguita. Remembering you is not passive. It asks something of me. It asks that I carry your history with me into rooms where it is uncomfortable, that I sing of you when silence would be easier, that I honor your lands of volcanoes and brown bodies not only with words but with action. To remember you, to honor you– is to refuse erasure, even when it would be simpler to forget.