Contested Discourses on National Identity: Representing Nicaraguan Immigration to Costa Rica

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This article explores the ways in which the immigration of Nicaraguans to Costa Rica is represented by Costa Rican institutions and individuals through public discourses and everyday life. Three discourses are considered. First, intellectual claims that immigration poses a threat to Costa Rican national identity, whereby intellectuals portray ‘Costa Rica in crisis’ due to immigration. Second, fictional works seek to represent issues regarding the Nicaraguan community in innovative ways, being open-ended and including diverse voices. Third, stories written by Nicaraguan children are discussed in view of exploring how hostility towards immigration interpellates them, who face the challenge of negotiating their identities with their peers in everyday life. The article ends by asking for a politics able to defend public institutions and public investment, able to forge networks of solidarity with immigrant communities.

Keywords: Costa Rica, immigration, national identities, Nicaraguan migrants, politics of representation, subjectivity.

Introduction

According to the 2000 census, the number of Nicaraguans living in Costa Rica represents about 5.9 per cent of the total population, that is 226,374 people (INEC, 2001: 5). By including the temporary migrants entering Costa Rica during the harvest season, the number reaches about 400,000 of the population, or eight per cent.  

1 I thank DuWalles Belles and Sarah Solz for their help in improving my shaky English.

2 Overall, at least 3 million Central American citizens, 10 per cent of the total population (Román, 1998), have left their countries due to violence and economic stagnation over the last two decades. The Salvadoran community in the US, for instance, numbers about 2 million people (Cañas, 2001: 40). The high concentration of Salvadoran and Mexican citizens in Los Angeles makes it the second and third most likely place in which for them to live (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2001: 8; García Canclini, 1999: 52).
80 per cent of the Nicaraguan population live below the poverty line and 44 per cent live in extreme poverty; in Costa Rica generally, approximately 20 per cent of the population live below the poverty line (CENIDH, 1998: 2, 26, 57). Besides being badly paid, the Nicaraguan community in Costa Rica is often racialised and criminalised, and it is often argued that Nicaraguan immigration is undermining Costa Rican national identity.

Nicaraguan immigration to Costa Rica has coincided with an undermining of the sense of nationhood in Costa Rica, characterised by a deterioration of public services such as education and health, which have been distinctive in Costa Rica modern history. Meanwhile, the imagery of Costa Rica as a ‘middle-class nation’ is also in crisis, as a good number of the population feel that they do not have access to middle-class standards of living. Both this material decline and its associated subjective meanings have generated a sense of dislocation regarding its material causes and feelings of nationhood in Costa Rica. Such a sense of dislocation produces anxiety and uncertainty because Costa Rica is supposed to be an exceptional nation in what is seen as socially exclusionary Central America.

The criminalisation and racialisation of Nicaraguan migrants have arguably provided a means of coping with the anxiety and uncertainty generated by this sense of dislocation, in which Costa Ricans blame Nicaraguans for the shortcomings experienced in everyday life. Peter Stallybrass and Allon White (1986: 53) call this process ‘displaced abjection’, the process whereby low social groups turn their figurative and actual power, not against those in authority, but against those even lower. Despite the fact that Nicaraguans are located in a lower status position, Costa Ricans tend to perceive them as all-powerful. Such an exaggerated threat justifies and makes rational diverse forms of hostility and aggression.

This article explores three cultural forms in which this sense of uncertainty is represented. First, public interventions by intellectuals who underline the notion that Nicaraguan immigration is a threat to Costa Rican national identity and in which rhetoric underpins the intellectual’s views as the truth of the matter under discussion. Second, fictional works are analysed to show how fiction contests this intellectual rhetoric. While intellectual rhetoric is organised around truth and monologue, fictional work pursues dialogue between diverse voices, the contrast illustrating that national identity as an arena of dispute between different discourses. Third, the contestation over nationhood and immigration is examined in terms of how primary school-aged children from a Nicaraguan background interpellate and negotiate their sense of national belonging. The article ends by asking how this contestation might allow a self-critique of the ways in which Costa Rican nationhood has been represented.

Articulating Xenophobia Through Intellectual Populism

Immigration has been traditionally framed as a topic of crime news, depicting immigrants as transgressors of national space, and law and order policies. More recently, well-known Costa Rican intellectuals have taken the topic of immigration into a wider
discussion through newspapers’ opinion pages and other public arenas. What is new in the Costa Rican case is that intellectuals articulate a discourse in which society is interpreted exclusively in terms of nationhood. Nation has replaced society as the frame in which problems are discussed (Morley, 1999: 247).

Among the intellectuals engaging in these debates, Rodolfo Cerdas – a political scientist and former leftist member of the Parliament – wrote in La Nación, the main Costa Rican newspaper, in November 2002:

Recently it has become fashionable to criticise Costa Rica as if there is nothing valuable here and as if we only have defects. Three mistakes are committed by repudiating the xenophobic refusal of immigration, especially of Nicaraguans – a repudiation that, in any case, is convenient and necessary. First, all Costa Rican people are denigrated, devaluing many of them and their social achievements. Second, the real problems brought about by immigration are overlooked. And third, immigrants are attributed with all manner of virtues and advantages, without recognising their disadvantages in... education, health and social adaptation. Thus just as self-complacency undermined democracy, a falsely progressive perspective such as this – which replaces objectivity with self-flagellation and self-blame – neither helps the immigrant nor helps us to understand their problems, and makes it impossible to educate the people (La Nación, 3 November 2002).

What Cerdas does not address here is why national identity and the attitudes of Costa Ricans towards Nicaraguans have become an issue of debate and controversy. Rather than self-flagellation, what seems to animate this ongoing debate is a sense of national identity in crisis, both institutionally and symbolically. As Kobena Mercer (1994) and Stuart Hall (1997) among others have noted, identities are often discussed in times of crises, when the present is perceived as separate from an idealised past.

Costa Rican general elections in 1998 and 2002 reported the highest rate of non-participation after 1953’s general election. Between 1996 and 1999, the gap between the richest 20 per cent of the population and the poorest 20 per cent widened (PNUD, 2002). The common icon of nationhood in Costa Rica as a middle-class nation has been further eroded by 20 years of structural adjustment programmes, following the loss of the welfare state’s legitimacy and the lack of alternative proposals (in terms of more inclusive policies or alternative forms of representing nationhood). Neo-liberalism is often criticised, but still reigns.

A few weeks after Cerdas’ intervention, another intellectual contributed to the immigration debate. A lawyer, university professor and newspaper columnist, Juan José Sobrado made an unforgettable intervention in a colloquium organised by the Centro Cultural de España in San José, Costa Rica. Sobrado argued that Nicaraguan immigrants posed a threat to Costa Rican identity. To continue receiving immigrants, Sobrado claimed, would turn San José into ‘a Calcutta’. According to his argument, the ‘waves’ of economic refugees were generating the disordered growth of cities, described
as a ‘serious environmental and social crisis’. Most of his comments linked identity with space: the arrival of immigrants transgressed national boundaries and undermined national identity. If Calcutta was associated with chaos, he cites London as an exemplary place, thus denoting how London’s powerful imagery can be used to articulate a racialised discourse on immigration. Interestingly, Sobrado also deployed body images to describe the seriousness of the crisis: immigration is compared, for example, with a ‘cancerous tumour’ and HIV-AIDS. Whereas cities refer to public space, bodies are private sites. Although nationhood is associated with space in both respects, its transgression was considered to be a major threat.

Another social scientist, José Luis Vega, wrote a journalistic piece in which he encouraged the new government (2002–2006) to stop chaos, by starting with the most critical issues, namely immigration and customs.

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 undesired groups and persons? Why not stop the undermining and loss of our national cultural identity and physical borders, as a state obligation, without falling into racism and isolation from the rest of the world, by establishing a rational immigration policy without extremism? Why not overcome the assault of simple immigration, an uncontrolled process like the one we currently have, by opting for immigration as a regulated process, able to be directed, organised and accepted, with advantages for the country and society? (Al Día, 13 January 2003)

For a reader accustomed to debates on immigration and nationhood, these three pieces might sound familiar (Chaves, 2001). They attempt to articulate a discourse of national belonging based on meanings associated with tradition and protection of national space. Overall, these interventions confirm what Stuart Hall (1988) called ‘the right move show’, in which right-wing views on immigration become part of public opinion. Rampant anti-immigrant sentiment entered into the mainstream to an unprecedented degree, in part facilitated by renowned intellectuals’ discourse on immigration as a threat to national identity which linked together previously disparate negative images. Images of chaos or disease became familiar through these discourses, illustrating what George Gerbner and his associates (Gerbner et al, 1996: 48) term mainstreaming, namely the process by which frames of reference are built and taken for granted in everyday life.

In this context, it is interesting to note that Costa Rican public intellectuals had previously aligned themselves with social democracy and leftist politics, yet were now expressing xenophobic views, insisting that national pride had to be protected and nurtured. What motivated them to re-position themselves ideologically? Three factors could be at work here. First, the fall of socialism and the erosion of social democracy might lead them to search for new ideologies, including a genre of nationalism deeply engaged with rampant anti-immigrant sentiment. Second, becoming the organic intellectuals of anti-immigrant sentiment may also be perceived as a means of acquiring...
political and public recognition, which is otherwise difficult to access. Third, the research agenda on nationhood experienced an important shift, whereby debates moved from reflecting on ‘being Costa Rican’, to thinking critically about the formation of nationhood in Costa Rica. Anti-essentialist views on national identities have replaced traditional images that assumed nationhood was constituted by an idealised sense of the past and selected territories.

Intellectual populism presents self-contained discourses, closed to any voices outside the intellectuals’ own voices, that describe themselves as the truth, and illustrate what can be termed monological thinking. Nonetheless, these images do not go uncontested. First, the intellectuals’ comments are published in, and framed by, the opinion pages of newspapers, a site infrequently read by the broad public. The idea of a dominant ideology permeating different social layers does not pay sufficient attention to the interplay between public discourses and everyday life. Second, important efforts to contest such xenophobic imagery have occurred simultaneous with the intellectuals’ interventions, as discussed in the next section. While intellectual populism employed rhetorical skills in order to make its point, fictional discourses comprised different voices.

Contesting Anti-Immigrant Sentiment

Diverse actions – what Paul Gilroy terms small acts (Gilroy, 1993) – contest this racialised and xenophobic imagery, especially by means of fictional works including documentaries, films and theatre performances.

For example, a couple of documentary videos have traced the social meanings around the Nicaraguan presence in Costa Rica. In the drama documentary ‘Objeciones a una novia nica’ [Objections to a Nicaraguan girl friend], the relationship between a teenage couple, namely a Nicaraguan girl and a Costa Rican boy, is represented (Bustos, 2000). In a combination of fiction and documentary, the boy resists pressure from his peers and decides to continue the relationship. The video is intended to be educational material for secondary school children, through which they can discuss the importance of respect. Meanwhile, another video production, ‘Desde el Barro al Sur’ [From the Mud to the South], narrates the experience of a young Nicaraguan girl who migrated to Costa Rica seeking a job as a domestic worker (Álvarez and Hernández, 2002). ‘Desde el Barro al Sur’ mixes the genres of documentary and reportage, aiming to depict the journey from rural communities in Nicaragua to Costa Rican upper-class neighbourhoods.

The most applauded fictional piece dealing with Nicaraguan migrants in Costa Rica has been a theatre play, ‘El Nica’ [The Nicaraguan], which consists of a monologue performed by César Meléndez, a Nicaraguan who has lived in Costa Rica for a number of decades. Meléndez was first a singer in a salsa group, later beginning a fine arts higher education. ‘El Nica’ comprises a monologue in which the main character, José Mejía-Espinosa, talks with an image of Jesus Christ, asking him to explain the discrimination against the Nicaraguan community in Costa Rica. José is a worker in the construction sector, a common source of jobs
among Nicaraguan men in Costa Rica. Jesus Christ is told that although he was also a foreigner, he has shown little interest in the situation of the Nicaraguan community. ‘Why are your life and mine so similar?’ asks José, ‘How difficult it is to turn the other cheek!’

In the performance, José tells the image of Jesus Christ about his lived experiences such that the stories are transmitted to the audience as well. José remembers that one Saturday after having been paid, he went with his employer to a bar, where they met the rest of his co-workers. The contractor cheered with the workers and José attempted to do the same, but none of his co-workers replied. Suddenly, one of them began to shout ‘the magic words’ at him, ‘Nicas, sons of bitches’, a common expression in Costa Rica. José tried to persuade them that he had migrated as he and his family had nothing to eat, saying ‘You are not interested because you have not felt starvation’. After his story, some of the co-workers beat him fiercely.

In another episode, José remembers that during his first entry into Costa Rica, he, his wife María and his little baby girl walked for 7 days through the mountains. Approaching the border, they attempted to cross the San Juan River – approximately 70 m wide – and they lost their daughter, who by chance was the same age as his employer’s daughter. Episodes such as these are not exceptional in immigrants’ life stories (Sandoval, 2000).

Throughout the performance, the main character revisits the stigma associated with the Nicaraguan migrant community and confronts Costa Ricans with their own stereotypes, which underpin their sense of national belonging. In the process of addressing his co-workers, José directly addresses the audience, who is confronted by his poverty and needs, and causes them shame. At points, ‘El Nica’ asks the audience forgiveness for his accent, his colour and his Indian hair. Ironically, he also asks the audience to forgive him for being the watchman in middle-class neighbourhoods and the domestic worker for thousands of Costa Rican households. However, he also refers to a construction contractor who called him ‘señor’ (mister) an unusual form of address for a Nicaraguan worker. ‘It is not everyone who dares to say that he is a friend of a Nicaraguan’, remembers José. ‘I swear to you that all this hurts’, says the performer. Finally, the masterpiece ends with the words ‘Who invented the borders?’

Lasting around two and a quarter hours, ‘El Nica’ has been presented regularly for over one year in theatres, communities and schools. It is estimated that around 50,000 people have seen the play, which had an exceptional reception given its profound critique of taken-for-granted images of ‘Costa Rican-ness’. ‘El Nica’ addresses a wide range of social groups, having been presented in diverse locales including Café Britt, a theatre frequented by the middle class, state and private schools, universities and rural communities. In rural communities with few theatre facilities and large numbers of immigrant agricultural workers, ‘El Nica’ received a huge reception. César Meléndez remembers performing twice daily in the community of La Fortuna in Costa Rica’s Northern region (close to the Nicaraguan border), after many people waited outside for the performance (Interview, 5 February 2003). The University of Costa Rica’s largest auditorium (the main public university) had to close its doors due to lack of available seats for one performance. In December 2003, ‘El Nica’ completed 300 performances
in Café Britt, in addition to numerous stagings in communities and schools, which arguably doubled those in the theatre.

In the context of hostility towards Costa Rica’s Nicaraguan community, it is not easy to explain ‘El Nica’s’ success. First, despite the rampant anti-immigration sentiment of important sectors of Costa Rican society, a growing number is concerned that some forms of demonisation have gone beyond acceptable limits. Discourses on immigration are a topic of controversy, and society is divided regarding the best way to approach it. Second, the Costa Rican theatre industry is predominantly frivolous, being frequently criticised for the populist tone of many plays. The scarcity of choice for theatre goers leaves ‘El Nica’ without competition. Third, ‘El Nica’ was the first play performed in many rural areas, reflecting not a lack of interest among rural populations, but an absence of opportunities for contact with theatre and other expressive arts. Priests working in the Catholic Church and state and private school teachers often invited Meléndez to make presentations in their communities and schools. While both these institutions have both been criticised for their conservativism, this case illustrates how they are diverse fields of power where social actors with contradictory views dispute the power of representing key events, such as immigration. Overall, this contested landscape demonstrates that despite the circulation of xenophobic discourses, their ideology does not close the doors of dissent. In 2003, ‘El Nica’ obtained the Ministry of Culture annual award for the best actor.

The contrast between intellectual populism and the visual arts illustrates disputes around the representation of immigration and how immigration debates connect with the sense of national belonging. Each genre portrays different ideological universes. The fictional material, whether documentary or theatrical, does not seek truths but rather listens to those voices usually excluded from the mainstream public sphere and seeks to document what goes unheard. These more dialogic discourses are organised around fiction and not rhetoric, as the former gives more room for dialogic narratives.

Despite their ability to interpellate broad audiences, hegemonic discourses on immigration face alternative voices that attempt to undermine depictions of immigrants as threatening others. Without underestimating the power of xenophobic ideologies, it is important to recognise the efforts made by these alternative voices.
Children Negotiate Their Sense of National Belonging

The contestation between monologue and dialogue does not take place exclusively in public discourses but is also present in more private sites, such as conversations and everyday interactions and leaves traces in the construction of subjectivity. As part of the work of a solidarity network called Merienda y Zapatos (Meal and shoes), Nicaraguan children were invited to write about their experience as immigrants. The project was organised as a literary contest, entitled ‘¿De dónde vengo, para dónde voy?’ [Where do I come from, where am I going?]. During 2003, twenty pieces were submitted, and a repeat of the project was planned for 2004. The prize-winning pieces of work were awarded a monthly bonus of US $20 for students during the academic year.

One of the testimonials written by a girl finishing primary school writes:

When I was six years old, I began kinder-garden in this nice school with a good and kind teacher. In my first years at school, I was not badly treated for being Nicaraguan. I did not even know I was Nicaraguan. After listening to so many insults about Nicaraguans in school, I asked my mother about the province [of Costa Rica] where I had been born. [When she said I was Nicaraguan] I burst into tears; I could not accept being Nicaraguan. I was afraid of being insulted or laughed at in school, like other Nicaraguans are. But time has passed and I have been accepting my nationality more even though I haven’t been there [in Nicaragua] and I don’t know anything about Nicaragua. Up to now I feel happy to know that at school and at home I am treated well. I realised that all people are equal before God.

This story illustrates how hostility towards Nicaraguans becomes a concern for her. Initially, she takes her Costa Rican nationhood for granted but then realises she was born in Nicaragua. She makes clear how arbitrary nationalities are, as she belongs to a nationality about which she knows nothing.

Nicaraguan children face the challenge of negotiating their identities. Their lived experience constitutes what literature on identities term a third space. Neither do they feel traditionally Costa Rican nor do they feel a strong attachment to Nicaragua, and hence thus fit neither single identity. In the words of Homi Bhabha (1994: 219) ‘such assignations of social differences – where difference is neither One nor the Other but something else besides, in-between – find their agency in a form of the future where the past is not originary, where the present is not transitory. It is … an interstitial future’. Furthermore, the testimonials, including the quote above, indicate that religion provides a reference point for claims to equity. Religion becomes a familiar world-view within which human rights can be claimed, suggesting that beyond earthly injustices there are transcendental aspirations for human beings. God transcends the real, is a resource of hope and proves that justice is possible. Similarly, in testimonials written by older generations, further mention of God as a source of justice is found (Sandoval 2000; 2004, p. 131–132).
An older girl child (starting secondary school at the time) wrote a piece in which she narrates her family’s decision to leave Nicaragua and their arrival in Costa Rica.

When my mum was pregnant with me, many sad things took place that I do not want for anybody else. One of them was that my father was recruited into the Nicaraguan compulsory military service, since at that time my country was at war... In 1990 my mum gave birth to my second sister, the war ended and my father came to Costa Rica and left us in Nicaragua. Many things happened; we suffered everything – hunger, illness; we had nothing. When my second sister was 9 months old, my mum became pregnant with my third sister, and after her birth my father returned to Costa Rica... My mother took the risk to travel to Costa Rica by sea. Very sadly she left us with my grandparents... Time passed and my parents faced many difficulties... [..] since they did not have legal status. They did not have enough money to legalise their situation. And the only way for them to bring us to Costa Rica was by becoming legal... Thinking of us and considering the difficulties, my father asked some people to lend a hand to cultivate zucchini [...]. The crop was good and with his money, he travelled to Nicaragua to bring us to Costa Rica. When we arrived at the farm where my mum was, after being away for two years, I was so happy! And my happiness hasn’t stopped. After being in that farm, we moved to another one... after a while we moved again since otherwise we couldn’t study because the nearest schools were too far and walking alone through lonely roads were dangerous for us. When we were in Paraíso [Cartago province], my mum wanted to enrol me in the Goicoechea primary school, but there was a problem because the Principal refused to accept me as I was Nicaraguan. After that I felt sad but I was still interested in studying.

Her account illustrates the ways in which migration transforms the most intimate, and the most structural, dimensions of life. War and poverty divided families and the extended family, especially grandparents, becomes the main support when parents have to leave. Remembering the past, she combines the time of history, familiar time and personal time (Martín-Barbero, 1993: 28). Time of history is characterised by war, compulsory military service and immigration; familiar time takes place when her parents left Nicaragua and later when they reunite with the children in Costa Rica. Finally, personal time acquires salience when she tells of her experience in the Goicoechea School (her exclusion from the school has particular resonance for me as I studied there). Familiar time mediates between historical time and personal time; it is the way in which autobiography is inscribed in history. To what extent is the reaction of the head teacher an example of institutional racism? The racism is less overt than the forms of xenophobia discussed above, but has been naturalised in many public services. Immigration is often made invisible, forcing many lived experiences to go unnoticed. Although Costa Rica has ratified international human rights conventions, it has not been translated into recognition and much less into the defence of immigrant children’s rights.
What this story, and many others, suggests is the need to approach citizenship in relation to a wider context than nationality. Concepts such as ‘communities in difference’ (quoted in Morley, 2001: 441) characterise this emerging landscape; yet translating these concepts into policy remains difficult. Currently, the Costa Rican parliament is debating legislation that would replace the present immigration law (Asamblea Legislativa, 2003). In effect, the proposed legislation assumes that policing is the key to regulating immigration. Articles 152 and 157, for instance, prohibit hosting or the employment of ‘illegal persons’, confusing the traffic of people, a flourishing business on the Costa Rican–Nicaraguan border, with human rights initiatives that offer migrants support.

In the Guise of a Conclusion

In contemporary Costa Rica, immigration has become a terrain of contestation where different views and voices dispute the legitimacy of representing national belonging. In this context, intellectual populism encodes a view – widely diffused by the media – that immigration is threatening Costa Rican national identities. Intellectual populism is based on rhetoric and considers itself the truth. Rather than discussing immigration, intellectual populism prescribes what should be done to prevent it. Although intellectuals’ interventions have a limited circulation, they contribute to the mainstreaming of xenophobic views on immigration. Socialism and social democracy have been replaced by nationalism, one of the most persuasive ideologies of modern times.

Not only present in discourse, hostility towards immigrants also has consequences in policy making and public services as discussed above. Importantly, this ‘war of words’ on immigration leaves traces in the constitution of subjectivity, as found in the children’s testimonials quoted above. The children’s stories hold lessons for the future, because they belong to generations that will have to learn the complexities of being between two nationalities without being completely satisfied with any one. Rather than considering discourses, policy making and subjectivity as separate domains, this case study confirms the necessity of considering the interplay and overlapping between them.

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. Nonetheless, the reception of the play ‘El Nica’ illustrates the possibility of forging and enacting dialogues.

The case study forces us to consider the relationship between a national identity materially and symbolically in crisis and discrimination against the Nicaraguan community. A reflexive approach to nationhood must acknowledge that, while critical research on Costa Rican ‘exceptionalism’ is increasing, nationhood is a powerful framework through which to resist privatisation and free trade initiatives currently
under debate. Paradoxically, nationalist claims at the same are the raw material for stigmatising Nicaraguans and are the only available repertoires with which to resist globalisation. Moreover, those supporting capitalism’s global expansion are frequently the most vehement critics of immigration; the mobility of finance, production and trade is celebrated while human mobility is unacceptable to the media and policy makers. Their defensive stance pinpoints the national interest in the protection of public institutions; state and nation are made identical. Privatisation and neo-liberalism drive trade unions and other organisations towards a political situation where, beyond nationalism, no scope appears possible for other forms of claims making on public institutions. In Costa Rica, the best example is telecommunications, the defence of which mobilised thousands of people in 2000 and obliged the president, Miguel Ángel Rodríguez, to reverse his decision to privatise (Solís, 2002: 35).

Public institutions, such as telecommunications, have been the material basis for better living conditions in Costa Rica, and their deterioration puts wide swathes of society at risk from social exclusion. The undermining of public services and public investment cutbacks are usually represented, not as a consequence of neo-liberal policies, but as a result of Nicaraguans’ migration to Costa Rica, who are thus made responsible for the decay of public services. In future, a major challenge will be how to preserve and reinforce public institutions without fuelling nationalistic ideologies that have provided the raw materials for hostility and xenophobia towards immigrants, particularly Nicaraguans. While people supportive of anti-privatisation movements may back anti-xenophobia campaigns and forge solidarity networks with immigrant communities, the task is increasingly difficult as defending public institutions rarely moves beyond the narrow confines of nationalism.

References


3 In Latin America, to my knowledge only Costa Rica and Uruguay still maintain telecommunications within the public sector.


