

Ivana Giang
SIT Nicaragua
26 February 2018
RMES Diario del Campo

CODING

- *Mothers*
 - Because our homestays are primarily driven by mothers, I want to pay attention especially to the role of mothers.
- *Children*
 - Interaction with children is different than adults who have context about many of the other themes I have listed here.
- *Home*
 - Our experience is driven by homestays, so I think it's worth looking at how we and our families interact with homes.
- *Location*
 - More than just location, I want to think about how people interact with land, and the specific geographies in which they live.
- *Religion*
 - Religion is a large part of culture that I think plays a key role in interactions between people, including us as visitors.
- *Power*
 - This is a big theme, but sometimes I talk about it explicitly and want to acknowledge that.
- *Wealth*
 - More than wealth, I also want to understand how money is a factor, sometimes a driving factor, in interactions between people.
- *Parents*
 - I believe that parents, within the context of family, have a large impact on how the family runs and how the family functions as part of the community.
- *Foreigners*
 - This theme is a lot about how we, as foreign students, impact the space around us.
- *Age*
 - Sometimes age differences or similarities impact the kind of interaction and dialogue that people can have.
- *History*
 - I want to acknowledge historical context whenever I can, in order to position my observations.
- *Campesinos*
 - There was a reason that we went to the campo, so I want to acknowledge the particular role of campesinos in our learning.

- *Language*
 - Language becomes an interesting dimension when even people within our group speak different levels of Spanish.
- *Food*
 - It was mentioned that food is a deep part of culture that I think can speak to larger histories.
- *Education*
 - I think that by looking at education as a part of society, we will be able to come to a deeper understanding about the public sector and government structures.

February 18, 2018
9:00 PM

DESCRIPTION

Emel, 4, and Antonio, 3, are cousins and grandchildren of my host mother, Doña Imelda [mothers; children]. After breakfast, they grabbed me and Diana by the hand to run off and play. Our houses are positioned on a hillside so that there's a drop-off nearly 20 feet from my front door that descends the hillside [children; home; location]. Emel took the lead and slid down the hillside into the brush [children]. She paused to choose specific branches to hold onto, and then pointed out the same branches for us to use. Starting with Diana and then coming back for me, Emel instructed Antonio to grab her hand as she held the other [children]. It took both of them to keep each of us adults from falling down the hill [children]. Emel showed us certain paths to take once she had taken them first [children]. Eventually we were able to climb back up. When Emel and Antonio lost their footing, they recovered without help [children]. Diana and I were not able to do the same.



This was the day that Antonio, left, and Emel, right, helped Diana and I down the hillside to play.

Later, Doña Imelda took Diana and I to the Evangelical church, where we met up with five of our other classmates also staying in La Reyna [religion]. At first, the service consisted of various individuals taking the podium to lead the congregation in song. The seven of us clapped along, not able to sing with them. Later, a man who had been in the front of the church since the beginning of the service took to the stage [power]. He was dressed in a bright blue dress shirt, dress pants, black dress shoes, and a watch [wealth]. He completed the sermon, walking back and forth, raising his voice at times, and shaking his arms and body. I could not understand much of what he was saying, but it was later explained to me that he compared one man's distant relationship with God to that of a long distance relationship between a boyfriend and girlfriend [religion]. At end of the service, most of all the adults gathered in the front of the stage. They dipped their hands in a cup of oil, rubbed their hands together, and some rubbed their

face, head, and neck as well. As the man in the blue dress shirt continued to speak into the microphone over background music, people prayed and some cried as well [*religion*]. The man placed his hands on some people's heads, and for others, he brought their already raised hands higher into the air as they kept their heads down, praying aloud [*religion*]. This went on for about 20 minutes. Then, one of my classmate's host mother motioned to us, and we were invited to the front of the stage as well. While almost all of the other adults sat down, some of the ladies stayed at the front to guide us in holding hands as the man in the blue shirt dipped his hands in oil, then took each of our hands to speak to us into the microphone, one by one, starting with me [*religion*]. Again, I could not understand much of what he was saying, but it was later explained to me that he was asking us to open our hearts to prepare for our lives and careers ahead. After that, he shook each of our hands again, we returned to our seats, and the service ended.

That night, Emel had been playing in a notebook while Diana and I were making corn tortillas and roasting coffee beans with her grandmother, Doña Imelda [*children; mothers*]. Emel kept pulling Diana and I over to where she was sitting and asking us to sign our names on slips of paper that she'd ripped out of the notebook [*children*]. Doña Imelda kept asking her to stop so that Diana and I could do our work [*mothers*]. There were many scraps of paper left on the ground. Later, as Doña Imelda was tending to the fire that we were using to roast the coffee beans, she looked around and quickly grabbed some of those slips of paper and threw them into the fire [*mothers*].



Diana making her corn tortillas after Doña Imelda taught us.

INTERPRETATION

The first event, in which Antonio and Emel showed their expertise in navigating the steep hillside, tells me that they have spent quite some time living and playing there [*children*]. I know that they have lived there the whole three and four years of each of their lives. The fact that they

ran off without hesitation also suggests that they are not accustomed to having parental supervision or even having to ask for their parents' permission to play on the hillside [*parents*]. Then, as they were the ones guiding and physically supporting me and Diana, I realized that their playground was something that people like us, who had grown up in the United States (the suburbs of Chicago and Cincinnati) regarded as dangerous [*foreigners*]. Perhaps it also had something to do with our age difference and higher perception of danger with age [*age*]. Regardless, I realized that campesinos truly do have an adaptation to the jungle that people who didn't grow up there wouldn't—just as it was described about the Sandinistas' guerrilla tactics during the revolution [*history; campesinos*].

With second event at the church, chairs were put out for about half of the space in the church, and then people only filled about half of those chairs. Doña Imelda also commented, when we arrived, about how there were very few people. She herself had not been to that church in 18 years, but said that the majority of the other host moms are Evangelical and that many other folks in La Reyna are Evangelical as well [*religion*]. I wonder what other factors may be contributing to a lower attendance. I believe that the man in the blue shirt is the pastor. He had the most presence at the church in the form of the most time spent onstage, speaking to the congregation [*power*]. He was also dressed more nicely than anyone else at the church [*wealth*]. Other men wore pants and button downs as well, but his clothes and watch and shoes appeared much newer and of higher quality [*wealth*]. In terms of my classmates' and my time at the front at the end, I think they are accustomed to having young people visit their community, as they mentioned a few times that they wanted to welcome the "jóvenes" to the service [*foreigners*]. The fact that one of our moms motioned us to the front as well seems to me a sign that they usually invite the foreign "jóvenes" to be prayed for and blessed by the pastor, face to face, in front of the whole congregation, asking them to consider their faith [*religion*].

Lastly, I included the part about Doña Imelda using Emel's scraps because it spoke a lot to me about Doña Imelda's experience with life in the campo [*mothers; children*]. Emel always has a lot of energy to run around and be mischievous, but Doña Imelda only lightly warns her, calling out "niña" at those times [*mothers; children*]. She didn't say anything in particular about the paper scraps, not because she knew she was going to use them, but I think because she had already said "niña" a number of times and the scraps themselves weren't preventing us from doing our work. The use of the paper scraps just tied together, what seemed to me, a lifetime's worth of experience with caring for children, cooking simultaneously, and efficiently using resources [*mothers*].

EVALUATION

As Emel and Antonio played with us, I first felt happy to be able to simply play in the outdoors without having to worry about work or classes [*children; foreigners*]. I felt like a kid again, but then I realized that this wasn't anything close to how I played as a kid [*foreigners*]. I then almost slipped into feeling pity that they did not have the same high-tech toys that I remember having,

but then what I truly felt was happiness that they seemed even happier with just the hillside and their imagination [*foreigners*].

At church, I was the most uncomfortable that I have been during my time in Nicaragua so far. I was raised as a Catholic but I no longer practice or identify as religious anymore. When we were at the front, the pastor started by speaking to me, and spoke to me an extra time at the end [*religion*]. Having to repeat “Amen” after him made me uncomfortable [*religion*]. I didn’t do it at first, but he didn’t go on with what he was saying until I did. It was also uncomfortable that rather than just speaking directly to me, he spoke into the microphone while not being sure about how much Spanish I could understand [*language*]. Perhaps he intended for the congregation, rather than for me, to hear more of what he was saying to me. I’m thankful for the experience overall, and am happy that after 18 years of not attending the church, Doña Imelda was still willing to take me and Diana [*foreigners*]. I still won’t easily forget how I felt about the pastor, who seemed comfortable with his power and hold over the congregation, and wouldn’t let us go without having us fully participate in the service as well [*power*].

Making corn tortillas and roasting coffee beans was my favorite part of the day [*food*]. Doña Imelda is so kind and now that I’m more comfortable using my Spanish, I think she’s also more happy to talk with both me and Diana [*language*]. As she threw the paper into the fire, my respect for her grew immensely, realizing how much experience contributed to that one action, and now I am looking forward to the remainder of my time here and hopefully my interview with her as well.

In taking a look back on all three events today, I want to start thinking about how I am impacting the space that I am occupying. Because Emel and Antonio are children, we did not have to worry about formalities and could go straight into playing games [*children*]. I wonder how many strangers have come into their house, though, and how many they’ve played with and had to say goodbye to after just a few days, weeks, or months [*foreigners*]. Seeing as they had no hesitation with me and Diana, however, it seems that they still feel it is worth it to learn the tourists’ names, convince them to play, and let them into their lives [*foreigners*]. This makes me happy for now, but I hope that it does not affect their mental and emotional health in the future.

The same goes for the church. With the pastor and the folks who were comfortable bringing us up to the front of the congregation and not uncomfortable with having tourists in their church, I wonder how others have reacted to the strong suggestion of participating [*religion*]. It was interesting, though, to be in a space where the local folks, who—in the context of the developed versus developing world—were in a position of less power compared to us students from the U.S., were imposing their views on us in a way [*foreigners*]. It’s also interesting that while I enjoy seeing that kind of power dynamic reversal, it was also the most uncomfortable moment for me [*power*]. Perhaps it is because it was a power dynamic reversal that it was so uncomfortable for me.

With the tortilla-making and coffee-roasting, I realized that it was an intentional activity on the tourist agenda after it was all over [*food*]. It hit me a bit hard to realize that that Doña Imelda was forced to become skilled at these activities over the years because she did not have a choice in how to make a living [*foreigners*]. For us, it was simply something fun, to take pictures while we were honestly doing a poor and inefficient job at making tortillas [*foreigners*]. Thinking back, it seems almost cruel to think that we were making light of the fact that it was an activity we had the privilege of trying once and never doing again, while Doña Imelda has had to do it her entire life and will have to continue, likely, for the rest of her life [*foreigners*].

February 21, 2018
9:30 PM

DESCRIPTION

The first activity of the day was visiting the primary school that is located right behind the rancho, where we have met for all of our activities during our time in La Reyna [*education*]. All of us were dressed for the hike that would follow: in jackets and boots [*foreigners*]. We walked up the steps of the school, and there was a growing sound of commotion as the students were let out of the two classrooms that we were able to see. Some of the students were members of my classmates' homestay families, so they greeted them as we walked in [*children; education; foreigners*]. Between the two large classrooms, there was a rectangular patch of dirt that was as large as each of the classrooms. Over the patch, there was a tin roof that connected the two classrooms. There, the eight of us, Gabe, and Adela sat down in a line along one of the classrooms facing the other side of the patch, where the students stood in a parallel line facing us [*children*].

The teachers, one of whom was the host mother of one of my classmates, introduced the school to us, talking about the other teachers and the school itself [*foreigners*]. Then, I believe she stated that the students would have put on a dance performance, but they did not have speakers for music. With that, she announced a free time where we could interact with the students [*children*]. Immediately, some students ran over to our line, while many stayed along their side of the wall. Then, I and some of my classmates approached them, asking their names, ages, and favorite areas of study. We then brought some of them into one of the empty classrooms to play games, such as Ring Around the Rosy and Simon Says [*foreigners*]. After about 20 minutes, the students were gathered to resume class and we were to leave. Before we left, some of my classmates took photos with some of the students that we interacted with [*foreigners*].

Later that day, my host mother, Doña Imelda, and some of the other host mothers brought out some things to sell after lunch as we were sitting at the table [*foreigners*]. They had bracelets, keychains, and earrings. Doña Imelda placed, on a different table, products made from parchment with dried pressed flowers, such as envelopes, stationery, bookmarks, and notebooks. Half of my classmates including myself, were on our feet, looking at the bracelets, keychains, and earrings in front of us [*foreigners*]. Others quickly went to the table where the parchment products were, which nearly sold out. We formed a line and each paid Doña Imelda for the products we had bought [*foreigners*].

INTERPRETATION

Because this day had been a bit later in the schedule, I knew by then that the school visit was certainly a part of the tourist agenda. We university students and the students of the school were each lined up in a parallel fashion, I believe, so that everyone could see each other

[*education*]. The students knew what was happening as it was happening before, and I think that some of them ran off to play quickly and some of them remained on the wall because they have different feelings about the tourists coming into the school [*children; foreigners*].

It seems to me that the time that was reserved for us to play with the students is constructed in such a way, because tourists in the past have enjoyed that activity [*foreigners*]. I think the time period, roughly half an hour altogether, is also structured in a way that gives the tourists enough time to have an experience to remember, and take photos with the students before they return to class. While the teachers did not interfere while we were interacting with the students, they walked around to take photos as we were playing with them [*foreigners*]. I feel that at least one of the functions of the photos is to advertise the agrotourism program for the future [*wealth*].

I believe that they reserved the chance to buy those souvenirs for last full day of the program, because by then, the tourists will have had the most attachment to the place and people, and will want to buy items to help them remember [*foreigners*]. They spread out the items quickly, turning what had been our lunch and dinner table into one of the stands that looked like the ones we saw in Granada—made for tourists [*foreigners*].

EVALUATION

I know that I had said that the day at the Evangelical church was the most uncomfortable for me so far, but the visit to the school ranks closely in that sense, but for a different reason. The students were lined up against the wall as if they were some spectacle to look at, or some commodity for us to choose from [*foreigners; children*]. In fact, when we were able to interact with them, when we chose which students to approach, it did look like we were shopping for some kind of commodity, especially when many of them were so afraid that they didn't move from their spot [*children*]. Some of my classmates took the students by their hand and claimed to be soothing them, but I believe that without their spoken consent, in some cases it made the students more afraid [*foreigners*]. We asked if some of them wanted to play games, and some of the students in my group did indeed want to, but others were excluded when they didn't join, and I didn't know how to include them without forcing them to interact with me—an outsider that they had never met before [*foreigners*].

I was under the impression, when I saw the school visit on the schedule, that we would not be interacting with students. I was excited to be in a separate space and hear from a teacher who was not busy, to learn about the education system [*education*]. I only expected to be brought into a classroom, interrupting class for a minute or so, to meet the students. What we did was quite different. Compared to some of my classmates, I never received any training to work with children, so I had no idea what kind of games to play. My Spanish speaking abilities were certainly not even at the level that I could play the role of "Simon" in Simon Says [*language*]. I can't imagine what the activity must look like with tourists who don't speak Spanish at all [*language*].

Especially when my classmates began taking photos with the students at the end, I felt very weird about the entire activity. Because we'd discussed media ethics in class, I felt that it was unethical to take or post photos with a child that we had just met 20 minutes ago [*foreigners*]. I really do not believe that education should be a tourism activity. That half hour that we spent at the school would have been much better served as an extra half hour in classrooms, so that the students can gain the education needed to stop being a spectacle for wealthier foreigners to come and ogle at [*education; foreigners*]. In no way is this a criticism of Darling and those from the cooperative who put the program together. This speaks so much more to the extent to which they perceive and have seen tourists enjoying such an activity in the past, that they have found it profitable in some way to include it on the agenda [*foreigners*].

Finally, when it came to the souvenirs, I felt very uncomfortable completing a monetary transaction with my own host mom [*wealth; foreigners*]. I know that not all of my classmates must have had this experience, but it made it seem all the more real to me that my very own presence in La Reyna was a source of income for Doña Imelda and her family [*wealth*]. While I always felt welcomed and truly appreciated how much they wanted me and Diana to feel a part of the family, I guess I had tried to push it out of my mind the fact that there was a monetary transaction involved [*wealth*]. Today was a day that reminded me that truly, the entire experience in the campo was a tourism experience in which the community laid bare their lives and homes to us, in exchange for income [*foreigners*]. I want to be critical moving forward with the rest of my time in Nicaragua, thinking about power dynamics as the rest of the country lays itself bare to me and my classmates [*power*].



My host mom was Doña Imelda, the person farthest to the left.