From the *Centro Histórico* to the "*Nueva Cantina*"

A Survey of Public Spaces in Managua, Nicaragua

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CHAPTER 1: Introduction

One feature of inevitable importance and contemplation in any city is that of public space. These areas foster the city's public realm, functioning as integral parts of its daily life and symbolic of its history. In addition, public spaces tend to dominate the popular image of a given city for foreigners, having subtle, culturally-specific characteristics in different regions of the world. That a city could lack such areas is baffling and seemingly antithetical to the very idea of a city as being a confluence of its country's people. Yet, both the student and the casual observer of the urban experience certainly face such a dilemma upon an initial encounter with Managua, the capital city of Nicaragua. Due to a combination of factors-- namely natural disaster and political turmoil-- Managua has become a rather disjointed city, lacking those formal plazas which many take for granted as a defining feature of the Latin American city. One must consequently look elsewhere for expressions of Managua's public life.

The public spaces of Managua have largely evaded close scrutiny, although the city is considered unique in both its historical development and its present embodiment. Public space merits examination in Managua if only because of the fragile state of its young democratic political system, existing now after decades of national dictatorship and single-party control. Public spaces do not guarantee democratic society, but they do foster it, serving as spatial expressions of urban society. Without uncompromised public spaces, a self-critical discourse of social realities becomes difficult, different groups will rarely come into contact with one another, socio-economic stratification, political inequality and other democratic concerns will be largely ignored and the marginalized will remain voiceless. If public space is in jeopardy, then so is society.

For these reasons, public spaces are important aspects of a city. Yet, the disorderly urban fabric of Managua further complicates these societal concerns, making it

difficult for the glue of public space to hold the city together in a coherent manner. One guidebook describes Managua as

> a place of contradictions and challenges. Less a city that *is* than a city that *was*, it has a history that lurks around every corner; less an urban center than an enormous conglomerate of nondescript neighborhoods, modern-day Managua is what a city looks like when everything has gone wrong.[1]

This description is indicative of how Managua is generally viewed in much of the literature, but this is not to say that the city is a parochial oddity. Indeed, Managua has changed dramatically in its recent past and its development is not entirely dissimilar from other cities around the world. For this reason, Managua's public spaces were chosen as the topic of investigation, as no city can fully function without public spaces, whatever their manner of expression may be.

In order to understand this city where "everything has gone wrong," this research project, conducted in the summer of 2006, reports on an investigation into the public spaces of Managua. By focusing on a half-dozen representative sites of city-wide importance, an interesting window is opened onto how this city continues to function so tenaciously despite its luckless history and current hardships.

The initial research questions center on the general characteristics of public space in Managua and the more particular forms, uses and meanings of specific public spaces in this capital city. Questions asked while conducting the field research pertained to how public spaces function in modern-day Managua and how they are changing. The preliminary line of questioning focused the initial observations on four themes-- design, use/norms, security and diversity-- which were selected both due to their relevance in the general discussion of public space as well as their particular pertinence in the case of Managua.

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[1] Randy Wood and Joshua Berman. *Moon Handbooks: Nicaragua*. Second Edition. (Emeryville, CA: Avalon Travel Publishing. 2005). 24.

This is the goal of the research project-- to place Managua into the broader debate over public space while also recognizing that it occupies a specific place in a specific cultural context with a unique set of historical circumstances. Such a balance can further the understanding of public spaces in Managua and the general understanding of this city as a whole, while also contributing to the broader discussion of public space by noting common patterns and trends present in this often overlooked capital city. The particular research questions explored in the following discussion are,

1. How do the public spaces of Managua illustrate the analytical themes present in the established literature on public space? In particular, how do the observed patterns of "privatization," social control and appropriation affect this city and its public spaces?

2. How do Managua's public spaces reflect the larger social patterns of the city? How do these public spaces function in the larger integration and/or disintegration of Managua's population?

The following report will address these questions by drawing upon qualitative data collected during the field research and the existing literature on public space. In this manner, the analysis of Managua's public spaces will lead to an analysis of Managua itself, helping to establish its relevance as a case study in the larger debate over the condition of contemporary, urban public space.

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A Note on Method

The approach to this research project involved gathering qualitative data and the tasks of the fieldwork primarily entailed multiple phases of both observations and interviews. In observing Managua's public spaces and interviewing Managua's people, attention focused on both the physical aspects of the site, its setting and its meanings. Of course, the people using the space and their actions, activities, relationships and participation with the space and with each other were noted. Such phenomena are commonly

addressed in field work through various methods.[2] In the first stages, particular attention was paid to playing the various "roles" of the observational researcher, beginning with being a "complete participant" and followed by being an "observer-as-participant." The first role allows research to be gathered without the knowledge of those under observation-- by pretending to be simply concerned with day-to-day activities and interacting with those in the space as such. In the formalized interviews and questionnaires, the second role was played. The "observer-as-participant" role allows the researcher to approach people as a researcher in order to gather information.[3] When possible, a third role of acting as the "complete observer" was also played. This proved more difficult, however, as any attempt at being as unobtrusive and inconspicuous as possible was generally thwarted by the researcher's appearance (he is very obviously not Nicaraguan). The combination of roles allowed for observations of candid activity and conversation to be made before revealing the true reasons for being present. The former were often much more revealing, as many past studies of urban public life would suggest.[4] The overall strategy employed was one in which the researcher pretended to be a regular tourist during the earlier visits to a site and by then approaching people as a researcher later in the course of the fieldwork.

Upon arriving in Managua, the first task completed was an initial observation of Managua and its public spaces. The various public spaces selected after visiting different parts of the city represent a cross-section of those determined to offer an accurate, informative, interesting and appropriate sample group in terms of the questions listed above. Ultimately, a series of eight public spaces served as the basis of the fieldwork. These spaces included the *Centro Histórico* ("historic center") of Managua, *Parque Las Palmas* (a neighborhood park), two very different restaurant areas known as *Zona Hippos*

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[2] Earl Babbie. *The Practice of Social Research*. Third edition. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company. 1983. 245.

[3] Ibid. 247-248.

[4] For a good example, see William H. Whyte. *City: Rediscovering the Center*. New York: Doubleday. 1988.

and *Rotonda Bello Horizonte*, the privately-owned mall *Metrocentro*, the *Catedral Metropolitana* (or "Metropolitan Cathedral"), a gas station (*"La Esso"*) and a national park in the center of the city called the *Parque Histórico Loma de Tiscapa*. Thus, the sample group incorporates a combination of older, "traditional" public spaces and those representing the more contemporary tendencies of development in present-day Managua.

Following this preparation, the second stage of fieldwork involved the systematic observation of the sites selected. Over the course of the six weeks in Managua, each public space was monitored three or four times a week, varying observation times among the morning, afternoon and evening hours of both weekdays and weekends, paying particular attention to the four themes mentioned above. In this sense, each site was treated as both a physical site and as a gathering place. The strengths and weaknesses of a site's aesthetic and functional design were revealed through this observation of the physical diversity of facilities, use of space and the physical expressions of safety and security measures.

A layer of depth was added to this stage by observing the sites as gathering places. This lens allows more insight into the functionality and arrangement of a space while also revealing the various uses and norms surrounding behavior in the space and, of course, the diversity of users and their activities. The characteristics of a site can be mapped along these lines by noting how a site's users interact with each other and with the physical space itself. Such observations recorded a spatial representation of users and how people from different demographical groups segregate or congregate within a given public space. In addition, as the sites were observed at various times of the day and week, the diversity of use over time was also revealed.[5]

The third phase of fieldwork approached the selected public spaces through the people of Managua. Two types of interviews were conducted. The first involved people

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[5] It should be noted here, however, that certain sites were not observed into the late evening or nighttime hours, as the researcher's safety became a cause for concern.

present during the various times of observation. The goal of these early, informal interviews was to gather a sense of the candid perceptions of a variety of local users. Those interviewed included employees of the area or of nearby establishments (including security personnel), regular and infrequent users and visitors to the spaces and people who were simply passing through the area. The second set of interviewees comprised similar individuals, but with the aid of a formal questionnaire. Each subject was asked a series of questions to gather general impressions of and attitudes toward a given public space, along with questions related to frequency of and reasons for use.

The combination of techniques outlined here approaches the aforementioned questions from a wide array of different and complementary perspectives, given the time constraints of the fieldwork. The variety of perspectives provides an overlap of information and allows for a more thorough analysis of the trends and patterns present in the form, purpose and meaning of public space for the city and its citizens. To this end, six of the eight observed public spaces mentioned above were chosen to be the focus of the final interpretive analysis. The *Catedral Metropolitana* and *Parque Las Palmas* are left out of the analysis, the former because an insufficient number of interviews were conducted and the latter due to its primary function as a neighborhood park rather than a truly central public space catering to city-wide use. These six were chosen due to their relevance to the literature review and to significant patterns and trends seen in Managua's public spaces-- those of "privatization," social control and appropriation. The sites were then organized according to a typology in accordance with their illustrative value related to these three themes.

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This research project comprises four principal sections. The following chapter presents a review of the literature on public space. In Chapter Three, the report provides an overview of Managua and of the public spaces studied in this report. Chapter Four presents a discussion of the sites in the context of the literature and analytical themes

explored in Chapter Two. The final chapter explores the universal relevance of the findings and conclude by providing suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER 2: Literature Review

Before delving into a review of the applicable literature, one should note that, despite the abundance available, the debate on public space has not yet fully coalesced. Public spaces take various forms with differences both subtle and profound, adding a certain complexity to the literature, a complexity reflected in the sheer abundance of available terminology. It is therefore of particular importance to first define "public space" before considering the case of Managua and its public spaces. To present a working definition of this term is of primary importance to this chapter, as is determining the basic epistemology of the topic. An exploration of the literature also reveals important themes which aid in understanding public space and its importance in urban society. Such considerations will aid in the discussion of Managua and the particular expressions of public space found within it, also helping to place this rather unique case study into a broader discussion of patterns and trends found in urban areas around the world. In this manner, the most pertinent information on this involved debate can be incorporated into the discussion while some details are necessarily left unmentioned in order to best address the questions at hand.

The concept of public space is extensively deliberated not only in urban planning, urban design and architecture, but also in the realms of geography, anthropology, sociology and political theory. There is an abundance of available material on this topic, yet the phrase "public space" finds different shades of meaning in its interdisciplinary relevance. Despite the differences in usage, however, this phrase remains the composite of two words which establish a common ground among its various definitions.

On its own, the adjective "public" suggests something that belongs to, affects, or concerns a larger community.[6] While the word "space" has great breadth of meaning, it

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[6] See "Public," *Oxford English Dictionary Online*. Third edition. (Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2007).

can be sufficiently defined as a physical area of practical use for some purpose.[7] As a phrase, then, "public space" suggests a place which is reserved for the purposes of a society. The following literature review will expand upon this basic definition by considering the various manners in which this phrase is employed. The discussion will move towards a working definition of public space as a place which is reserved for the purposes of a community composed of individuals-- individuals who may use such a place for their own personal reasons or for a group of people who may use such a place for purposes particular to themselves or more universally relevant to the community as a whole. More importantly, such a place implies that neither group nor individual may infringe upon the right of others to use it insofar as the use does not threaten the well-being of the larger community.

This is an idealized definition. Of equal importance to the impossibility of fully realizing such places in the modern city is that the ideal has never truly existed, despite the nostalgic romanticism found in the writings of many who lament the current state of urban affairs around the globe. This is no real matter, however, as a certain amount of idealism is present in any definition-- definitions attempt to describe the nature of things. Thus, a "public space" must incorporate these characteristics to a certain degree; it is the extent to which a space approaches the ideal that makes it interesting for discussion.

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Moving away from semantics and approaching the manner in which the term "public space" is used within the literature, it is helpful to briefly consider the term on a basic epistemological level. At the root of the contemporary preoccupations with public spaces is their changing nature. Today, one of the chief matters of concern in the literature is the seemingly inescapable presence of capitalism, commodification and their effects on

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[7] See "Space," Ibid.

public spaces.[8] Such discussions involve a consideration of the public and the private realms of society. The dichotomy between these two has become less pronounced or, stated more accurately, public space has a different level of ambiguity now than in the past.

Although a society defined by these two realms has long been a concern in western philosophical thought as far back as Ancient Greece, the modern societal expression of the "public" and the "private" can be traced back to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and the era following the predominantly mercantilist societies of Europe. Of particular use for this discussion is Jürgen Habermas' inquiry into what he identifies as the bourgeois "public sphere" of Western Europe. Emerging in tandem with European capitalism, the modern public sphere represented a newly self-conscious social order in a newly privatized economic system. In this context of rapidly growing, privately-owned commercial trade freed from the formerly strict bonds of state authority, economic activity became a subject of general interest.[9] Groups of private individuals formed along two lines: those concerned with protecting their investments from a resurgence of state control and those concerned with the development of civil society and its newly discovered freedoms of thought and expression, as well as its ability to actively criticize the social order.[10] The "public sphere" formed when "the interest of the owners of private property could converge with that of the freedom of the individual in general."[11] This new identity of the public was a direct result of private individuals coming together to construct a "public sphere" for the protection of private interests. Thus, even in its historical foundations, the modern public is inextricably connected with

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[8] For a good example, see Tridib Banerjee. "The Future of Public Space: Beyond Invented Streets and Reinvented Places." *APA Journal.* (Vol. 67, no. 1. Winter 2001).

[9] Jürgen Habermas. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society.* Thomas Berger and Frederick Lawrence, trans. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. 1991). 19.

[10] Ibid. 31-43.

[11] Ibid. 56.

the private; discussing one requires a discussion of the other to understand its full connotation.

Yet, the discussion at hand is decidedly less abstract. These two "spheres" of society find their expression in physical places. How do such physical spaces allow for the expression and continued cultivation of the public sphere? This is where concerns over the material and the socio-political overlap.

Prior to thinking of public spaces as proper gathering areas specifically designated to function as such, it is helpful to remember that the general understanding of public space is as "a space that is freely accessible for everyone: public is the opposite of private."[12] Indeed, one must recognize that

> … space *is* routinely divided into public and private and there appears to be a rough consensus-- at least theoretically-- about which is which. Public spaces (whatever their ownership) are generally understood to be more *accessible* (physically and visually) than private spaces.[13]

Such places can "even be spaces that are not public in the strict sense, for example privately-managed collective spaces that still function as public domain."[14] Public, then-- as per the working definition above-- is more of a quality and is the result of a "complex system of codes, expressed through physical objects and social arrangements."[15] In this fashion, private places signify that "strangers cannot enter without permission or negotiation" and, by contrast, public places signify that accessibility is granted "to everyone, where strangers and citizens alike can enter with fewer restrictions."[16] To reiterate, public and private spaces should not be thought of as strict opposites. While

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[12] Maarten Hajer and Arnold Reijndorp. *In Search of a New Public Domain: Analysis and Strategy.* (Rotterdam: NAi Publishers. 2001). 11.
[13] Lyn H. Lofland. *The Public Realm: Exploring the City's Quintessential Social Territory.* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter. 1998). 11.
[14] Ibid. 11.
[15] A. Madanipour. "Why are the Design and Development of Public Spaces Significant for Cities?" *Designing Cities: Critical Readings in Urban Design.* Alexander R. Cuthbert, ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing. 2003). 140.
[16] Ibid. 140.

there is a tension between the two, they overlap and complement each other, providing appropriate sites for the activities of the various spheres of society. In recognizing the dichotomy between public and private, however, the reality of public spaces can be acknowledged-- they may be private places (under private ownership) which nevertheless function as public places due to certain characteristics.

That "public" is not entirely the opposite of "private" suggests the sheer abundance of space in the urban environment which enters this discussion. Yet, this reality often goes overlooked. Diagrammatic representations often used in architecture and urban planning provide one example. Private spaces are colored black and the public spaces in between them are colored gray. If one were inclined to create a truly representative black-and-white map of a city by coloring it as such, there would be many shades of gray necessary to gain any sort of accuracy. The map must include public, semi-public and private zones.[17] Depending upon what side of "center" the intermediate spaces are, one should also include the fourth category of "semi-private." To discern these types of spaces is not formulaic. Such a task is contingent, rather, on various qualitative factors.

What, then, are the qualities of "publicness" in urban spaces? How do these qualities suggest the degree to which a space is "public"? Why do certain attributes strengthen or weaken a site's "publicness"? One important aspect already suggested in this discussion is that of general accessibility. Two other important characteristics generally agreed upon in the literature are those of collective ownership and of interaction among different groups of the population.[18]

Accessibility is a quality of public space as it allows for the gathering of "persons who are strangers to one another or who 'know' one another only in terms of

[17] Rob Krier. "Typological and Morphological Elements of the Concept of Urban Space." *Designing Cities: Critical Readings in Urban Design.* Alexander R. Cuthbert, ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing. 2003). 323.

[18] Margaret Kohn. *Brave New Neighborhoods: The Privatization of Public Space.* (New York: Routledge. 2004). 191.

occupational or other nonpersonal identity categories."[19] While private spaces are generally open only to those who are personally known, public spaces should be, by definition, openly accessible and welcoming to all. Threats to public space are taken so seriously because, at one point in time, "public places were proud repositories of a common history"[20]and this seems to be less apparent. Such a shared history can foster a shared feeling of both responsibility and ownership by transcending differences and creating a sense of solidarity. It is here that individuals should feel entitled to use the space and should feel threatened if this freedom becomes jeopardized.

In fostering interaction among strangers, a public space helps "to create a shared set of symbols and experiences that create solidarity between people who are separated by private interests."[21] Interaction among strangers is no more complicated than providing a place for "seeing and being seen and witnessing social diversity," which "enriches the civic character by fostering tolerance."[22] To avoid oversimplification, it must nonetheless be affirmed that social distance and spatial distance are not equivalent.[23] While not strictly a necessity for interaction and acceptance, exposure is often an important pre-condition to both of these societal ideals. If one is not regularly exposed to difference, then one will be less prone to accept difference and, in turn, recognize commonalities with others.

Although not exhaustive, these three qualities attributed to public space help clarify the concern over the condition of public space in contemporary society. Without accessibility and collective ownership, contact among disparate segments of the

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[19] Lofland, 1998. 9.

[20] Spiro Kostof. *The City Assembled: The Elements of Urban Form through History*. (Boston: Little Brown. 1992). 187.

[21] Ibid. 8.

[22] John Gulick. "The 'Disappearance of Public Space': An Ecological Marxist and Lefebvrian Approach." *Philosophy and Geography II: The Production of Public Space*. Andrew Light and Jonathan M. Smith, eds. (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc. 1998). 139.

[23] Pierre Bourdieu. "Social Space and the Genesis of 'Classes' [Chapter 11]." *Language and Symbolic Power*. John B. Thompson, ed. Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson, trans. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. 1984 [1991]).

population becomes much more difficult to achieve. The failure to provide spaces for such interaction is generally viewed to be a major hindrance in fostering a more democratic society in the current age. Which properties contribute to the shortcomings of public spaces in contemporary cities?

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Of particular interest in considering the case of Managua are the tendencies toward privatization, social control and the appropriation of public space. The first two processes demonstrate how current trends and patterns in development threaten public space; the third demonstrates the resoluteness of urban dwellers to congregate despite sometimes lacking appropriate places. Together, however, all three demonstrate the necessity of functional, uncompromised public spaces for the health of a democratic urban society.

Contemporary debates are dominated by the so-called "privatization" of public space. As the term suggests, this occurs when private interests assume control of public spaces. This can occur through the willful collaboration of the municipality (such as the "public-private partnerships" used to revitalize many North American downtown areas by transforming them into destination shopping districts) or by simply having a dominant presence around the space in question. Another pattern of "privatization" can be seen in newly created, privately-run spaces which masquerade as public spaces. This term describes any number of different types of space, the most studied examples being the corporate plaza and the mall. Given the effective role of these places, however, it might be more appropriate to think of them as "publicized" private spaces.[24] Other available terms include "pseudo-public" and "quasi-public," but whatever one chooses to call them, it remains that these spaces are neither fully private nor fully public.

The atmosphere of such places often looks and feels much more open and "public" than it actually is. This is no accident. Usually areas of commercial activity,

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[24] Banerjee, 2001. 12.

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these spaces are designed be reminiscent of the traditional public spaces which tend to dominate the popular imagination's ideal of "publicness" (which is often based on heavily romanticized or nostalgic images). While their relatively porous boundaries provide for an increased accessibility, they are not available to everyone. One must generally be a paying patron to enter and subsequently remain on the premises. As long as those present are "well behaved," however, they are normally allowed to linger at their leisure, allowing many to blissfully forget that "access to and use of the space is only a privilege, not a right."[25] After all, these places are free from any evidence of social ills-- other than an intense materialistic consumerism, which is easy enough to ignore-- and do their best to offer a pleasant, consumable, almost-public environment. Thus, privatization is, as one might expect, a major factor behind the blurred lines and gray areas between public and private spaces.

How does privatization blur the lines between public and private? After all, the gray area between the two is nothing new. Yet, at this point in time, while

> the traditional role and the fiscal capacity of government have shrunk, the role of the private … [sector] has increased … privatization-- the 'commodification' of public goods and the emergence of local governments as entrepreneurs-- seems to be the order of the day.[26]

In the past few decades, one can see a general trend in municipal governments relinquishing their duties to provide and foster the public realm and allowing private developers to build quasi-public spaces. In effect, market forces have come to dictate the types of spaces provided. These are, quite frequently, those where consumption is the dominant pastime. The result of this "combination of public and private uses has struck critics as *submerging* public place to private markets. It takes to an extreme the

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[25] Ibid. 12.
[26] Ibid. 9-10.

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liminality between public and private urban spaces."[27]   In effect, by forcing public and private spaces to coexist, it becomes increasingly difficult to differentiate between the two in the modern city. The problem created by such a situation is not the ambiguity of the space in question but that, despite their superficial resemblance, these spaces are not public and, legally, remain fully private and exclusive.

Given those qualities of publicness listed above, one can see the detrimental effects privatization can have on the public realm, as "The privatization of public space gradually undermines the feeling that people of different classes and cultures live in the same world. It separates citizens from each other and decreases the opportunities for recognizing commonalities and accepting differences,"[28] which affects both public spaces and society itself.

Closely related to privatization is the second concept extracted from the literature, social control. Certain physical aspects in the design of public spaces are created to encourage certain activities and to discourage others. Such effects of design are evident in all types of space. While more pronounced in privatized public spaces (as one might expect), they are also readily visible in fully public spaces owned by the state or municipal government. Such is the distinction "between *representational space…* and *representations of space*," the former being "appropriated, lived space; space-in-use" and the latter being "planned, controlled, ordered space."[29]   The difference is found, above all, in the extent to which a space is designed to control social activity. Although there are numerous reasons behind this trend, such measures can be traced back to the visibility of certain activities and behaviors which offend the sensibilities of the dominant social groups. While some are

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[27] Sharon Zukin. "The Urban Landscape." *Designing Cities: Critical Readings in Urban Design.* Alexander R. Cuthbert, ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing. 2003). 184.
[28] Kohn, 2004. 8.
[29] Don Mitchell. "The End of Public Space? People's Park, Definitions of the Public, and Democracy." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*. (Vol. 85, no. 1. 1995). 115.

disquieted by the constant reminders of surveillance in the sweep of cameras and the patrols of security personnel. Yet those… for whom it is designed are willing to suspend the privileges of public urban space to its relative benevolent authority… readily [accepting] nostalgia as a substitute for experience, absence for presence, and representation for authenticity.[30]

Security and other methods of controlling and monitoring behavior reflect a preoccupation found in the literature over the contested nature of public space: the tendency of the privileged classes to keep the "undesirable" marginalized citizens out-of-sight and comfortably out-of-mind. In effect, most encounters with difference are sacrificed for the comfort of paying customers. The socially controlled space "is designed to protect middle-class patrons from the moral confusion that might result from an unmediated confrontation with social difference."[31] Thus, publicness is immediately threatened upon attempting to control it and "contemporary designers of urban 'public' space increasingly accept signs and images of contact as more natural and desirable than contact itself"[32] by conceding to market forces. The accepted compromise is to provide spaces with a superficially pleasant atmosphere.

Appropriation is a pattern related to the two tendencies discussed above. In and of itself, appropriation is a rather common phenomenon. It is the conscious reassignment or designation of something for certain purposes. In the context of public space this is a subject of frequent discussion. When a group appropriates a part or the entirety of a public space, the group generally has a specific desire to use the space for a particular activity, one which then becomes the dominant activity of the space. A public space becomes conducive to appropriation in that it "does not refer too outspokenly to an

[30] J. Goss. "The 'Magic of the Mall': An Analysis of Form, Function, and Meaning in the Retail Built Environment." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*. (Vol. 83, no. 1. 1993). 29-30.
[31] Peter Jackson. "Domesticating the Street: The Contested Spaces of the High Street and the Mall." *Images of the Street: Planning, Identity and Control in Public Space*. Nicholas R. Fyfe, ed. (New York: Routledge. 1998). 178.
[32] Mitchell, 1995. 120.

unequivocal goal, but that it still permits interpretation, so that it will take on its identity through usage."[33]   Somewhat implicit and not often directly discussed is the appropriation of quasi-public spaces. The sequence of events is similar, but perhaps more fleeting, as those involved in appropriating the space can be easily expelled, given its ultimately private character. Nonetheless, this type of appropriation is readily observable in a variety of places and is achievable due to that gray area between public and private.

This gray area is described as "loose space" by one recent publication[34] and becomes defined by appropriation "by citizens to pursue activities not set by a predetermined program."[35] Once again, the importance of people in urban spaces is highlighted, "as people use these spaces, they also become representational spaces, appropriated in use."[36] When a site is appropriated for alternative activities, they sometimes occur "along with the primary, intended uses, as on the sidewalk, in the street or in the plaza," but before this becomes possible, "people themselves must recognize the possibilities inherent in [a space] and make use of those possibilities for their own ends, facing the potential risks of doing so."[37] The risks can range from expulsion to arrest, but are more immediate in quasi-public spaces.

In addition, appropriation implies collective activity[38] stemming from shared interests, an important characteristic of the public sphere and a resulting quality of public space. That appropriation is done by a group of people and very rarely, if ever, by a single individual is important. It is easy to see how fully public spaces are appropriated,

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[33] Herman Hertzberger. *Lessons for Students in Architecture*. (Rotterdam: Uitgeverij 010 Publishers. 1991). 152.
[34] *Loose Space: Possibility and Diversity in Urban Life*. Karen A. Franck and Quentin Stevens, eds. (New York: Routledge. 2007).
[35] Karen A. Franck and Quentin Stevens. "Tying Down Loose Space." Ibid. 29.
[36] Mitchell, 1995. 115.
[37] Franck and Stevens, 2007. 2.
[38] Bernardo Jiménez-Domingues. "Urban Appropriation and Loose Spaces in the Guadalajara Cityscape." *Loose Space: Possibility and Diversity in Urban Life*. Karen A. Franck and Quentin Stevens, eds. (New York: Routledge. 2007). 99.

as they are supposedly available to all and are thus more readily subject to an interpretation of possibility.

What about the appropriation of quasi-public spaces? Such spaces allow for themselves to be treated as "public spaces" by doing their best to create an illusion that they can be appropriated. In the privatized world of consumption spaces, one's "'free' time spent 'informally'… has in fact been carefully scripted to provide a simulation of the variety and spontaneity of the real city, while encouraging consumption and eliminating other distractions,"[39] allowing very little room for the unprompted encounters more easily found among the diversity of the open public space. An aseptic version of public life is thus packaged and sold, suggesting the desirability of public life while also implying to its visitors that the unmanaged public realm outside is dirty, unsafe and not worth visiting. People are permitted to gather in these spaces, albeit not for many reasons too far removed from consumption. In quasi-public spaces, there is nothing allowing for appropriation to occur "in both directions" between the city and the group. It does not allow for the creation of "a completely different space, a space of closeness and social relatedness that goes beyond purely consumer relations."[40] If the appropriation of public space is the exercise of what Henri Lefebvre famously called a "right to the city,"[41] then the illusory appropriation of privatized spaces creates a mockery of the very ideals after which they are modeled. There is no right to use in consumer spaces-- only the privilege of gaining entrance and lingering with the intent to purchase.

Appropriation is contained through the standardization and consumption of space. The result of privatization and social control is "that the communal activities which were once a defining feature of place have become geographically fragmented, and

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[39] Franck and Stevens, 2007. 24.
[40] Jiménez-Domingues, 2007. 111.
[41] Henri Lefebvre. "The Right to the City." *The Blackwell City Reader*. Gary Bridge and Sophie Watson, eds. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers. 2002 [1967]).

communities are now defined as much by common interest as by common location."[42] In effect, then, the qualities of publicness-- accessibility, collective ownership and interaction with others-- are being undermined by these two trends. Perhaps even more worrisome is that, while these alternative spaces become the preferred venues for activities which are equally possible or better enjoyed in fully public spaces, it is more than likely that there is insufficient or underutilized public space elsewhere in a given city.

<p style="text-align:center">* * * * *</p>

To revisit the working definition articulated at the beginning of this chapter, a "public space" is a place which is reserved for the purposes of a collective composed of individuals-- individuals who may use such a place for their own personal reasons or for a group of people who may use such a place for purposes particular to themselves or more universally relevant to the community as a whole. Yet, a more important implication of such a place is that neither group nor individual may infringe upon the right of others to use it.

The definition can now be read as incorporating the qualities of accessibility, collective ownership and interaction with others. Appropriation is similarly implied, but one can see how privatization and social control threaten the ideal of publicness. While it would be unfair to hold all public spaces up to this ideal, it is nonetheless worth maintaining that a public space must contain some measure of these characteristics although sometimes they go largely unrealized.

The next chapter will introduce Managua and its public spaces in order to set the stage for an application of these concepts to the city. Following the overview of Managua, the research questions will be answered through a discussion and analysis of the relationship between these patterns and Managua's public spaces.

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[42] Edward Relph. "Modernity and the Reclamation of Place." *Dwelling, Seeing, and Designing: Toward a Phenomenological Ecology.* D. Seamon, ed. (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press. 1993). 32.

CHAPTER 3: Managua: Context and Sites Studied

The capital city of Managua stretches along the southern shore of *Lago Xolotlán* (also known as Lake Managua) in east-central Nicaragua and sprawls south into the hot and dusty landscape of this country (see Map 1). This city, which was once considered the modern jewel of Central America, continues to grow despite a tumultuous and unfortunate history.

Map 1: Nicaragua and its major cities.[43]

To briefly outline the events contributing to Managua's present condition, one should go back as far as 1851 when the city was chosen as a compromise capital after years of alternating between Léon and Granada, the capital cities for the liberal and conservative national governments, respectively. A minor town at that point in time, the seismic activity which lay underneath was as of yet unknown.[44] In 1931 the first major earthquake leveled the small city, which was rebuilt only to be consumed by fire in 1936.[45] It was again rebuilt. During the period from 1937 to 1979, Nicaragua fell under the dictatorship of General Anastasio Somoza García and his son Luís Somoza Debayle,

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[43] Map Source: The CIA World Factbook. Available at: https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/nu.html.

[44] Dennis Rodgers. "'Disembedding' the City: Crime, Insecurity and Spatial Organization in Managua, Nicaragua." *Environment & Urbanization*. (Vol. 16, no. 2. October 2004). 115; David L. Wall. "City Profile: Managua." *Cities*. (Vol. 13, no. 1. 1996). 45.

[45] Wood and Berman, 2005. 27.

which helped to develop the city into the most modern metropolis of Central America.[46] For instance, it was under this regime that Managua built its international airport, gained a municipal water supply system and was linked to the Pan-American Highway. In 1972, however, it was leveled by a second earthquake. Thousands died and the city was crippled. The scars left by this disaster can still be seen in Managua today.[47] The fear of future seismic activity has prevented much of the historic center from becoming much more than a ghost town. Additionally, the redevelopment of Managua followed the lines of the interested and very partial government spreading the city outward and developing outlying properties owned by the Somoza family and friends.[48]

Political change did come in 1979 with the socialist Sandinista revolution, which caused most of the wealthy elite of Managua to flee for the United States. Unfortunately, however, the Sandinista government was never fully able to implement its progressive policies-- among which can be found an ambitious redevelopment strategy for Managua-- due to the subsequent civil war with the U.S.-backed *Contras* ("counterrevolutionaries").[49] As time and money were diverted to this war effort, the country fell into a steady decline. Political change came yet again in 1990 when the Sandinistas met an electoral defeat. With the advent of a more moderate national government, many of those under self-imposed exile in the United States returned, along with their wealth, to a government eagerly willing to cater to their needs and wishes.[50]

The urban form of Managua embodies this distinct history. For this and other reasons, researchers have tended to focus on the effects of the Somoza family dictatorship, Nicaragua's civil war, the Sandinista era and subsequent regime change in 1990, political corruption, crime and the earthquake of 1972. The spatial qualities of the

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[46] Ibid. 30; Wall, 1996. 47.
[47] Rodgers, 2004. 115; Wall, 1996. 48-49.
[48] Doreen Massey. "Nicaragua: Some Reflections on Socio-Spatial Issues in a Society in Transition." *Antipode*. Vol. 18. 1986. 322; Wall, 1996. 48-49.
[49] Wall, 1996. 49.
[50] Ibid. 50; Rodgers, 2005. 115-116.

city emerge from a survey of these investigations, revealing some of the sources responsible, in part, for the current condition of the city's public spaces. One author notes that, rather than following the current trend of building gated communities (also known as "fortified enclaves"), the privileged classes of Managua have not entirely isolated themselves from the surrounding city. Instead, he argues, the elites have been recently building a sort of "fortified network" connecting various private and protected areas within the city in order to provide for more security and comfort, a strategy which relies heavily upon the automobile and an improved highway system.[51] Understandably, the phenomenon of the "fortified network" adds another dimension to the already frequent interruptions found in Managua's urban fabric.

Various descriptions of Managua agree upon the effects of its haphazard urban fabric, calling it "'*la ciudad del caos*'"-- a chaotic city-- one "with '*no centre, no skyline and no logic*.'"[52] Statistically, Managua's population density reflects this disorder, being one of the lowest "of any Third World city. Its physical expanse is equal to Caracas, Venezuela, a city with almost seven times the population of Managua."[53] One rather creative illustration compared the strange characteristics of Managua to a "deformed octopus… the octopus's body [being] riddled with gaping holes," as the growth of the city over recent decades has spread outward along transportation arteries while leaving the historic center, among other areas, largely vacant (see Map 2).[54] Indeed, the historic center and plaza have been largely abandoned since the earthquake of 1972. Despite a central concentration of some governmental buildings with some symbolic value, the city seems to lack a well-defined nucleus where Managuans from all walks of life will cross paths. Due to this reality, most of the literature particular to Latin American public

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[51] Rodgers, 2004.
[52] Qtd. in Ibid. 115.
[53] Wall, 1996. 49. (The current population of Managua is approximately 1.5 million).
[54] Ibid. 48-49.

spaces cannot fully apply to Managua. Nevertheless, Nicaragua still possesses many of the social characteristics seen in other Latin American countries.

Map 2: The city of Managua. The green areas are the largely vacant tracts of land, the blue lines signify the major arterial roads.[55]

Plazas, like most public spaces, can provide a spatial representation of society and social hierarchy, allowing a variety of interactions and activities. The typical Latin American plaza is generally a large, paved quadrilateral-shaped space, enclosed on one side by a church and on the other sides by various buildings (often commercial in nature and sometimes with political significance), frequently incorporating an arcade. Historically, Latin American cities grew out from plazas which were both geographical and political centers. Such areas have had numerous uses over time and are consistently sites imbued with symbolic and social meaning. Despite Managua's overall lack of formal plazas, the traditional public spaces of Latin American cities, this statement still holds true. Indeed, this statement is relevant to most types of public spaces in most cultures. One must simply substitute the word "plaza" with "public space." The complexities of any city, including Managua, suggest that the sum total of public spaces

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[55] Map Source: "Rica Nica Travel and Tourism." Available at:
http://www.ricanica.com/NICARAGUA/Managua/managua.htm.

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throughout the city also represent society and social hierarchy en masse, as they necessarily attract different persons from all walks of life. As singular locations, however, the central gathering points should demonstrate this reality to a greater degree, as they operate on the city-wide scale, having the potential to attract all citizens to what should be the principal focus and symbolic heart of the city.

Yet, precisely because of its unique and disorderly form, "there is still quite visible public space in Managua which is organized… as a series of neighborhoods or *barrios* that open into a central open space, that serves as a local plaza. Here people play, converse, discuss…"[56] Without denying the existence of smaller, neighborhood public spaces, the relative lack of centralized public spaces in Managua also becomes conspicuous as there are plenty of centrally-located spaces which function as substitutes-- either in full or in part-- for the traditional, centralized plaza. Thus, there is a different spatial representation of society and social hierarchy present in Managua which is no less significant in the broader discussion of public spaces.

The "fortified network" described above serves the upper classes of society while contributing to the overall commotion of the city. Yet, the various nodes within this network have employed private security companies in order to provide the safety desired by those included in this sphere of society.[57] The exclusive nature and limited accessibility of this network suggest the relevance of the themes of this report. The "fortified network" was created as a solution-- albeit for a small stratum of people-- to the socio-economic realities of Managuan society. The themes presented in the previous chapter-- privatization, social control through design and appropriation-- are all related to the larger trends and patterns in development around Managua, the "fortified network" being the most visible and relevant example for the purposes of this report.

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[56] Randy Martin. "Nicaragua: Theater and State without Walls." *Social Text*. (No. 18, Postmodernism. Winter, 1987-1988). 93.
[57] Rodgers, 2004.

With one exception, the six sites chosen for the purposes of this discussion are centrally located in the context of Managua's sprawling urban fabric. One of the divided highways that cuts across the city, known popularly as *La Carretera a Masaya* (but also as the *Avenida Rubén Darío*, *Avenida de las Naciones Unidas* at different stretches), serves as the north-south axis at the core of Managua. This route stretches south from below the small, central hill (*La Loma de Tiscapa*) which holds in its crater the *Laguna de Tiscapa*. North of this lagoon, at the end of another highway, *Avenida Bolivar*, on the shore of Lake Managua, is the *Centro Histórico* ("historic center") of the city. On the other hand, the *Centro Nuevo*-- or "new center"-- is located south of the *Loma de Tiscapa*, where *La Carretera a Masaya* intersects with the *Pista de la Resistencia* at the *Rotonda Rubén Darío*. This roundabout serves as a gateway to the new center of Managua and on it are located both *Metrocentro* and *La Esso*. Further along the *Carretera a Masaya*, in one of the neighborhoods of this new center, is *Zona Hippos*. Between these two "centers" of Managua, on the hilltop, is a national park known as the *Parque Histórico Loma de Tiscapa*. The final site of study is another roundabout on the eastern side of the city, known as *Rotonda Bello Horizonte* (see Map 3).

Map 3: The sites studied. *1. El Centro Histórico*; *2. Parque Histórico Loma de Tiscapa*; *3. Zona Hippos*; *4. Rotonda Bello Horizonte*; *5. Metrocentro*; *6. "La Esso."*[58]

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[58] Map Source: "Rica Nica Travel and Tourism." Available at: http://www.ricanica.com/NICARAGUA/Managua/managua.htm.

These six sites provide a diverse cross-section of Managua's public spaces. The five types of spaces represented by these sites include the "traditional" Latin American public space (the *Centro Histórico*), a national park (*Parque Histórico Loma de Tiscapa*), two restaurant districts (*Zona Hippos* and *Rotonda Bello Horizonte*), a shopping mall (*Metrocentro*) and, somewhat unexpectedly, a gasoline station (*La Esso*). This list focuses on major public spaces which serve the city as a whole and, for this reason, does not include the smaller, more local parks which can be found in various neighborhoods of Managua. The diversity of types provides a good sample of Managua's urban nodes and of its public spaces in general. Despite the unique character of Managua, the reader will undoubtedly see similarities with other public spaces in cities around the world.

1. *El Centro Histórico*

To begin, then, the once thriving historic center of Managua now finds itself rather isolated from the majority of the city. This area was all but fully leveled by the earthquake of 1972 and left vacant by the peripherally-oriented rebuilding efforts of the Somoza dictatorship. Due to the continued fear of future seismic activity, the same development patterns which have caused the southern expansion of the city and the subsequent naming of a "new center" of Managua have resulted in leading all roads away from this picturesque site along the lakeshore (see Figure 1). Indeed, the central axis of the historic center, *Avenida Bolivar*, is the only major route of entry to and exit from the area.

Figure 1: *Avenida Bolivar* heading south, away from the *Centro Histórico*.

Here, at the northernmost point of Managua, the land slopes gently towards the lake. The few buildings which survived the earthquake and those which were more recently constructed sit within a handful of blocks in one of the few regular grid patterns to be found in Managua. The surrounding streets still contain the ruins of Managua's old center, the neighborhoods now inhabited by squatters despite the structurally unsound condition of many of these old buildings. These neighborhoods are generally considered to be quite dangerous even during the daylight hours. Given the proximity of these districts and the relatively low level of police presence, it should be noted that there is a sentiment among many Managuans that the *Centro Histórico* has little to offer, is ugly and should generally be avoided, especially at night.

While the *Centro Histórico* covers a rather large area and incorporates many distinct public spaces, it remains largely underused. Yet, despite its removed-- although still geographically central-- location, this area must nonetheless be included in this study as it incorporates traditional public spaces that purport to serve the entire city. Included in this expansive site are the *Plaza de la Revolución*, *Plaza de la Fe Juan Pablo II*, *El Malecón*, and the *Teatro Nacional Ruben Darío*.

At the foot of *Avenida Bolivar* is *El Malecón*, a Spanish-American boardwalk, which stretches along the shore. Here, one can find the few services offered in the

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Centro Histórico, mainly small restaurants perched above the banks of the lake and generally frequented by less affluent Managuans. Immediately to the west of the restaurant area is a small amusement park area and to the east can be found a palm-tree lined walkway with benches (see Figures 2 and 3).

Figure 2: The restaurants of the *Malecón* (photo courtesy of David Brown).

Figure 3: The *Malecón* and the lakeshore (photo courtesy of David Brown).

From *Avenida Bolivar*, the restaurants of the *Malecón* are obscured from view by the large stage of the *Plaza de la Fe* ("Faith Plaza"). Built for the visit of Pope John Paul II in 1996, this is little more than a large paved expanse focused on its stage area. Rarely used today except for large gatherings (generally political in nature), the *Plaza de la Fe* has little daily activity (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: The expanse of the *Plaza de la Fe*

Opposite the *Malecón* and across the street from the *Plaza de la Fe* on *Avenida Bolivar* is the *Teatro Nacional* (National Theater). One of the few structures to survive the earthquake, this heavily landscaped and fully gated building remains isolated from the other spaces in this site, despite its rather central location (see Figure 5). Most patrons drive or arrive by taxi and are more than capable of paying the price of admission. Security guards man gates through which is a parking lot-- a visible display of the socio-economic segregation present in Managua, especially when contrasted to *El Malecón* across the street from its main entrance on the north side (see Figure 6). This is, however, one of the few venues in Managua offering cultural events with any regularity, usually matinee and evening performances.

Figure 5: The *Teatro Nacional* standing in splendid isolation…

Figure 6: The façade of the *Teatro Nacional* across the street from and facing the *Malecón*.

Up the slope from the *Malecón* and just south of the *Teatro Nacional* is the *Plaza de la Revolución*. Clustered about this one remaining traditional Latin American public space are the Presidential Palace, the Old Cathedral, a small park and the Palace of Culture and National Library. Yet, although it has some of the important features of a Latin American plaza, it has become an ill-defined area where pedestrian use is impeded by many decorative obstacles. Rather than large, paved expanse open to many uses, there are geometrically-aligned pathways enclosed by shrubbery and patches of landscaping which limits its usability. The large center is ornamental and largely unusable, as its fountain is encircled by landscaping and surrounded by a low chain fence. Additionally, much of the plaza's periphery is dedicated to automobile traffic, although most vehicles stay on the *Avenida Bolivar*. The grounds of the three surrounding buildings are fenced-off and guarded-- the Presidential Palace and Palace of Culture for security reasons, the Old Cathedral due to its lack of structural integrity following the 1972 earthquake (see Figures 7, 8 and 9). The space does allow for the leisurely passing of time, however, providing various benches a garden-like park on its western edge (with a colorful gazebo and plenty of shady trees) and, despite the few visitors to the area, a handful of food vendors.

Figure 7: The Presidential Palace.

Figure 8: The Palace of Culture and National Library.

Figure 9: The Old Cathedral.

It would be possible to examine each of the above sites on their own merits. Given their close proximity and their relationship to each other in forming a district, however, this research project examines them as a larger interconnected whole. By doing so, a more interesting and provocative analysis becomes possible, for together they offer a transect of more traditional public spaces, as well as the common failure of such centralized places in Managua to remain active other than on rare occasions. Furthermore, despite their sporadic use as public spaces, the historic district also reveals that Managua is a stratified city. Even in its most openly public spaces, a sharp contrast between socio-economic levels remains.

2. *Parque Histórico Loma de Tiscapa*

Moving south from the historic center, one comes to the highest point in the city, the *Parque Histórico Loma de Tiscapa*, which sits atop a hill known as the *Loma de Tiscapa* between old and new Managua (see Figure 10). This park links the "two Managuas"-- old and new-- geographically and, more importantly, forms both a historic and a symbolic bridge. Yet, at the same time, this park provides another example of an underutilized public space.

Figure 10: The *Parque Histórico Loma de Tiscapa* as seen from *Metrocentro*.

Its topography removes it from the rest of the city, the steep slope rarely being negotiated by foot-- taxis and private automobiles are the predominant mode of access after paying a small entrance fee at the bottom of the hill. Features of its physical design further compound this isolation. The park is gated and guarded by military personnel and has strict hours of operation.

Upon arrival, one recognizes the suitability of the site for a national park, as the panoramic of Managua from the various playgrounds, grassy areas and benches is impressive (see Figure 11). Perhaps for the same reasons, Somoza himself found it a fitting place for a presidential mansion, the ruins of which can be found down along the slope. Rising from the center of the park at the crest of the hill is a silhouetted statue commemorating the national hero, Augusto César Sandino (see Figure 12), at the foot of

which are the toppled remains of an equestrian statue of Somoza, two makeshift tanks from the Sandinista period and, nearby, one will find a statue commemorating the fallen revolutionaries. Also present in this park are a small snack stand and the "canopy tour." The latter is a tourist attraction consisting of a "zip line" ride in which visitors are harnessed to a mechanism which speeds them along the length of a cable extending from the top of the hill to the other side of the *Laguna de Tiscapa*. This recreational attraction tends to be less popular with local visitors, however, as most come to the park to picnic, relax or to play with their children.

Figure 11: The panoramic view of the *Centro Histórico* from the *Parque Histórico Loma de Tiscapa*.

Picture 12: The Statue of Sandino at the center of the park.

In addition to its isolated nature-- both in its geography and design-- the *Parque Histórico* is rendered even more restrictive by its strict rules and guidelines for behavior, which are deliberately posted throughout this public space (see Figure 13). Indeed, this is one of the few public spaces studied where the rules are explicitly posted (and with frequency). The rules are generally well respected, probably due to the conspicuous

presence of security personnel in the park. In addition, the types of users tend to contribute to the overall tranquility of the spot as it is frequented by tourists, young couples and families.

Figure 13: The strictly enforced and frequently posted rules of the *Parque Histórico Loma de Tiscapa*.

3. *Zona Hippos*

Just west of the *Carretera a Masaya* (and south of *Rotonda Rubén Darío*) is a tangle of streets housing a number of restaurants. Located in the *Centro Nuevo* of Managua, the surrounding areas are primarily commercial, although there are some residential neighborhoods south of these seven large restaurants (one of which is the eponymous establishment of the area). The urban fabric here lends itself well to a restaurant district, as the streets are narrow and not arranged in a strict grid pattern. Also present in this area is a small paved square on the corner of one intersection and a lush park. The latter goes largely unused, however, while the former has been overtaken by an adjoining restaurant which, in turn, has undertaken the responsibility for its upkeep (see Figures 14 and 15).

Figure 14: The underused park at the center of *Zona Hippos* (photo courtesy of David Brown).

Figure 15: The small corner plaza in *Zona Hippos* (photo courtesy of David Brown).

As a restaurant district, *Zona Hippos* is a public space in the sense that it offers a vibrant street life near a hub of activity. Although not the finest example of "café culture," it does offer one of the few examples Managua provides for such a scene. The physical design of the restaurants offers ample street-level seating adjacent to the sidewalk, but these restaurants have constructed fences along the perimeters of their terraces, creating a rather obvious barrier between the more well-heeled patrons and the sporadic foot traffic of those visitors from the informal sector (see Figures 16 and 17). In addition, its central location serves as a shortcut for traffic, with many vehicles passing

through the area. During the busy hours, the street parking provides an extra buffer from the busy street.

Figure 16: The terrace of the *Marea Alta*, a restaurant in *Zona Hippos* (photo courtesy of David Brown).

Figure 17: The eponymous restaurant of *Zona Hippos* (photo courtesy of David Brown).

Despite the tourists and younger, more well-to-do student crowd which tends to characterize the clientele of these restaurants, the area does have some social diversity. *Zona Hippos* is an obvious choice for those working in the informal sector, such as street peddlers selling cigarettes and gum, the typical panhandler and small groups of children performing traditional Nicaraguan dances, complete with costume, for spare change. Yet, in general, the lively nighttime atmosphere maintains a sense of decorum, perhaps to

ensure the comfort of the keeping the wealthier patrons while keeping the others moving along.

4. *Rotonda Bello Horizonte*

The one geographical exception to the six public spaces under study is located farther to the east, far from the more central axis along which the other sites are found. The *Rotonda Bello Horizonte* was one of the first roundabouts constructed in Managua. Located at a busy intersection, it is at the center of a popular restaurant and commercial district known throughout the city (see Figure 18). While perhaps a logical turn of events considering this roundabout's location amidst a more densely-populated area of the city-- in contrast to the *Rotonda Rubén Darío--* there is little evidence of any effort to accommodate these activities. Particularly on weekend evenings, one side of the *Rotonda Bello Horizonte* is filled with restaurant and bar patrons who come not only to socialize, but also to hear and perhaps buy a song from one of the many mariachi bands which have found a venue here.

Figure 18: The commercial strip stretching east from *Rotonda Bello Horizonte*.

Similar to *Zona Hippos*, the *Rotonda Bello Horizonte* benefits from its proximity to both commercial and residential areas. Insofar as its physical layout is concerned, however, it is much less formal in design. Managua's urban fabric lends itself well to the clustering of activity at its roundabouts, which are at most major intersections. The *Rotonda Bello Horizonte*, however, is an interesting example of the general commercial

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activities which tend to dominate such sites and a sort of organic "café culture." There are services surrounding the entire area, including a gasoline station, an ice cream stand and a shoe store, as well as national and international restaurant chains (see Figure 19). The main attractions of this *rotonda*, the open-air restaurants and nightclub, however, are clustered on one portion of the circle. Centrally located on this small strip is the most popular restaurant and bar, *Los Idolos*, where the mariachis congregate (see Figures 20 and 21). The chaotic atmosphere created by the many competing bands is intensified by the minimal building setbacks and narrow sidewalks onto which spills seating for the clients.

Figure 19: Other establishments near *Rotonda Bello Horizonte*.

Figure 20: The always-popular *Bar-Pizzeria Los Idolos*.

Figure 21: A Mariachi trio waiting for the night to begin.

The informality in design and the seemingly organic quality of the scene lend themselves nicely to an enjoyable chaos, an atmosphere much more affable to social diversity. While similar to *Zona Hippos* in services offered, the *Rotonda Bello Horizonte* is a livelier environment and the scene here lasts later into the evening. One factor contributing to this characteristic is the noticeable lack of security personnel and policemen. The proximity of the buildings and public street area attracts peddlers and panhandlers, who are generally tolerated unless seen harassing the restaurants' guests, in which case a doorman will generally handle the situation, sometimes roughly. *Rotonda Bello Horizonte* also differs from *Zona Hippos* in its patrons, being frequented by a more middle-aged and generally middle-class clientele-- and, in contrast to the other five sites, it also hosts fewer tourists.

5. *Metrocentro*

The *Rotonda Rubén Darío*, which serves as an entrance to the *Centro Nuevo* of Managua, also finds itself as the focal point for much commercial activity-- but of a much different sort than the *Rotonda Bello Horizonte*. The most visible complex at this intersection is a gated shopping center known as *Metrocentro* (see Figure 22). While nothing more than the typical, privately-owned mall housing both national and

international stores, it has nonetheless become a popular gathering place. Managua is far less densely populated in this area than in others. North of *Metrocentro* is the "New Cathedral" of Managua, the *Catedral de la Inmaculada Concepción de María*, its large entryway and grand palm tree-lined pedestrian walkway framing a direct view of *Metrocentro*'s main entrance. While its location on a major roundabout certainly makes *Metrocentro* accessible as an urban node, the design and physical layout of its property remove it from the surrounding fabric.

Figure 22: The view of the *Centro Nuevo* from *Parque Histórico Loma de Tiscapa* (photo courtesy of David Brown).

Metrocentro is raised above the street level; a retaining wall topped by a fence is the façade presented to its surroundings and to the two major streets bordering its north and west sides. Between this barrier and the mall is a large parking lot. The formal entrance to the complex is surrounded by very few entrances to individual stores. Again, the design of this site is typical of most North American-style suburban shopping malls (see Figure 23). Some effort has been made to giving it a more Latin American feel, given the adobe-type structure of the exterior and the arcade flanking the main entrance (although this walkway is less than authentic, given the few storefronts found on this exterior).

Figure 23: *Metrocentro*'s front entrance.

The exclusivity created by these physical characteristics is fully intentional and creates a space of social homogeneity, welcoming those of means and excluding all others. This social reality is particularly striking when considering the popular market opposite *Metrocentro*'s main entrance, which caters to the underprivileged classes. It is serviced not by parking lots, but by a bus stop (see Figure 24). Although not a "public space" in the traditional sense, it serves as a popular node in the city and it is here that many choose to pass the time shopping, eating, strolling or simply people watching. *Metrocentro* is also popular across age groups, as groups of high school and university students, young couples and families can be found here.

Figure 24: The scene immediately outside *Metrocentro*'s fences.

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6. *"La Esso"*

Also located at the *Rotonda Rubén Darío* is the final and most unusual of the "public spaces" studied. As its name suggests, it is nothing more than an Esso brand gasoline station. The surrounding area is largely commercial, given its proximity to the *Carretera a Masaya* and the *Centro Nuevo*. These activities become more concentrated south of the roundabout. West of here, along *Pista Juan Pablo II*, there is a sharp drop in activity as residential neighborhoods overtake the streets to the south and two universities, *La Universidad de Centroamerica* (UCA) and *La Universidad Nicaragüense de Ingeniería* (UNI), occupy large areas to the south and north of this thoroughfare, respectively.

Although this Esso station has become a popular hangout, there is nothing extraordinary about its physical characteristics. It is exceptional, perhaps, in that its asphalt covers much more space than the typical gasoline station. This rather deep, somewhat sloping lot allows for an unobstructed view of an illuminated fountain at the center of *Rotonda Rubén Darío*. Regardless of the pleasant aesthetic created by this fountain amid the hubbub of nighttime traffic, *La Esso* has probably become a node of activity primarily because of its centrality and twenty-four hour services, including the sale of alcohol. Coupled with an ample amount of parking, it is easy to see why evening tailgate parties are frequent, despite the clearly posted rules prohibiting them (see Figure 25).

Figure 25: The blatantly disregarded rules posted in the parking lot of *La Esso*.

The social diversity in this space seems to be directly related to the time of day. While it becomes a "public space" later in the evening, it also functions as a node of activity during other times of the day. Aside from the usual sale of gasoline and convenience store offerings, the sit-down fast food restaurant inside is a popular lunchtime spot. Although the nighttime parking lot gatherings are largely unpoliced, there are private security guards who prevent the raucous activities from moving indoors. The nighttime crowd is generally composed of well-dressed twenty-somethings gathering for the evening before heading to one of the popular clubs in this area of Managua. They usually vacate the premises in the small hours after midnight, often with some encouragement from the police (although the information gathered suggests that few arrests are ever made).

<div align="center">* * * * *</div>

These six sites provide only a partial transect of Managua's public spaces. Yet, they share the complexity characterizing urban public spaces in other contexts. The three themes discussed earlier can all be seen in these examples, often evident in the same spaces. The next chapter discusses these sites along thematic lines in order to help in the larger analysis of Managua's public spaces.

CHAPTER 4: Discussion and Analysis

The six sites of this study were introduced in a geographical sequence. The discussion now examines them vis-à-vis the three analytical themes of privatization, social control and appropriation discussed in the literature review. The overlapping qualities of these three themes result in a subjective grouping of the public spaces, as each theme is applicable to each site. The aim is to offer useful "lenses" through which the public spaces of Managua can be better understood. In this analysis, each site is examined through the lens most pertinent to its characteristics. While not exhaustive, this approach helps to ground the qualitative nature of the data collected. This will aid in understanding the public spaces in terms of the forces affecting them in Managua today, better equipping the discussion to answer the questions of this report.

"*¡Estás en el corazón de la ciudad!*" proclaims a banner outside of *Metrocentro*, welcoming those on the *Rotonda Rubén Darío* to the *Centro Nuevo* of Managua and telling them, excitedly, that they are in "the heart of the city." In most Latin American cities, one would probably expect a large, traditional plaza surrounded by colonial architecture and public buildings to be somewhere nearby.[59] As mentioned, this is not the case in Managua. Instead, this banner welcomes the citizenry to a heavily manicured commercial corridor. Private establishments deny the street outside and are either physically fortified or employ security personnel. The ability to leisurely stroll through *Metrocentro* or to enjoy a meal or drink at one of *Zona Hippos*' establishments is a luxury afforded only to those of certain means.

While *Metrocentro* forces people to self-select themselves before entering, *Zona Hippos* has more difficulty in providing a socially homogeneous environment. Panhandlers, street performers and others are allowed to pass through the public streets and to linger briefly. They are, however, driven away by security guards should they

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[59] These basic guidelines, among many others, were articulated in the *Laws of the Indies* under King Philip II of Spain.

approach the clientele too directly. The physical boundaries between the private establishments and the sidewalk are low enough to provide a sort of "café culture," but is deep enough to dissuade the realities of a socio-economically stratified public to extend a hand for some spare change. The public quality of *Zona Hippos* is thus somewhat superficial and privatized. Café culture belongs under the umbrella of public space by providing a venue for social gathering and interaction oriented towards sidewalk and the street. Due to the juxtaposition of relatively stationary activity with the constant movement of the sidewalk and the street, a café district provides a place for those wanting a more lively experience. To this end, cafés are in the gray area between the strictly public and strictly private. *Zona Hippos* qualifies as a public space and is popular for these reasons. It (and café culture in general) "represents one of the few remaining opportunities for public sociability."[60] At the same time, however, *Zona Hippos* presents a more privatized café culture, undermining "the feeling that people of different classes and cultures live in the same world"[61] by distancing them from each other both physically and symbolically.

In general, those subjects interviewed agreed with what is articulated in the literature. Those who frequent *Metrocentro* and *Zona Hippos* do so because of the obvious presence of security and a general feeling of safety. These spaces are seen as offering clean and pleasant atmospheres offering a variety of activities while remaining conveniently accessible. Most of the negative comments came from younger interviewees and related to the high (and often "dollarized") prices in most stores at *Metrocentro*. Another complaint was that, especially on the weekends, *Metrocentro* is too crowded. The weekend observations confirm this comment, which seems to be a telling sign that there are few other public places which attract the wealthier segment of Managua's population. One respondent noted that *Metrocentro* and *Zona Hippos*-- and

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[60] John Montgomery. "Café Culture and the City: The Role of Pavement Cafés in Urban Public Social Life." *Journal of Urban Design*. (Vol. 2, no. 1. February 1997). 83.
[61] Kohn, 2004. 8.

the *Centro Nuevo* in general-- offer places where people can go to eat, talk and generally enjoy themselves without any real problem. In particular, the same respondent suggested that more places like *Zona Hippos* should be developed as they attract tourists and present a better side of Managua.

While possessing more public qualities than the above two sites, the *Centro Histórico* and the *Parque Histórico Loma de Tiscapa* are nonetheless designed for social control, the second lens of this investigation. The various sites within the *Centro Histórico* have an interesting relationship to one another. The government buildings and facilities are well-distanced from the *Plaza de la Revolución*, heavily gated and manned by security personnel. While understandable due to their function and the area of Managua in which they are located, the layout of this space nonetheless precludes any potential interaction between the buildings (as activity nodes) and the plaza itself due to these features. Yet, this is not the area most frequently visited by those who venture to this removed spot on the lakeshore.

The most powerful example from the *Centro Histórico* is the relationship between the *Teatro Nacional* and the *Malecón*. The two generally cater to the financially privileged and disadvantaged of Managua, respectively. The latter has little visible security and is the most popular and well-used spot of the historic area-- but almost exclusively on weekends-- as the many restaurants, small amusement area and pleasant lake breeze offer a rather lively atmosphere. Similarly, the majority of events held across the street at the *Teatro Nacional* are also clustered on the weekends. While this relationship could offer a fine opportunity for some degree of interaction between two disparate socio-economic groups, such an exchange does not occur. While the façade of the *Teatro Nacional* overlooks the lake, the *Malecón* is obscured from view by the high fences and shrubbery surrounding the theater's perimeter. The guarded open gate is located on the side of the lot farthest away from the *Malecón*, serving those entering the parking lot by automobile or taxicab.

Security is certainly necessary, given the real threat of criminal activity in central Managua, but it is notable that the design of the *Teatro Nacional* completely refuses to engage itself with its surroundings is worthy of note. In this manner, the theater is a socially controlled space not in the building itself, but in its surrounding fortifications, as it "is designed to protect middle-class patrons from the moral confusion" which can result "from an unmediated confrontation with social difference."[62] While justified in charging admission, this publicly-owned theater largely ignores those who comprise the majority of the country's citizenry, who gather just across the street. This seems ironic given the role of this public institution as a stately venue for Nicaragua's performing arts and culture.

In the *Parque Histórico Loma de Tiscapa*, the first people interviewed were park employees. Although they have an understandable bias, it is hard to argue with their claims that there is not a more beautiful spot in Managua. From atop this hill, the vista of Managua presents a green oasis of a city. Few of its problems are visible from above the foliage. Yet, this is an illusion, for the trees are not as thick and lush down below, the leaf cover hiding buildings and streets from above, but providing less shade in most parts of the city than one might imagine. After paying an entrance fee at the gate, one slowly climbs out of the messy city below and enters a tranquil park. Mostly catering to tourists from outside the city, those Managuans who can sometimes do come here on the weekends and it is a spot especially popular with young couples. The playground area is also enjoyed by families with children who agreed that the safety of this area is one of its better qualities. Although everyone interviewed agreed that a mix of people from different classes, age groups and neighborhoods do visit the park, the marginalized members of Managua's population seem conspicuous by their absence.

The *Parque Histórico Loma de Tiscapa*'s role as a national park does not reduce the implications of its existence as a space of social control as evidenced by its heavily

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[62] Jackson, 1998. 178.

fenced-off areas, explicit rules and regulations and the obvious presence of security and military personnel. Despite various contributing geographical factors, one cannot escape the implication that the most prominent site of the capital city displaying national pride is largely inaccessible. Additionally, in contrast to most of the smaller parks around the city, this park closes every evening. Perhaps its symbolic value is the reason why it is so heavily guarded and monitored-- in addition to its historical significance, it is one of the few public areas of the city showcasing a more peaceful and trouble-free Managua than that which actually exists. In this manner, the *Parque Histórico* is an example of Lefebvre's distinction between a "representation of space" rather than a "representational space," [63] as it is consciously planned and ordered beyond its natural geographical features to control behavior and limit access to one of Managua's most significant amenities.

The bar and restaurant area located on *Rotonda Bello Horizonte* provides the first instance of appropriation for this discussion. The small strip of open-air establishments provides for a rather ingenious appropriation of the sidewalk. With patrons already present for food and drink, the spontaneous gathering of mariachi bands in this area flourishes, creating, in the words of one respondent, "a completely different and unique place in the city." There is little regulation of activity near this roundabout, allowing the space to become "loose" and open to such appropriation. While other, more well-guarded international restaurant chains are present across the way, the local bars on its southern side do a brisk business precisely because of their relationship with the street atmosphere created by these performers. There would be little motivation to hinder such activity and the restaurants take it upon themselves to provide doormen who will shoo away any particularly aggressive panhandlers-- otherwise, the hubbub is largely tolerated.

The *Rotonda Bello Horizonte* comes closer to integrating members of different socio-economic groups than the other sites discussed, but its location in the city is also a

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[63] Mitchell, 1995. 115. (An application of key concepts from Lefebvre's *The Production of Space*).

telling sign of Managua's overall disintegration. This roundabout is not situated on the axis of the *Carretera a Masaya* where the vast majority of Managua's current development is focused. By virtue of its location, it is both more accessible to surrounding middle-class neighborhoods and well connected to the transportation network. Its counterpart in the *Centro Nuevo*, *Zona Hippos*, is a decidedly less diverse, more controlled environment catering to those with means. While the *Rotonda Bello Horizonte* remains a site oriented towards consumption, it is less discriminating and its popularity across social strata is due in part to it being a more chaotic environment with fewer affectations. The *Rotonda Bello Horizonte* is not regularly frequented. It seems to be reserved more as an occasional indulgence, yet its widespread attraction suggests a desire for exposure to the less neat and tidy, more publicly inclusive public space. Its popularity demonstrates that

> … entering public space is [not] like eating your vegetables: something you do because it is good for you… public spaces can be attractive, vital, and fun. They are desirable places that most people cannot afford to provide for themselves or places that they prefer to share with others.[64]

The *Rotonda Bello Horizonte* certainly provides a unique experience which does not distance itself from the surrounding city. An inclusive public space does not necessarily imply a chaotic environment, but in Managua there are few other such places where a truly public experience can be found. The calmer examples are those privatized and heavily controlled sites of the *Centro Nuevo* where the atmosphere is sterilized. It is difficult to say whether or not Managuans would gather in a more tranquil version of *Rotonda Bello Horizonte*, perhaps here "the spectacle of 'the public' dissolves into public spectacle"[65] and nothing more. Yet, it seems that, given certain provisions of

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[64] Kohn, 2004. 190.
[65] Mitchell, 1995. 123.

accessibility and amenity, such places would flourish in Managua if only because there are presently so few.

La Esso provides an unexpected and interesting contrast to the other public spaces in this study. In the astute words of one taxi driver, "*¿La Esso? Ah, sí, la nueva cantina. Ja ja ja.*" While jocular in tone, when this man described "*La Esso*" as "the new bar," he was not only referring to the drinking which occurs in its parking lot, but also to its newfound role; the parking lot has come to be appropriated by those looking for a place to meet. While these groups of young revelers are generally chased away by the police in the hours after midnight, they flagrantly disobey the posted rules and regulations of the site during their time there and have truly recognized and used the possibilities presented by the space. Although the gasoline station is a privately-owned space, it becomes quasi-public insofar as affording and permitting this non-sanctioned use. While the activity of this appropriation is singularly centered on drinking and cavorting in the parking lot, this does not belittle its significance. One security guard mentioned that the police generally only stop by to break things up due to concerns over drunk driving. The toleration of such freedom of activity on private property allows the appropriating parties to stake a "territorial claim" on the space, despite its private ownership, establishing its alternative use as a societal convention.[66] While perhaps a temporary phenomenon, as long as this appropriation is not mitigated by the proprietors it can be expected to continue.

<p style="text-align:center">* * * * *</p>

Given the unique history of Managua and the physical features which characterize the city and affect its public spaces, it is now time to examine the research questions posed at the outset of this discussion. The first set of questions focused on established patterns in public space literature, asking: How do the public spaces of Managua illustrate the analytical themes present in the established literature on public space? In particular, how

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[66] Hertzberger, 1991. 14-15.

do the observed patterns of "privatization," social control and appropriation affect this city and its public spaces? The second set of questions focused on the effects of this phenomenon on Managua's society at large: How do Managua's public spaces reflect the larger social patterns of the city? How do these public spaces function in the larger integration and/or disintegration of Managua's population?

These two sets of questions are closely related due to the manner in which public spaces are arranged throughout Managua. It would be redundant at this point to list how Managua's public spaces illustrate the three analytical themes guiding this discussion. Perhaps more insightful is to consider the effects of these patterns on the city in terms of integrative and disintegrative forces. The definitions of "integrative" and "disintegrative" forces presented here are borrowed from a recent paper in which the authors define the two terms as follows:

> Integrative forces-- those that promote equity, social cohesion and community development while respecting the bio-physical environment-- are generally conceived as those introduced on behalf of society or the environment at large. Disintegrative forces-- understood here as those contributing to social polarization, exclusion, and inequitable access to institutional support and opportunity-- are the product of individuals or groups' attempts to secure advantages that are not available to others, often at the direct expense or exploitation of others.[67]

One can readily see how appropriate it is to think of Managua in terms of these two forces, for above all, public spaces are linked to the activities of daily life. In Managua, the daily lives of people from different levels of its social hierarchy rarely come together, in part, because of the very structure of its urban fabric. Managua's jumble of socially and economically disparate neighborhoods, its vacant tracts of land, its low population

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[67] David Brown and Lisa Bornstein. "Whither Managua? Evolution of a City's Morphology." Proceedings of the 42nd ISoCaRP Congress. 2006. 3.

density and sprawling growth patterns are all interconnected by a network of ring roads which serve, at the same time, to further divide the already incoherent urban fabric. Again, the notion of the "fortified network" becomes important, providing a basis for answering the questions posed above. It is around this system of arterial roadways that development is centered. Yet, in trying to exploit this feature, the city is becoming more integrated for a select few while neglecting many others. Indeed,

> An examination of the overall urban form of Managua, its transport links, growth areas, and urban problems suggest that many of the elements that contribute to the re-integration of the city around new axes and commercial centers simultaneously are leading to fragmentation and dis-integration as certain groups, places, and networks operate in distinct 'disembedded' ways.[68]

Given the sprawling character of the city and its disproportionate area-to-population ratio, this contradiction is not altogether inexplicable. The reliance upon vehicular transport combined with a less than adequate public transportation system makes traversing the city a difficult task if one is without private transport or taxi fare. Those without are generally left to proceed by overcrowded bus or on foot in an environment that is less than "pedestrian friendly." Even if such an individual were to visit these sites, it is unlikely that any of the services offered would be within their price range, even if they were to be granted access.

Contrary to what is often said about public spaces and their role in maintaining, at least in part, the ideals of a democratic, egalitarian society freely accessible to all citizens and fostering the interaction of all citizens, the public spaces found in Managua are largely representative of the disintegrative forces present throughout the city. Even in the *Centro Histórico*, where two attractions-- the *Teatro Nacional* and the *Malecón*-- catering to the extremes of the city's socio-economic classes are situated in remarkably close proximity, there is a great symbolic distance created through the design of the area.

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[68] Ibid. 4.

Managua's public spaces contribute to the disintegration of its society by further exacerbating the already profound socio-economic class differences. To a certain extent, this results from the overall urban fabric of the city. On the other hand, however, there is little effort to develop areas too far removed from the *Carretera a Masaya* and the *Centro Nuevo*, or other important arterial roads. This is largely the result of market forces but, in Managua and Nicaragua in general, market forces cannot reflect the desires of the general population, for the elite classes of Managua form a rather small percentage of the population. In catering to their desires, the less accessible, less collectively-oriented and less diverse spaces constitute the majority of centralized development in the city. The result is an extreme pattern "of socio-economic spatial segregation… in which poorer groups and their neighborhoods are dis-articulated from the whole, and made invisible-- physically and symbolically-- to those who frequent newly remade spaces."[69] Indeed, there is little development in Managua which currently offers to alleviate this tendency through the provision of public space and the city becomes more disintegrated than it has to be. Without such spaces, Managua's urban society will flounder, unable to find a sturdy foothold amid the more pervasive sense of physical chaos.

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[69] Ibid. 3.

CHAPTER 5: Conclusions

In considering the atypical nature of Managua in the context of Latin America, this report has looked beyond "traditional" public spaces for expressions of this city's public sphere. While the archetypal Latin American plaza does exist in form, the *Centro Histórico* is no longer central to Managua and lacks a more important characteristic of the plaza: the presence of a vibrant public life. As one can see, Managua does have centrally-located public spaces which function in the daily life of its citizens and have symbolic meaning, despite the relative newness of most areas of this city and notwithstanding its turbulent history.

Managua's public spaces have gone largely overlooked, in favor of other aspects of its recent growth and development. More popular research topics include the effects of the Somoza family dictatorship, Nicaragua's civil war, the Sandinista era and subsequent regime change in 1990, political corruption, crime and the earthquake of 1972. Yet, the spatial qualities of Managua-- and, consequently, the current condition of its public spaces-- directly stem from these historical developments. The discussion of public space in Managua is complementary not only on the physical and spatial level, but also on the less tangible level of public life. All of the events and time periods listed above have led to the delicate state of democracy in Nicaragua. It is therefore useful to consider that, while public spaces do not guarantee democratic society, when left uncompromised by the forces of privatization and social control, they can help it to move forward. It is in such venues that the self-reflective discourse leading to social progress begins. Without it, there is little opportunity for the betterment of society, as the status quo remains intact and will ignore such inconvenient social realities such as socio-economic stratification, political inequality and other democratic concerns.

The results of this investigation entail stating certain caveats. There were innate limitations encountered in conducting the field research alone as opposed to being part of

a project team. Time constraints were also a factor, as only six weeks (during only one season of the year) were allotted for the collection of observational and interview-based data. In favor of maximizing the time spent in the field,[70] contacts with "key informants" were not made and interviews were conducted solely within the sites themselves. The same time constraints led to the selection of what were perceived to be six centrally located public spaces displaying qualities that seemed representative of public spaces in Managua. To compensate for these limitations, however, the analytical framework of this report has been grounded in the current literature on public space. The generalizations made here are not only required for such an approach but also contribute to the goal of understanding Managua as more than simply a parochial case study. For these reasons, this report does not purport to be a fully comprehensive survey of Managua's public spaces. It offers a balanced comprehension of the specificity of Managua as a place and as a city that is typical in ways that inform the more general debate on public space.

The three themes which give structure to this discussion were chosen precisely for these reasons. Privatization, social control and appropriation are of particular interest here as the first two processes demonstrate how current patterns in development threaten public space and the third demonstrates the resoluteness of urban dwellers to congregate despite sometimes lacking appropriate places. Together, however, all three demonstrate the necessity of functional, uncompromised public spaces for the health of a democratic urban society. The young fragility of Managua's democracy is cause for concern, as its public spaces play a vital role in nurturing its growth on the societal level. This is not to say that the established democracies of the world need not pay attention to their cities and public spaces. Indeed, the three analytical themes are most often discussed in these contexts and have striking effects upon such societies.

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[70] Observational data arguably remains the best way to gain knowledge of public spaces. Again, see Whyte, 1988.

In what ways does Managua offer insight in spite of its unique characteristics? Managua is certainly not the only city that has struggled to rebuild after natural disaster. One author considers Managua when surveying modern and vernacular building techniques in earthquake-prone regions of the world; the article cites cities from Europe and Asia, as well as neighboring Latin American capitals such as Mexico City and San Salvador.[71] Another author compares Managua to Chicago.[72] The growth of both cities is constrained by lakes, which contributes to other similarities in spatial arrangement. In considering the basic morphology of Managua, one might be reminded of suburbia. While not strictly subdivided, it nonetheless has a low population density spread amongst large isolated areas connected by its network of arterial roads. In thinking along these lines, Managua's relevance becomes much more than morphological, however. Public space literature frequently considers the analytical themes in question by looking at the difficulties created by suburban development in creating effective public space. Thus, Managua can provide lessons to other cities while also learning much from them in striving to improve its own lot.

In considering more specific possibilities for future research and comparison, there are other places throughout Managua which could be examined for a more comprehensive study. Other roundabouts and intersections could be explored in comparison to *Rotonda Rubén Darío* and *Rotonda Bello Horizonte*. There are also other large, popular malls which serve similar functions to *Metrocentro*, such as the *Plaza Inter* near the *Parque Histórico*. Of course, rather open-ended definition of public space implies certain other possibilities. Managua has many large markets in various parts of the city which, unlike its malls, have local vendors and serve a more common segment of the city's society and serve more general day-to-day needs. Additionally, the bus stations throughout Nicaragua often incorporate markets or encourage increased activity in the

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[71] Randolph Langenbach. "Bricks, Mortar, and Earthquakes: Historic Preservation vs. Earthquake Safety." *APT Bulletin*. Vol. 21, no. 3/4. 1989.
[72] Wall, 1996. 47.

surrounding city blocks. This suggests another possibility for research-- a comparative study of public spaces throughout Nicaragua. Such a project would offer an interesting perspective on Managua, as most other Nicaraguan cities (such as the two former capitals of León and Granada) display exemplary qualities of the Spanish-American city and its public spaces.

A critically important quality of the public realm in both the past and the present is that it almost unfailingly finds compelling venues for its expression, albeit sometimes in less than ideal surroundings. For the time being, Managuans might have to find their public realm in the category of non-traditional public spaces before the urban fabric allows for public spaces that can offer true accessibility, foster interaction among disparate socio-economic groups and create a feeling of collective ownership. Indeed, this is already happening. Managua's citizens are tenacious in both surviving their chaotic city on a day-to-day basis and-- as demonstrated by *La Esso*-- finding creative ways in claiming their "right to the city." In Managua, as elsewhere, the public realm may suffer in not having proper spaces for its full expression, but it will survive despite the forces which currently suppress it.

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