

Oppression & Doing the Right Thing

By Lynda Gabriela Arostegui

The people of Nicaragua have been in “la lucha,” which means “the fight,” since April 19 of this year, when the government voted to change the INSS, which is Nicaragua’s form of social security. The change meant that the people would lose more of their money to the government, which would contribute to corruption. The people did not support this change and in light of the challenge from the people, the government attempted to force university students to demonstrate pro-government support. Much to Ortega and his regimen’s distaste, the students refused. Across the country, the people of Nicaragua have gathered in protest, literally risking their lives. The national police and “la Juventud Sandinista” have been assaulting their own people. The government has been paying for counter-protestors, actively attempting to instill fear, and censoring news outlets. As a result of the unrest, dozens of lives have been lost.

Though the protests were sparked by the change incurred to the pension system, it has become more than that. The people are fighting for their freedom, for their human rights that have been infringed upon since Ortega came into power 11 years ago. Now the people demand change; a fire has been lit inside them and they are fighting for their country. But, it has now been a few weeks, and with each day that goes by more lives are lost--- how and when will this end?

This situation is something that has been filling my mind with thoughts. My family is from Nicaragua. Though my parents have been in the United States for more than 30 years, I still have family there. As a little girl, I would spend my entire summers there with my grandparents. Nicaragua is huge part of identity. Since the protests have begun, I spoke on the phone with my grandmother. As a 90 year-old woman, the streets in Managua, the capital, are no place for her

right now. She has been locked up at home since the uproar began. She told me how they finally had the opportunity to go grocery shopping. She said it was like they were preparing for a hurricane to hit, something she knew I could relate to as this is something I am very familiar with having grown up in Miami, FL. It wasn't until then that the seriousness of what was happening hit me, which filled my mind with a plethora of moral questions. What would I do if I was over there—my actions, my thoughts?

Would I idly sit at home and wait things out while hoping for the best? Would I join the people and bravely fight against the oppressive government? Or would my silence be bought by the oppressive government to ensure the safety of me and my loved ones. Though the current scene in Nicaragua is quite intimidating, I would like to believe I would join in “la lucha”—alongside my aunts, uncles, and cousins. I try my best to fight the good fight, to speak up or take action when things are not as what I would define right or just. Except, doing that here in the United States of America and doing that in the current state of Nicaragua are two very different things. For one, in Nicaragua, people are quite literally risking their lives. There is a drastic difference between protesting in the United States where free speech is protected, and in Nicaragua where the government is oppressing the people and trying to belittle the efforts and discourage the people. This act of containment has turned violent to a degree that would never be reached in the United States. So, although I might feel reasonably safe and empowered when protesting in this country, would I feel safe and empowered in the same way if I was in Nicaragua?

The government in Nicaragua is clearly leading the country in an immoral way and harming its people. This is something that needs to be changed and the direction of the country needs to be changed. Who's responsibility is it to fix this problem? The people running the

government clearly have no concern and no intention of fixing the high levels of corruption because it benefits them. So if the people want to see change they have to fight for it themselves and force it upon their officials—whether or not that is fair, it's the reality. However, does this mean the responsibility falls on each and every citizen? Is it immoral for one not to join the fight? For example, is my grandmother immoral for not physically joining the fight? I do not think it is fair to say so. My grandmother is an elderly woman who has lived a long life and fought her own battles, it is time for the younger generations to step up. She is no longer physically capable, and it is her time to pass on the torch. However, it is important that everyone becomes educated on the issue and support the cause in a way that is reasonable for them, whether it be through verbal support, financial, educational, or other means. Everyone should be able to evaluate their personal situation and figure out a way to contribute in any way that they can.

Though it is not fair that the people of Nicaragua have to fight for their basic human rights, it is the reality. A wrong is being done and it needs to be fixed. Like in the short story examined in class, the people of Nicaragua are currently the child locked away in a closet, and the officials running the country are reaping the benefits of their suffering. Like in *Omelas*, I would have to choose to rescue the child, or in this case, rescue the country. I could not sit and let injustices be done to my own person and that of all those around me. The government is committing immoral acts, and aside from being hypocritical as someone that actively strives to live a moral life, it would be immoral of me to not commit myself to the cause. As humans, we have a social responsibility and that is to protect the social contract. If not the world would be chaos and thus it is in our best interest to protect the contract. Choosing to be complacent is the

same as being involved with government that is breaking the contract, making one immoral. If I have the ability to stand up against it, it is my duty, unless I do not care to live a moral life.

Social responsibility might manifest in different ways. It can vary from person to person given different circumstances and different means. For example, I do not believe my grandmother not actively protesting to be immoral, as the limits of her body do not make this a possibility for her. Another example comes from this past week. The people of Nicaragua that work for the government were forced to go to a manifestation in support of the government. This was the government's attempt to show everyone that they have support and things are "under control." Conversely, the only reason why people showed up is because if not they would have lost their jobs. So, it would not be fair to say the people who went to the manifestation were immoral, because they were being coerced. Matters were out of their control and they were given an ultimatum. In a greater scope, it is also necessary for them to keep their jobs. If not, they could not continue providing for themselves and thus limit their capability to continue in the long-term fight.

In terms of the social contract, I do believe it is our moral obligation to fight immorality. We have agreed to these rules of how to live as humans, so we can live at peace. We agreed to these rules for our own self-interest. We agreed to them so we do not have to live in chaos and fear. In these terms, immorality is considered to be in violation of the rules. If these rules are being broken, then our self-interest is at risk. So if we agreed to follow these rules and agreed anything outside of the rules is immoral, it must be immoral to not protect the contract. But this begs the question to what degree or end? Is it ok to hurt others; what if you are being attacked and need to protect yourself? What if the people in power will not cooperate or do not step down? Is it acceptable to compromise your morals for the greater good?

It is hard to answer these questions, and I think that it is impart because given different scenarios the answer would vary. With questions of this degree, there are multiple factors that have to be weighed. While I feel uncomfortable saying it, I do believe compromising morals for a greater good to be in fact moral itself. If the outcome is a positive one, something that is moral, then as Aristotle would argue, the ends justify the means. The greater good in this situation would be the opposite of the state of the government in power. The greater good is a ruling body that is fair, doesn't exploit its people, and doesn't inflict suffering. Nevertheless, committing immoral acts in the name of the greater good is a slippery slope. An immoral act would only be justified if it is the only way, the only choice left to be made. Choice here is also very important, because choice is relative to a person, their situation, and means or capabilities. For example, if an attempt has been made to get the officials to step down and the government refuses, then the people have no choice but to overthrow it, because, as established, allowing the government to continue abusing its people would be immoral. So, if the only way to stop the abuse entitles aggression and force, it must be done if the choice to be done otherwise has already been given. If the people have tried to be peaceful, it is not their fault the government will not listen.