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Political Caricature to Mobilize Solidarity Through Humor

Pedro Molina

Nicaraguan cartoonist, journalist, and illustrator

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It intends to serve as a platform for testing, circulating, and debating new ideas and reflections on these topics, expanding beyond the geographical, cultural and linguistic boundaries of Latin America - Abya Yala. We hope to contribute to connecting ideas, and to provide a space for intellectual exchange and discussion for a nascent academic community of scholars, devoted to counter-balancing mainstream understandings of development.

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Introduction

Pedro X. Molina is an internationally acclaimed Nicaraguan cartoonist, journalist, and illustrator who was forced into exile in December 2018 following the Nicaraguan government's crackdown on journalists. He now lives and works in the US. You can find out more about his work on Instagram: PxMolinA.

As part of our special issue, we invited Molina to choose a selection of his works to dialogue with our central themes of past and present European-Latin American solidarities, and the role of artifacts therein. Molina has chosen three caricatures for our special issue, which we include over the coming pages. Reflecting on current socio-political affairs such as Nicaraguan authoritarianism, migration to the US, and memories of violence, his work manages to address these issues with sharpness and rigor.

Rather than incorporating extensive interpretations, we wish to leave space for the images to speak for themselves. Below each image is a brief summary by the artist Molina. We invite you to approach these documents of transnational exile in the spirit of this special issue.

¹ Pedro X. Molina is a cartoonist and illustrator from Nicaragua with more than 20 years of experience working for media in Nicaragua and worldwide. His cartoons, caricatures, editorial illustrations, and comics have been printed or published online in many major publications such as Politico, Los Angeles Times, The Washington Post, and Courier International, as well as appearing daily on the exiled Nicaraguan news outlet Confidencial.com.ni. Molina was awarded the 2018 Excellence in Journalism award (category: cartoons) by the Inter-American Press Association. He was forced to flee Nicaragua as a consequence of his activities in 2018. Pedro X. Molina has contributed three cartoons to this special issue.



Figure 1: Yes, Sir. Pedro X. Molina, 2024. Printed with permission of the artist.

The caricature in figure 1 portrays Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega, symbolizing the incongruence of the supposed 'nationalist pride' of the FSLN (Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional, Sandinista National Liberation Front). It highlights the irony of a leadership that claims to defend the country from the influence of foreigners, yet seeks to exploit those same relations for personal and political gain.



Figure 2: Migrant Child. Pedro X. Molina, 2021. Printed with permission of the artist.

This second piece (figure 2) is a cartoon I made when the case of a 10-year-old Nicaraguan child, who was wandering around lost in the Texan desert, went viral on social media². The process of creating this helped me think through the ways migrant-receiving countries such as the US, where I'm residing now, deal with migrant issues. This is especially relevant in the context of the so-called US-Mexican border crisis.



Figure 3: GuerNicaragua. Pedro X. Molina, 2021. Printed with permission of the artist.

² Brito, Christopher: Video shows 10-year-old boy abandoned near U.S. border asking officer for help. April 7, 2021: <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/boy-abandoned-us-mexico-border-officer-help/> (access June 22, 2024)

This last cartoon (figure 3) is a parody of Picasso's famous “Guernica.” I took advantage not only of the proximity of the work's name to that of my country [Nicaragua], but also of the context of civilians living through contexts of armed violence. I added several details of Nicaraguan reality to the original work without altering those that are repeated in both situations, such as the assassination of children. The elements I added include the national Nicaraguan blue-white flag, the ornament-like trees lining the streets of Managua, snipers positioned on top of buildings to shoot unarmed protesters, and the so-called mortero, a type of primitive short gun made from a tube to shoot fireworks upwards.