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Karen Kampwirth

Latin America's New Left and the Politics of Gender

Lessons from Nicaragua

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Latin America's New Left and the Politics of Gender

Lessons from Nicaragua

Introduction

The majority of Latin Americans – citizens of Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Uruguay, and Venezuela – now live in countries that are governed by democratically elected leftist presidents.[1] This is unprecedented. During most of the twentieth century, Latin American leftists were more likely to seek power through arms than through the ballot box. Latin American right-wingers were more likely to torture left-wingers – of the guerrilla or non-guerrilla variety – than to concede elections to them.

This new electoral wave has been called the pink tide, alluding to the seeming force of nature that has led leftist after leftist to win presidential elections starting with the election of Venezuela's Hugo Chávez in 1998. The term pink tide also alludes to the color of this force of nature, not the deep red of the old Marxists, but still tinged with red. A significant literature on the pink tide already exists, mainly seeking to answer the question of why leftists have done so well in elections in the past decade or so.

Scholars have explained the emergence of the pink tide in terms of several factors. Perhaps the most important explanation is simply that the new left-wing politicians are not right-wing politicians. That is, the failures of neoliberalism in the

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generation since the transition to democracy in most Latin American countries have led voters to vote for candidates who condemn neoliberalism (rhetorically though not always in practice), and who identify with some version of the left. Interestingly, voters themselves are not necessarily more leftist, they are simply more willing to give the left a try. By considering how voters identify themselves (rather than looking at electoral outcomes), Marco Morales found that leftists have succeeded electorally despite the fact that "Latin Americans did not show a drastic ideological shift to the left" (2008:21).

Second, international politics has changed. The collapse of the Soviet Union, the end of the cold war, and the US government shifting its focus from Latin America to the Middle East, means that left-wing politicians are freer to run for office, and to govern in the cases when they win, than has ever been true before. Today's elected leftists do not face the sort of violent opposition from the US that Chile's Salvador Allende faced after being elected in 1970, or that Nicaragua's Daniel Ortega faced after being elected in 1984.

Finally, across the region, the past generation has seen the rise of important new social movements that have provided a social base for leftist politicians, including the liberation theology movement, especially in countries like Brazil and El Salvador, indigenous rights groups, especially in Ecuador and Bolivia, economically oriented social movements such as the Landless Movement of Brazil, and the Piqueteros of Argentina, and the second wave feminist movement across the region (on the new left see e.g., Arditti 2008; Barrett et al. 2008; Cameron and Hershberg 2010; Castañeda and Morales 2008; Lievesley and Ludlam 2009; Murillo et al. 2010; Natanson 2008; Panizza 2005).

I ask a different and less often considered question: to what extent have the pink tide governments governed in alliance with, or promoting the interests of, the social movements that form an important part of their base of support? To some extent, this question has been addressed regarding the religious, ethnic, and economic social movements, though these works look more at the contribution that social movements made to leftists' electoral careers, than at the extent to which elected leftists have governed with those social movements (e.g., Almeida 2009; Barrett et al. 2008; Epstein 2009; Hammond 2009; Lievesley and Ludlam 2009; Prashad and Ballvé 2006; Selverston-Scher 2001; Vergara-Camus 2009; Wolff 2007). But little has been said regarding the relationship between the new left and women's concerns, with a few exceptions (Azize Vargas 2009; Friedman 2009; NACLA 2007; Rakowski and Espina 2010). To what extent has the second wave feminist movement been integrated into the pink tide? To what extent do pink tide presidents govern in a feminist way?

In this book, I will evaluate the gender record of the pink tide through the lens of contemporary Nicaraguan politics. Nicaragua offers important insights into the nature of the pink tide, in part because it is quite understudied within the literature on the new left. Of all the sources on the new left cited in the previous paragraphs, only Lievesley and Ludlam (2009) include Nicaragua as a major case, devoting a chapter to the country. Nicaragua is also a very important case as the only pink tide country that is simultaneously an old left and a new left country.

Nicaragua's history of a vibrant old and new left makes the tensions within the left particularly vivid. So, Nicaragua offers a clear window through which to view the evolution of the left throughout Latin America. That is not to claim that Nicaragua is typical. None of the pink tide countries are typical, they all have their specific histories, and any attempt to explain them with a single argument, or a simplistic good and bad dichotomy, is likely to confuse as much as it illuminates. As Maxwell Cameron noted "the 'good' versus 'bad' lefts thesis…ignores the systematic ways in which Latin American lefts reflect the nature of the societies in which they emerge. One might as well say there are 'good' and 'bad' countries" (2009:345).

Across the region, including Nicaragua, the three factors I outlined earlier – the end of the cold war, the limits of neoliberalism, and the emergence of new social movements – interact with country specific histories to explain outcomes. In this article I will argue that only a fine grained analysis – that remains sensitive to both regional realities and country specific histories – can offer clear answers as to what the emergence of the pink tide really means for women or other historically disenfranchised groups. I will also argue that in Nicaragua, and across the region, an analysis of gender politics illustrates how the new left clearly emerges from its roots in the old left, and yet in some ways is entirely new. Finally, in concluding, I will argue that the divisions within the Nicaraguan left have complicated and even undermined Nicaraguan democracy. The collapse of the old revolutionary coalition has left Nicaragua with something that disturbingly resembles the old authoritarian strongman model of politics that has dominated the country for at least a century.

Like the old left, the new left has been made significant efforts to improve the lot of women when those efforts coincide with the traditional leftist concerns for class equality. Like the old left, the new left has had an ambivalent relationship with second wave feminism: both actively promoting women's mobilization and the ideal of gender equality, and yet trying to constrain women's rights activists whenever they slip out of the control of leftist parties and leaders. This tendency to see feminist movements as a threat more than as a resource is sometimes greater with the new left than with its predecessors, precisely because Latin American feminism is better organized, and has access to more national and international resources, than during the days of the cold war. Finally, unlike the old left, the new left in Nicaragua and elsewhere has reached out to the emerging gay rights movement, and in so doing has divided the new social movements, mitigating the threat of autonomous feminism.

Feminism and the Sandinista Revolution

As a country with a significant history of both old and new left politics, Nicaragua is an excellent case for analyzing the evolution of the left with respect to gender. The current ruling party – the Sandinista Front for National Liberation (Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional, FSLN) was founded in 1961 as a guerrilla organization, eventually overthrowing the Somoza dictatorship in 1979.

The Guerrilla Years: 1960s and 1970s

Women played a significant role during the FSLN's guerrilla years. Many have suggested that about 30% of the Sandinista combatants in the 1960s and 1970s, including many of the top guerrilla leaders, were women (Collinson 1990:154; Flynn 1983:416; Reif 1986:158). There is some controversy regarding these figures: a study of the records of the Sandinista Social Security Institute found that only 6.6% of those who were killed in the war against Somoza were female (cited in Vilas 1986:108). But whatever the actual numbers of women in the guerrilla struggle, the dominant memory of the era is that women were present.

The guerrilla war that ushered in the Sandinista revolution marked the revolution in profound – and contradictory – ways. One image from the guerrilla period that was repeated over and over during the decade of revolution nicely captured the gendered legacy of the guerrilla struggle. The idealized Sandinista woman was a mother. A young woman with a rifle over her shoulder, she grinned while holding a nursing infant. Originally a photograph, the image of the nursing guerrilla was reproduced in many forms including public murals, postcards, and the official poster that commemorated the tenth anniversary of the revolution. That this image was so widely reproduced throughout the revolution testifies to its symbolic importance. It captured both the extent and the limits of the Sandinistas' feminism, as seen through their own eyes.

Though the image of the nursing guerrilla is an image of empowered maternity, it is also, of course, an image of war. And the lessons that were internalized in the guerrilla struggle were laden with tensions. In the guerrilla struggle of the 1960s and 1970s, thousands of women gained the opportunity to break the constraints of their traditional roles. It was also in the guerrilla struggle that many women who were to go on to be feminist activists first gained the skills and consciousness that made their later activism a real possibility. In some sense, the guerrilla war opened opportunities for many women that would have remained closed had the dictatorship entered a third generation, as it almost surely would have done if not for the FSLN. And Sandinismo would forever mark Nicaraguan feminism, even in the case of women who were to reject their formal ties to the party. "Without the revolutionary movement, feminism would undoubtedly still be the province of a privileged few" (Chinchilla 1997:209).

At the same time, old lessons are hard to forget, especially in times of stress. The Sandinista leadership presented significant evidence, in deeds and words, of their commitment to democratization and even to democratizing gender relations. But evidence of their commitment to democratizing gender was clearest during the best of times, especially in the first 2 years of the revolution, before the Contras[2] began their attacks. Once the Contra war began in full force, the FSLN was often tempted to fall back on the lessons it had learned in the guerrilla struggle. Those lessons included the importance of avoiding controversy within revolutionary ranks, and of controlling any dissent that might arise. Neither lesson boded well for feminists.

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[2] The Contras, short for counter-revolutionaries, were a guerrilla force led largely by former members of the Somoza dictatorship's National Guard and funded, almost entirely, by the administration of US President Ronald Reagan. As the war neared its end in 1988, 58,000 people, out of a population of a little over 3 million, had been killed (Vilas 1995:138). As the Reagan administration's role in the Contra war violated international law, the International Court at the Hague ordered the United States to pay indemnity for its undeclared war against the Central American nation. In March of 1988 the cost of the indemnity was set at 17 billion dollars, which was how much the war was calculated to have cost Nicaragua (INEC 1990:58). That indemnity was never paid.

The Years of the Revolution: 1980s

While some women served as Sandinista guerrillas, and far more in Sandinista support work during the war against the Somoza dictatorship, there was a qualitative leap in women's public roles once the Sandinistas took power in July of 1979. During the early years of the Sandinista Revolution (1979–1990), women were mobilized in massive numbers, especially young women. In part, this was because women had "earned" the right to participate through the guerrilla struggle, in part because Sandinista leaders were influenced by Marxist notions that the road to gender equality was through the integration of women into the public sphere. In part, it was simply because carrying out social change in the poorest country on the mainland of the Americas required the help of the whole adult (and adolescent) population, including women. So women were mobilized by the Sandinista government for a variety of purposes: to teach others to read, to immunize children, to harvest coffee, to guard their neighborhoods at night. Those campaigns played a critical role in the challenge to traditional authority which was the revolution (Kampwirth 2004:26–28).

The Sandinista coalition had always been a broad coalition – comprised of radical Catholics, Marxist-Leninists, nationalists, and people who simply opposed the Somoza dictatorship. It is not surprising then that once the Sandinistas succeeded in overthrowing Anastasio Somoza, all the conflicts within the coalition rose to the surface. Those conflicts included disagreements of how the revolution was to emancipate women and even what it meant to emancipate women. Broadly speaking, these arguments can be categorized as feminine or feminist (Kampwirth 2004:8, 44–45). Proponents of a feminine interpretation of women's emancipation argued that the revolution should open opportunities for women to better fulfill their traditional roles. In contrast, feminist revolutionaries argued that women's emancipation required challenging those traditional gender roles. Proponents of both schools of thought might support, for example, improving women's access to health care but for somewhat different reasons. Feminine thinkers would support better access to health care because taking care of the family's health is a woman's job. In contrast, feminist thinkers would support better access to health care (especially reproductive health care) because it would free women to live better lives, and to challenge the confines of traditional gender relations.

These conflicts sometimes became heated arguments between the members of the incipient women's movement and Sandinista leaders, and sometimes among Sandinista leaders themselves. Military service was one area in which the conflicts within the Sandinista coalition bubbled up to the surface. Despite women's participation in the guerrilla struggle, once the Sandinistas came to power, and the Contra war had begun (leading the FSLN to initiate a military draft), women were not included in the draft despite lobbying efforts by the Sandinista women's organization, the Asociación de Mujeres Nicaragüenses Luisa Amanda Espinosa (Luisa Amanda Espinosa Association of Nicaraguan Women or AMNLAE), in favor of including women in the draft. However, women were permitted to serve in the army as volunteers (Molyneux 1985:149–150).

Hazel Fonseca was one of those volunteers. In 1981, Ortega spoke to her all women's battalion, a speech which made an impression on her. "Daniel Ortega practically said to us: Go give birth! Now women should dedicate themselves to supporting their husbands, etc." In 1985, the women's battalion was eliminated completely and "many women in the EPS [the Sandinista Army] ended up in more administrative positions" (interview, June 10, 1991).

At about the time as the women's battalion was dissolved, in the mid-1980s, the first signs of an autonomous feminist movement began emerging within the Sandinista affiliated labor unions (Kampwirth 2004:30–36). One of those feminists, Marta Júarez, was very involved in revolutionary politics: as a literacy volunteer, as a member of the neighborhood watch group (the CDS), in the Sandinista youth, as a member of a reserve battalion, and in a group called Christians for the Revolution. By the mid-1980s she was active in the Asociación de Mujeres Ante INIES (Women's Association of INIES or AMPRONIC), a small Sandinista women's discussion group, and in the women's secretariat of CONAPRO, the association of professionals.

Abortion was one of the many issues they addressed. In 1984, "we had spent time reflecting on the issue of abortion since at that point there were demands to provide care in the hospitals. I even understood that legally there was not a problem, it was already codified. In the mass media there was a lot of debate about how women were dying because they did not go to the hospital until the last minute." So they invited doctors and lawyers to talk to them, and they went to events where they could introduce the topic. At one event for professional women they asked Daniel Ortega about the problem of illegal abortion and high death rates.

> [Daniel said] 'and if there is a wounded soldier [cachorro] and a woman comes along who had an abortion, who are they going to prioritize?' We said, 'Both of them.' I was so offended by his idea that the hospital had to give priority to the wounded man… . I remember that I got up and left. And he has not changed his way of seeing things, of seeing women with such contempt (interview, December 1, 2006).

More evidence that the Sandinistas were deeply divided over whether "women's emancipation" should be understood as feminine or feminist came in September 1987. That month, more than a 1,000 women met at a "face the people" meeting marking the tenth anniversary of the founding of the Sandinista women's organization, AMNLAE. At the meeting, President Ortega and Minister of Health Dora María Tellez addressed questions on topics including abortion, birth control, and sterilization (Molyneux 2001:68).

Téllez was one of the most prominent Sandinista women, a former guerrilla commander who later founded the Sandinista dissident party, the Movimiento de Renovación Sandinista (Sandinista Renewal Movement or MRS), in 1995. As Minister of Health, she was a strong advocate for women's health issues, including an expansion of therapeutic abortion (abortion in cases of rape, incest or threat to the woman's life) to include abortion for some socioeconomic reasons (Wessel 1991:542–543). Moreover, her remarks at the face the people meeting in 1987 suggested a feminist interpretation of women's emancipation. One audience member, a worker at a shoe factory, complained "that not only were sterilizations very difficult to get, but that they even required the husband's permission" (Molyneux 2001:68). Téllez promised to immediately address the problem of the husband needing to grant permission. She concluded her remarks arguing that "the solution was 'not to defend the right to abortion but to prevent abortions. This was being tackled by simultaneously improving the availability of birth control devices and by maintaining public education campaigns" (Molyneux 2001:68).

Ortega's comments were framed by a different understanding of gender politics. He suggested that efforts to promote birth control or abortion could be seen as imperialist, or as a way for the US to stop movements for social justice in southern countries before they had a chance to begin. According to Ortega, US policy had been to "freeze the population growth in these countries, to avoid the risk of an increase in population that could threaten a revolutionary change." He suggested that the US-funded Contra war should be seen as "a policy of genocide," suggesting that women who were interested in controlling their fertility were guilty of disloyalty, and of undermining the revolution. "One way of depleting our youth is to promote the sterilization of women in Nicaragua…or to promote a policy of abortion…the problem is that the woman is the one who reproduces. The man can't play that role." A woman who out of a desire to be "liberated" decides not to have children "negates her own continuity, the continuity of the human species" (quoted in Molyneux 2001:69).

In addition to the disagreements regarding women's emancipation, conflicts within the Sandinista coalition also emerged over the role of social movements. Was their purpose to advocate for the interests of the sector they represented, whether or not that pleased the leaders of the Sandinista party? Or was their purpose to defend the revolution, that is, to defend the interests of the party as defined by top leaders of the party? Party leaders often argued that if the Sandinista government were to fall to the Contras then all the gains of the revolution for women, as well as other sectors, would be lost. This tension, between an old left party-centric view of social change (in which social movements were called "popular organizations"), and the new left social movement-centric view of social change, was not resolved during the years of the revolution.

In the early years of the revolution, the Sandinista affiliated national women's organization, Asociación de Mujeres Nicaragüenses Luisa Amanda Espinoza, or AMNLAE, played an important role in challenging traditional authority. Founded in 1977 as AMPRONAC (Asociación de Mujeres Ante la Problematica Nacional), it was one member of the Sandinista coalition that helped bring down Somoza. With the revolution it changed its name but its mission did not change significantly. Still an FSLN support group, the most significant changes were due to the changes in the FSLN itself, from a guerrilla movement to a political party.

AMNLAE's work included advocating for legal changes to help women and providing services through Casas de la Mujer, which numbered over 50 nation-wide by the end of the revolutionary decade. These Casas provided services in the areas of health, psychological counseling, and legal counseling, at the same time as they offered workshops in areas such as sexuality, contraception, and job training. Yet despite all the important work it did, AMNLAE's role as support for the male-dominated FSLN impeded its ability to challenge sexual inequality. With time, even women who stayed with AMNLAE began to question the relationship between the association and the party (on AMNLAE and the FSLN, see Bayard de Volo 2001; Criquillón 1995; Kampwirth 2004:28–36, 54–57; Murguialday 1990:101–148).

AMNLAE's work promoting reforms in gender-related laws, and internal pressures within the women's organization in the 1980s, provide reasons to believe that AMNLAE would have evolved into a more independent and more feminist organization had the revolution continued on its original course. But there is no way to know for sure. The relatively easy years of the revolution came to an end with Ronald Reagan's inauguration as president of the United States in 1981 and his funding of the Contras shortly thereafter.

With the onset of the war, gender politics in Nicaragua entered a new phase. Within the evolving women's movement, there were at least two different responses to the war, that of what Nicaraguans call "the sectors," (labor unions or other economically organized groups), and that of AMNLAE. And their responses to the very same war could not have been more different.

The Women's Secretariats (Secretarías de la Mujer) were founded in all the major labor unions in the early to mid-1980s. The first Women's Secretariat was created within the rural wageworkers union, the Asociación de Trabajadores del Campo, or ATC, in 1983. The women of the ATC women's secretariat successfully made the case that the key to increasing rural women's productivity – and therefore raising funds necessary for the war effort – was to address gender inequality. Perhaps because of the power that came out of their important role in the national economy, the women of the ATC succeeded in pressuring the FSLN to open hundreds of day care centers, collective corn mills and wash basins, and to address issues like sexual harassment and access to contraception. At the same time as the women of the Secretariats insisted that the war could never be won without more gender equality, the women of AMNLAE accepted an ever more subservient relationship with the FSLN, on the grounds that the war could never be won without softening demands for gender equality, at least temporarily (on the emergence of feminism within the sectors see Criquillón 1995:215–225; Kampwirth 2004:30–34; Murguialday 1990:155–188).

The final years of the 1980s were a time when elements of the revolution were institutionalized; they were also the years when another sort of women's organizing began to emerge. Joining the Sandinista affiliated women's movement, AMNLAE, whose roots could be traced to the guerrilla period, and the Women's Secretariats that grew up in response to the contra war, was a third branch: independent or autonomous feminism. This third way – that explicitly rejected links to parties and unions – responded to two occurrences: the debates that led up to the 1987 Constitution, and the 1987 Latin American Feminist Gathering (Encuentro Feminista Latinoamericana) that was held close enough – in Taxco Mexico – to allow 40–50 Nicaraguan women to attend.

By 1987, one of the earliest autonomous feminist groups, the Masaya Women's Collective (Colectiva de Mujeres de Matagalpa) was formed. Initially it broadcast over the radio and performed feminist theater on topics such as abortion, and soon added classes in literacy, midwifery, and the law. The Masaya Women's Collective, founded in 1988, and the IXCHEN Women's Center (Centro de Mujeres IXCHEN), founded in 1989, were women's centers that provided a range of legal, health, and psychological services, at the same time as they advocated for gender equality.

Groups like the Masaya Women's Collective and IXCHEN (which soon had centers in many Nicaraguan cities) were in many ways like AMNLAE's Casas de la Mujer, except that they operated independently from the FSLN. But a very different model of women's organizing – an autonomous feminist organization that sought to change state policy rather than providing services – was founded by many of the women who participated in the Encuentro Feminista. Upon their return from Mexico in 1987, they founded the Party of the Erotic Left (Partido de la Izquierda Erótica, or PIE).

PIE was a lobbying group that succeeded in promoting gender equality as a Constitutional value. In the 1987 Constitution, at least ten articles make specific mention of women's rights (compared to none in the 1974 Constitution). For instance, couples in common law marriages (which are more common than legal marriages among Nicaragua's poor majority) were protected from discrimination and no fault divorce was permitted. PIE did not last into the 1990s but it left its mark on the Constitution and on the women's movement. After the FSLN lost the 1990 election, all 20-some members of PIE became founding members of the autonomous feminist organizations that emerged in the early 1990s (on autonomous feminist organizing in the late 1980s, see Criquillón 1995:221–228; Kampwirth 2004:35–38; Murguialday 1990:207–250; on gender issues and Sandinista law making; see Kampwirth 1998; Stephens 1990, 1988).

The Neoliberal Years: 1990s–2006

Daniel Ortega had been overwhelmingly elected in 1984, winning 67% of the vote in a six person race. At that point, the memory of the Somoza dictatorship was still fresh. The Sandinistas enjoyed a great deal of legitimacy as the movement that had overthrown the dictatorship, and that had implemented a series of popular policies, especially educational and health reforms. Moreover, many Nicaraguans hoped that once they had legitimate elections (that were verified by international observers such as the OAS and the Latin American Studies Association), the Reagan administration would cease to fund the Contras and thus the Contra war would end. In fact, Contra violence only escalated after the 1984 election, and inflation had spun out of control by the end of the decade. So in 1990, when the Daniel Ortega stood for reelection, nearly 55% of Nicaraguans voted him out of office. As he had promised, once the Sandinistas had been defeated electorally, US President George H. W. Bush cut off funds to the Contras. And so, the war finally came to an end.

What followed, for the electoral left, was 16 years in the wilderness. Sixteen years in which a series of three presidents – Violeta Barrios de Chamorro, Arnoldo Alemán, and Enrique Bolaños – sought to reverse many of the changes of the revolution including its gender policies, though policies that in broad terms can be characterized as neoliberal. That is, the logic of neoliberalism, a logic that was dominant across Latin America at this time, is that the private sector is inherently more efficient than the public section. So the 16 years after the FSLN's 1990 defeat were years in which state services were cut much more often than they were created, years in which life for Nicaraguans became more unequal and generally more precarious. During these 16 years, Daniel Ortega repeatedly ran for president, finally succeeding in late 2006. Seemingly, Nicaragua made a seamless transition between old guerrilla left and new electoral left. But politics is never that seamless.

Along the way, many of the social movements that emerged through the revolution broke with the party, seeking autonomy. The women's movement was very successful in that effort.

> It [the women's movement] is the only movement that has succeeded until today in maintaining its autonomy in relation to the political parties, the State, other institutions [and] religious institutions, in contrast with the rural and neighborhood unions (Mónica Baltodano quoted in Cuadra and Jiménez 2010:44).

Nicaragua has the most significant second wave feminist movement in Central America today, and one of the most significant in Latin America. Its emergence was simultaneously thanks to the mobilization of women in the revolution, and thanks to the Sandinista loss in 1990, freeing most feminists from Sandinista control. Building on the legacy of the revolution, and enjoying the benefits of autonomy, feminists were able to build a powerful social movement focusing on the struggle against violence, for sexual rights, and for an expansion of citizenship rights, especially for women but not exclusively for women. The movement includes hundreds of groups, thousands of activists, and may touch the lives of millions through its networks of Women's House, through medical services, psychological services and legal advocacy work for individual women, through its lobbying efforts, and through its role in the mass media[3] (Cuadra and Jiménez 2010:32–51; Kampwirth 2004).

But for all the benefits of autonomy, there were costs. The very accomplishments of the autonomous feminist movement was one factor that motivated a backlash, what I have called the antifeminist movement (Kampwirth 2003, 2006, 2008, 2010).[4] While the feminist movement was much larger, the antifeminist movement enjoyed the support of powerful institutions: the Catholic Church, a number of evangelical churches, and the state, especially the Ministries of the Family, Education, and Health.

Gaining autonomy from the party of the revolution helped the feminists tremendously, but it had its downside. There comes a point when autonomy becomes alienation. For many members of the FSLN, and for many feminists, autonomy passed into alienation in 1998. In that year, Daniel Ortega's stepdaughter, Zoilámerica Narvaez publicly accused him of having sexually abused her from the age of 11, and having raped her from the age of 15. The autonomous feminist movement, especially the Women's Network Against Violence (Red de Mujeres Contra la Violencia), stood by Zoilámerica. In the years that followed, many feminists found it harder and harder to maintain their ties to their former comrades in arms.

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[3] The feminist magazine, *La Boletina*, which has been published approximately every other month since 1991 by the *Fundación Puntos de Encuentro* has a circulation of 26,000 (available at http://boletina.puntos.org.ni/). That is larger than the circulation of any other magazine in Nicaragua. The feminist soap opera *Sexto Sentido* – which addresses issues such as domestic violence, rape, abortion, and homophobia – is also produced by the staff of *Puntos de Encuentro*. It drew 70% of the audience in its time slot in 2001, which was its first year on the air.

[4] Antifeminism is often referred to as "fundamentalism" by analysts of Latin American politics (e.g., Cuadra and Jiménez 2010:54; Maier 2010:348–350; Vargas 2010:327–329).

This all came to a head in 2006, when in the last weeks of the presidential campaign, the antifeminist movement finally succeeded in its efforts to ban therapeutic abortion. Astonishingly perhaps, the antifeminists only succeeded thanks to the votes of the party of the revolution, the FSLN. Despite their public protests and private lobbying efforts, feminists activists were helpless as their old party seemed to prefer improve its chances at the ballot box, even at the cost of women's lives.

In some ways, their "old party" was not the same old party. During the 16 years when it was out of power, many of the historic leaders of the FSLN had broken with the party, founding the alternative party Movement for Sandinista Renewal (MRS), devoting their energies to civil society organizations, or simply retiring in disgust. A major focus of their disgust was known in Nicaragua as "the pact," a series of agreements between FSLN leader Daniel Ortega and his historic enemy, Arnoldo Alemán of the Partido Liberal Constitucionalista (PLC), that concentrated power in their hands, divided the spoils of government between the two, and changed the rules of the political game so that Ortega was able to get reelected in 2006 with only 38% of the vote (see e.g., Hoyt 2004; Martí i Puig and Close 2009; Ortega Hegg 1997; Torres-Rivas 2007).

In the 2006 election campaign, the FSLN seemed to reimagine the legacy of the revolution. And that new vision of what it meant to be a revolutionary was traditional Catholic rather than liberation theology Catholic, antifeminist rather than feminist. One could question, in what sense was this legacy of the revolution truly revolutionary? On the billboards that sprung up everywhere in Nicaraguan cities in the months leading up to the November election, there was little of the FSLN's traditional red and black, replaced instead with an array of brilliant colors, especially hot pink. Daniel Ortega, the Marxist-Leninist in military uniform, was replaced with Daniel the practicing Catholic in white shirt and jeans. The rhetoric of antiimperialism and class struggle was replaced with the rhetoric of peace and reconciliation. In fact many historic enemies of the FSLN were incorporated into the Sandinistas' electoral coalition, most prominently, vice presidential candidate – and former Contra commander – Jaime Morales Carazo.

Despite the unlikely breadth of the Sandinista electoral coalition, many traditional revolutionaries – most notably the feminists – were left out as Ortega chose to ally himself and his very disciplined party with the right in voting to abolish therapeutic abortion. Despite long-standing tensions between the leadership of the FSLN and autonomous feminists, I think it is unlikely that the FSLN would have voted to abolish the life of the mother exception if not for the fact that the election was days away. In other words, the FSLN's new found opposition to therapeutic abortion does not necessarily indicate a shift to the right. What it does show is that, after a decade and a half out of power, and close to a decade of political pacts with the right – with

Arnoldo Alemán's PLC party and with Obando y Bravo's faction within the Catholic Church – the FSLN was quite willing to oppose its former base in the women's movement, to say nothing of the vast majority of Nicaragua's medical establishment, if that is what it took to return to power. The arrival of the pink tide on Nicaraguan shores seemed to bode poorly for gender equality. Given that beginning, there were some surprises in store.

The Second Stage of the Revolution: A Revolution for Women?

Elisabeth Friedman (2009) evaluates the gender politics of the contemporary Latin American electoral left in four countries – Brazil, Bolivia, Chile, Venezuela – looking at the following indicators: women's socioeconomic status, feminist state-society relations, women's representation in decision-making positions, legislation on violence against women, reproductive rights, and sexual rights. I will organize my discussion of the gender politics of the new left in Nicaragua around these indicators, though in a different order than Friedman presented, as the new order better fits the details of the Nicaraguan case.

Women's Socioeconomic Status

Socioeconomic policies belong first on the list of indicators of Sandinista gender politics for a number of reasons. First, the goal of lessening or even eliminating class inequality is the quintessential issue that has defined the Latin American left. To the extent that Latin America's new left has incorporated an understanding of gender issues into its discourse and policies, it has tended to do so through the lens of class, promoting policies that benefit poor women more than middle- and upper-class women. Worldwide, leftists have sometimes dismissed some gender demands as being unimportant, claiming they do not matter to poor women. Specifically, in the case of the current Ortega administration, a number of people suggested that the 2006 ban on therapeutic abortion does not really matter as poor women care more about feeding their children rather than having access to reproductive healthcare.[5]

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[5] A nice example of this discourse, pitting poor women's class interests against their gender interests, was used by Dorothy Granada, who had been defended by feminist groups when she was a target of President Arnoldo Alemán's anti-NGO campaign in 2000 and 2001. "The development worker Dorothy [Granada] surprisingly broke off from the movements that defend therapeutic abortion, like the Movimiento Autónomo de Mujeres (MAM), arguing again and again that they that they are groups that defend 'partisan interests like those of the US empire, which has an interest in destablizing the government." [Granada] had become a symbol for those movements, in 2000, upon being practically thrown out of Mulukukú by former president Arnoldo Alemán (Partido Liberal Constitucionalista or PLC), who accused her of giving priority, in her clinic, just to Sandinistas, and of serving members of the FUAC, an armed organization that was implicated

Another reason for starting my analysis of the gender policies of the Ortega administration with the intersection of class and gender is that when, in December 2008, I asked Sandinistas and dissident Sandinistas what the Ortega administration had accomplished in almost 2 years back in government, socioeconomic issues were always first on their lists. Generally, even dissident Sandinistas who were very alienated from Daniel Ortega identified eliminating fees for public education and health care as important accomplishments.

Women's rights, especially their economic rights, was a prominent theme in the discourse of the second Ortega administration. The coordinator of the Executive Commission of AMNLAE and National Assembly representative for the FSLN, María Lidia Mejía, started our interview by giving me a pamphlet, entitled "Gender Politics: Draft Proposal" (Gobierno de Reconciliación y Unidad Nacional n.d.) that outlines the goals of the Ortega administration regarding gender. The pamphlet sports a glossy hot pink cover, illustrated on its front with a woman at some sort of political rally holding a poster with one of the slogans of this new Sandinista administration, "Rise up poor of the world!" The back cover is illustrated with a sepia toned Sandino on a horse with a note to him: "Sandino: we are getting things done!" Both front and back covers are signed by "Daniel."

This same document is reproduced on the website of state women's institute, INIM, under a slightly different name (INIM n.d.). It is an odd document in many ways, starting with its being an attractive, professional looking pamphlet that is subtitled "draft proposal." It offers no statistics or data of any sort regarding the condition of women in Nicaragua, nor does it mention any specific programs that have been, or will be, implemented to address the gender issues. All 20 pages of the document are devoted to general statements of this sort: "Equality between men and women – in addition to being a human right – is a strategic necessity for deepening representative and participatory democracy as well as for the construction of a society that is more just and socioeconomically developed" (Gobierno de Reconciliación y Unidad Nacional n.d.:5).

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in robberies, murders, and kidnappings in that area. At that time, the American development worker received support from the Coordinadora Civil, headed by Ana Quirós, one of the woman that, along with Sofía Montenegro is now on the government's black list. [Granada] repeated that the local proabortion organizations are those that do the least to meet the needs of poor women, 'the needs of those women whose nails get full of mud as they seek to make enough to eat, and I see that the right and the US is using them, and who knows who else,' she mentioned, hinting that this is the great difference between the persecution against her and that against those movements" (Aguilera 2008). Granada, who in the past has called herself a feminist, drew upon a standard antifeminist slur, suggesting that activists who worked to protect reproductive health were tools of foreigners, an accusation that she herself faced when attacked by Arnoldo Alemán (Kampwirth 2003). She also made the argument, which is common within the traditional left, that poor women's problems are problems of class, not gender. But of course everybody has both class and gender interests and in practice it is often hard to separate the two. While nobody plans to have a high-risk pregnancy, poor women are much more vulnerable than wealthier women who do not depend on the public healthcare system and who, in the worst of cases, could often afford to leave the country to get an abortion.

Despite the vagueness of official discourse on gender politics, something that characterizes the INIM website more generally, in fact the Ortega administration has implemented a whole series of programs that address women's socioeconomic status.

> Once in power, he announced a series of policies and programs that seemed to hark back to the Sandinista years. Educational matriculation fees were abolished, a literacy program was launched with Cuban assistance,[6] and an innovative Zero Hunger program established, financed from the public budget and Venezuelan aid, that distributed one cow, one pig, 10 hens, and a rooster, along with seeds, to 15,000 families during the first year (Burbach 2009:33–34; for details see Spaulding 2009:368–377; Silva and Galeano 2011).

From the perspective of rural women, the Zero Hunger (Hambre Cero) program is perhaps the most significant. The food security program's "five-year objective is to 'eradicate hunger, chronic malnutrition, extreme poverty and unemployment among 75,000 poor rural families through the quantitative and qualitative increase in the production and consumption of protein, while at the same time favoring the substitution of firewood consumption with bio-gas.' By January 2009 the…target had grown to 80,000 benefitted families" (Kester 2010). César Otero, who belongs to the coordinating council of his neighborhood CPC, noted approvingly that Zero Hunger grants were given to women. "There are thousands of people [who receive grants], women, they don't give grants to men. You know what Nicaraguan men are like: they are unreliable. In contrast, women have more family values" (interview, December 2, 2010). The women who receive support from the Zero Hunger program:

> must meet these criteria: 1) need, i.e. the family must be in a state of extreme poverty suffering at least two of the five basic unmet needs (overcrowding, inadequate housing, insufficient services, low education levels and economic dependence); 2) capacity, i.e. the family must have a yard or plot of .7 to 1.5 hectares available for the animals and plants provided by the bond; and 3) commitment, i.e. the beneficiaries must pledge to participate in training workshops, not sell the animals issued to them, organize into "nuclei" and save-contribute the equivalent of 20% of the bond's value to create a rural revolving fund for the development of their community (Kester 2010).

The requirement that families must own (or have access to) some land is reasonable enough for an agricultural program like Zero Hunger though it does mean that the program does not directly help the poorest of the poor, who do not have access to land (Spaulding 2009:373).[7]

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[6] The new literacy program was named "Desde Martí Hasta Fidel," a not so subtle way of identifying current policies as a continuation of the Latin American revolutionary tradition (Spaulding 2009:370).

[7] It is worth noting that despite sharing a name, Nicaragua's Zero Hunger is totally different than Brazil's tremendously successful Zero Hunger program (part of a larger program known as Bolsa Familia) which is a direct cash transfer program in which poor families are given small stipends, partially in exchange for immunizing their children and keeping them in school (Baiocchi and Checa 2008). Because one does not have to have land to be eligible for the Brazilian program, it has a greater impact than the Nicaraguan one in raising the caloric intake of the poorest people in an immediate way (at the same time as it improves the health and educational opportunities of the next generation).

A number of other socioeconomic programs benefit poor urban and rural women, these include, most prominently, Zero Usury (Usura Cero) a microcredit program, in which small groups of friends and neighbors, most of whom are women, agree to form a "solidarity group" which makes them eligible for loans. The idea is that members of these groups who trust each other, will support each other, and will commit to paying off loans if any member should default. As of 2010,

> 80, 649 women [received credits] so they could improve their small businesses in their neighborhoods, the markets or also those that work in the streets and municipal communities selling their products. These businesses have mainly been small corner stores, small restaurants, sewing workshops, businesses devoted to the making and selling of piñatas, small bakeries, small beauty parlors, tortilla stores, drink stores, small cafes or news stands that are set up in parks on streets, etc (Radio La Primerísima 2010a).

Also, since 2007, stores that are affiliated with ENABAS (Empresa Nicaragüense de Alimientos Básicos) or the state basic grain company, have been founded. During the revolution in the 1980s, ENABAS provided rations of basic foods (the AFA packet or rice, beans, and sugar) in response to the problem that in the war economy, food was often scarce in the markets. In the post-war neoliberal age, the main problem that ENABAS responds to is that the markets are full of food that is too expensive for many people to buy. This time subsidized food is available to all (not just people with formal sector jobs) for sale at below market prices in very small neighborhood stores known as pulperías (these are preexisting stores that sometimes have ENABAS subsidized food available, during the rest of the time they are just ordinary stores).

The Ortega administration has also implemented, or resurrected, some services explicitly aimed at working mothers and their children. Arle Martínez, who worked in the state social welfare agency, INSSBI, in the 1980s, in the state family "fund" or FONIF and then the Ministry of the Family in the 1990s, and who was General Director of Special Programs in the Ministry of the Family at the time of our interview in 2008, compared family programs now with those of the 1980s. He lamented the fact that many of the accomplishments of the 1980s had been lost in the 1990s and that the new conditions made it hard to return to the days of the revolution. "There were so many projects that I think were cut off, with this government we want to restore the projects. In the 1980s more was done than now. Now we only have been here in the government for two years. Today international aid has shrunk." In the 1980s, the workplaces had their own day care centers which is not true now. Of the 45 day care centers administered by INSSBI in the 1980s, only 12 survived the neoliberal years.

Despite the setbacks of the neoliberal years, they had big plans in the Ministry of the Family. "The INSS [Social Security agency] has given us funds so as to rehabilitate fourteen day care centers. By the year 2011 the government is going to develop one hundred day care centers nationally with between 80 and 90 children in each one. And in the countryside we are going to rehabilitate 1,116 communal cafeterias to serve a population of 80,000…twenty four centers with equipment for physical rehabilitation so as to be able to provide them with specialized medicine depending on the case." Finally, he told me about what at that point was a brand new program, the Love Program (Programa Amor) to get street children or the children of working mothers who themselves worked in the street washing windshields, selling water, or begging, to enroll in school (interview, December 5, 2008; for a sympathetic description of the Love Program see Jacobs 2008; for a critical update see Bonilla 2010a).

Despite criticisms from dissident Sandinistas that the FSLN is no longer a left-wing party, the social programs I just outlined are all clear examples of left-wing politics. That is, they are aimed at reducing poverty and social inequality through state spending. Moreover, the explicit focus on women in many of these programs (they are the majority of beneficiaries and family benefits are typically given directly to the women, even if a man is present in the household) suggests that Sandinista policy makers have acquired some level of gender consciousness over the years. And during the time period when these policies were implemented, there were improvements in poverty rates.

A major study based on a survey of 1,732 households found a drop in extreme poverty between 2005 and 2009 from 17.2% of all households to 9.7% of all households, with a slight increase in non-extreme poverty, from 31.1 to 35% (presumably because, as the desperately poor became somewhat better off, they joined the ranks of the ordinary poor) and an overall decrease in poverty from 48.3 to 44.7% between 2005 and 2009. Those changes were most notable in the rural areas, 30.5% of rural households were extremely poor in 2005, compared to 18.2% in 2009 (FIDEG 2009:2, 4).

In a presentation of these results, Alejandro Martínez Cuenca,[8] president of the Fondo Internacional para el Desafío Global (FIDEG) noted that these percentages meant that "there are 300,000 fewer people in [the category of extreme poverty] than there were in 2005, the year in which 800,000 people said that they lived on less than 20 córdobas [the equivalent of US $.93 at the time of the presentation]" (Sánchez 2010). The FIDEG study is a survey of household incomes (and many other indicators of well being like enrollment in school, and employment rates). It does not seek to explain why extreme poverty dropped between 2005 and 2009. There are various factors besides the Ortega administration's policies that could explain the drop in extreme poverty (e.g., increased migration and therefore an increase in remittances, or improved prices for agricultural products) though it is quite possible that the administration's development policies are responsible for at least some of the drop.

But though they may have had some real impact in reducing poverty, at the same time many of these programs are plagued with accusations of clientelism, that they are not for poor women as much as for poor *Sandinista* women. When I asked Dora

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[8] Given how polarized debates are among Sandinistas were during the second Ortega administration, it is worth noting that Alejandro Martínez Cuenca's findings cannot be dismissed as politically biased. "The economist Alejandro Martínez Cuenca, who was Minister of Planning for the Sandinista government in the 1980s, sought the presidential nomination from the FSLN and has been critical of Daniel Ortega's leadership" (Radio La Primerísima 2010b).

María Téllez[9] to describe the good things the FSLN had done since taking power in 2007, she identified "free health care, eliminating fees for public schools which was an abuse. All of the rest is clientelism." I questioned her claim that all the social programs were clientelistic, using the example that, as I understood, anyone could buy subsidized food at the ENABAS stores. Her answer: "The young woman who works in my house cannot buy food in the ENABAS store because she works in my house. They do not sell her beans. They do not sell her sugar" (Dora María Téllez, interview, December 5, 2008).

Another example of political favoritism in the distribution of state resources came from the 2009 report produced by the Ministry of Labor, seeming to confirm rumors that to obtain many jobs, a letter from the Sandinista neighborhood organization, the CPC, was a requirement.

> The 2009 report from the Ministry of Labor (Mitrab) provided evidence for what was already publicly known. To get a job in the state sector one has to have the endorsement of the Consejos del Poder Ciudadano (CPC). Last year, over four thousand people got jobs in the state sector only because of the recommendation that was given to them by those official organizations. Although in the official information that appears as 'collaboration' between the CPC and the Public Service Employment Program, from the perspective of the lawyer Uriel Pineda, employee of the Centro Nicaragüense de Derechos Humanos (Cenidh), that is an example of 'discrimination based on political reasons'… . The report from Mitrab highlights the participation of the Gabinetes del Poder Ciudadano in this program, since they placed 2,688 men and 1,335 women in jobs, contrasting that with the 372 men and 223 women that the same program placed in 2008. 'Up until that point it is fine,' suggested Pineda, going on to note that the problem is found in the report, since "it is like an admission of what we suspected" (Romero 2010).

It is worth noting that these new jobs were created within a contracting labor market, in a country that had high unemployment rates long before the global financial crisis. In Nicaragua in 2009, "the ongoing survey of households [Encuesta Continua de Hogares] carried out by the Instituto Nacional de Información de Desarrollo (Inide) shows that there was an increase in unemployment, going from a little less than 140,000 in 2008 to 200,000 in 2009" (Romero 2010). Under those difficult circumstances, a letter of approval from the local CPC was particularly valuable.

In addition to concerns regarding clientelism, Daniel Ortega's dependence upon Venezuela's Hugo Chávez to finance many of his projects was a cause of concern for some (see Spaulding 2009:375 for details on Venezuelan funding). Granted, Nicaraguan governments of all political stripes are dependent on foreign aid but in the past, there was at least some more transparency, as foreign aid was incorporated into the national budget. In May 2010,

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[9] Dora María Téllez was a top commander during the guerrilla struggle in the 1970s, one of the most prominent Sandinista leaders in the 1980s, a member of the FSLN National Directorate in the early 1990s, and cofounder, with former vice president Sergio Ramírez, of the dissident Sandinista party, the MRS, in 1995. She is arguably the most high profile opponent of the politics of the second Ortega administration, among other things, carrying out a hunger strike in June 2008 in protest of what she saw as Daniel Ortega's dictatorial politics.

> The IMF…announced it was suspending talks with the Nicaraguan government regarding the fourth revision of the country's economic programme following President Daniel Ortega's announcement of a monthly US$25 "Christian, socialist, solidarity" bonus for some 120,000 public sector workers. The bonuses are contentious because they will be financed not by the State but rather by the nebulous cooperation from Venezuela which remains outside the budget (Latin American Weekly Report 2010:3).

These bonuses, which were not included in people's paychecks, instead requiring them to stand in long lines outside of participating banks, led many Sandinista dissidents to object, though for somewhat different reasons than the IMF. "Former Sandinista 'comandantes' such as Henry Ruiz ("Modesto") and Hugo Torres… compared [Ortega] to former dictator Anastasio Somoza (notorious for resorting to hand-outs as a means of buying political allegiance) whose regime Ortega and the FSLN toppled in 1979". Torres told reporters that "the hidden message behind the bonuses is that they will continue only as long as Ortega remains president…they are meant to reinforce Ortega's cult of personality and his illegal re-election bid" (Latin American Weekly Report 2010:3).

Marvin Marenco, member of the executive board of the Confederación de Trabajadores por Cuenta Propia (an affiliate of the FSLN's Frente Nacional de los Trabajadores or FNT) commented that at a government sponsored Purísima event, held the day before we spoke, there had been a line that stretched for five blocks because what he called "basic basket style packages" were being given away by Daniel Ortega and his wife Rosario Murillo, along with other members of their family. Almost 40,000 of these packages were given away to people who were needy enough to stand for many hours in the tropical sun to get a package of staple foods including "rice, beans, sugar, oil, tomato sauce, cereal, and some sort of pasta" (Marenco 2008). I asked where the money to pay for those packages came from and he told me: "From Uncle Chávez. Thanks to the aid from Venezuela we have had a pretty good year as far as electricity goes. This year, the aid is not going to be as generous" (interview, December 8, 2008). Marenco's response to my question reflects both the glee and caution with which many Nicaraguans view Ortega's very close relationship with Hugo Chávez.

Women's Representation in Decision-Making Positions

Daniel Ortega promised that, if he were elected in 2006, half of his cabinet ministers would be women. Like so many things in Nicaragua, there is debate as to whether this has actually happened. In an excellent article that analyzes the political backgrounds of appointees, Francisco A. Guevara Jerez presented the members of Ortega's original cabinet, along with the heads of state agencies. Although women did not reach 50% of all appointees analyzed in that article (there were 11 women compared to 24 men, not including vice ministerial positions held by men or women), they were appointed to many significant positions, including Defense Minister Marisol Castillo and Government Minister Ana Isabel Morales. Perhaps most importantly, with respect to individual women who hold power: “Rosario Murillo is much more than just First Lady. She exercises real decision-making, execution and veto power. In practice, she’s functioning more like the head of government, with her husband acting like a head of state” (Guevara Jerez 2007; Córdoba 2010 reports that some cabinet meetings are run by Murillo and Ortega is not even present).

A different version was presented by Valeria Imhof.

> The Sandinista government, in this second stage of the revolution, has reached a historic milestone in the participation of women in the executive branch, going beyond the goal of fifty percent percent holding ministerial positions, concludes a study carried out by the historian and codirector of the Instituto Nicaragüense de Cultura (INC), Dr. Clemente Guido Martínez…noting that currently seven of the thirteen state ministries are headed by women.

According to Guido, 5 of the 13 members of the 2007 cabinet were women, steadily increasing to 7 of 13 in 2010 (cited in Imhof 2010; Téllez 2009:29 presents similar numbers and details how women’s representation has increased compared with the administrations of Alemán and Bolaños).

Clearly one difference in Guevara and Imhof’s view of women’s representation in the executive branch could be explained by the passage of time, with the cabinet becoming more gender inclusive later in the Ortega administration. Another difference is which governmental positions are analyzed, with Guevara Jerez looking at a much larger number of positions than Imhof, and finding that women occupied a smaller percentage of those positions. But this increasing role of women is complicated by the fact that there has been a great deal of instability in those cabinet positions.

> During the first two and a half years of the administration of Daniel Ortega five ministers – four of five were women – two presidents with ministerial rank and more than a dozen presidents or directors of autonomous or decentralized agencies have been fired, according to the presidential agreements published since January 2007 in *La Gaceta*, the official journal (Cerda 2009).

As Cerda details, in the article and in the accompanying chart, women have been fired more than have men, apparently arbitrarily (i.e., typically after a short period of time and with no explanation). That does not mean that women were fired for being women (and in fact they were often replaced with new women). But the Ministry of the Family and the Women’s Institute (INIM) were among the ministries and state agencies with the most turn over. That may have something to do with the fact that gender issues were always sensitive ones for the Ortega administration. The typical explanation for the high rates of turnover was that loyalty to the first family was valued above all else, and any sign of disloyalty, no matter how trivial, was enough to get a Minister fired.

Finally, regarding women’s representation in decision-making positions, far more women have been elected to the National Assembly representing the FSLN than any other party. Referring to Guido’s study, Valeria Imhof noted that “106 Sandinista women have held seats in the legislative branch during the period 1979–2007, which means that they comprised 65.83% of the propietaria and suplente[10] National Assembly representatives. The FSLN is followed by the PLC with only 18.63% of its representative positions being held by women" (Imhof 2010). Dora María Téllez agrees with Imhof, though she qualifies it by considering change over time, and by distinguishing between the proprietarias and the far less powerful suplentes.

> In the 1996 election, 23 women, including propietarias and suplentes, were elected representing the FSLN, in 2003 the figure fell to 18 and rose to 20 in the most recent [2006] election. The number of propietarias was 8, 14, and 13 in the last three elections, respectively, with a reduced proportion [relative to men] in the most recent election, but in the two previous elections, the party has reached the quota established in its own statutes with respect to propietarias, though not suplentes. In this case, the proportional weight fell relative to the 1996 election. In the case of the PLC (Liberal Alliance), in 1996 7 women, including both propietarias and suplentes, were elected, in 2001 the number rose to 18, and fell to just 9 in 2006. Regarding the election of propietarias, in proportional terms, the tendency has been toward progressive increases, though even so the numbers do not even reach one fifth of the elected representatives. In the case of suplentes, their proportion fell in the last election (Téllez 2009:24; also see Cabrales Aráuz 2010:153–171 for details on the participation of women in the National Assembly during the period 1957–2012).

Violence Against Women

The years after Daniel Ortega was voted out of office in 1990, and his reelection in late 2006, were years when state policy was dominated by the logic of neoliberalism. That meant that state spending was limited: funding for programs tended to be cut and few costly new programs were initiated. An exception to that general pattern was the creation of a number of Women's and Children's Police Stations (Comisarías de la Mujer y la Niñez), so as to better address domestic violence, first founded in 1993 as the result of the work of a coalition of women's groups and state agencies (Kampwirth 2004:67–69).

When the FSLN returned to the presidency in January 2007, Sandinistas sought to expand the Comisarías. By 2009, there were 48 Comisarías, though only 35 of them functioned due to lack of financing. According to Mercedes Ampié, national chief of the Comisarías, each Comisaría processed an average of 36 cases of violence against women per month, the majority of which eventually led to mediation. The preference for mediation over prosecution has been typical of state domestic violence work throughout the hemisphere. Elisabeth Friedman notes that in the 1990s "most of the legislation prohibiting domestic violence was gender-neutral, addressing 'intra-familiar' violence through mediation and conciliation. This move protected the family rather than women's human rights" (2009:417).

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[10] Propietarias are the "owners" of an electoral office while suplentes are their substitutes. Both are elected but normally it is the propietaria who votes; in her absence the suplente votes.

Fátima Millón, member of the board of directors the Women's Network Against Violence, suggested that the same bias for family protection informed the actions of officers at the Nicaraguan Comisarías.

> If a victim arrives at a Comisaría and she does not have visible injuries, the case is not treated with the seriousness it deserves. Then the woman is made to fell guilty when officials even ask her who is going to support her later or they express doubts about her complaint suggesting that she does not love her partner anymore. That is followed with what will the neighbors say, all of which leads the man to have a sense of impunity that encourages him to commit the same crime again or to be more aggressive in the next attack.

A clear example of the state's unwillingness to treat domestic violence as a crime in the same sense as violence in other settings, according to Millón, was the fact that an act of violence against an unrelated person was penalized more severely than an act of violence against a spouse (quoted in Lara 2009a; see Amnesty International 2010:12–13 on other problems within the Comisarías including lack of privacy and inadequate training of officers).

During the years of the second Ortega administration, recorded cases of domestic violence increased. For instance, during the first 9 months of 2010, there were 25, 803 cases reported to the Comisarías, compared with 23, 442 cases in all of 2009. Nonetheless, according to the national chief of the Comisarías, Mercedes Ampié, this increase could be explained by the greater ease in reporting cases, as the number of Comisarías in the country was up to 59 by the end of 2010 (Romero and Loáisiga 2010). No doubt that was a factor. It is also possible that there was also more domestic violence in general, or it is possible that more people felt they could or should denounce cases of violence. Wendy Flores, a lawyer from the Centro Nicaragüense de Derechos Humanos (CENIDH), noted that at CENIDH they had also seen an increase in complaints of domestic and sexual violence. "The complaints have increased annually. Three years ago they went up from 150 to 200, by the end of last year, we had heard approximately 360 cases" (quoted in Lara 2010; see Amnesty International 2010:5 for more data on domestic violence).

Interestingly, when speaking to a delegation of Nordic politicians who criticized Nicaraguan politicians for having banned therapeutic abortion (abortion to save the life of a pregnant woman) in the run-up to the 2006 election, President Daniel Ortega brought up domestic violence rates in Nicaragua to make the point that women and children's status was good in Nicaragua. "[The ban on therapeutic abortion] is a way of defending the rights of women and children. The truth is that Nicaragua has the lowest rates of violence against women in all of Central America" (quoted in Alemán 2008). There is no way to know if Ortega was right in his claim that Nicaragua has the lowest rates of violence against women in Central America (and of course, Ortega himself does not know if his claim was true).[11]

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[11] "Nicaragua has been host to a series of surveys that suggested some of the highest levels of domestic violence encountered anywhere in the world, with two studies from the 1990s showing over a fifth of the women encountering severe physical abuse. A quarter of rural men in one survey said it was alright to beat a woman if she neglects the children or the house, and 10% thought it acceptable for refusal of sex. Only 17% of victims in one study told the police about the offence"

Reproductive Rights

The major issue in reproductive rights that dominated the first several years of second Ortega administration was the ban on therapeutic abortion. Therapeutic abortion was banned thanks to the votes of the FSLN, a party that had historically defended therapeutic abortion rights, in the weeks leading up to the 2006 election (on the partisan and social movement politics that led to the ban see Kampwirth 2008). That vote was then repeated in September 2007, when a new penal code was ratified by the National Assembly. In some ways, the second vote was the more shocking of the two.[12]

In 2006, many observers explained the FSLN's shift from its historic position protecting therapeutic abortion (though not abortion under other circumstances) in terms of electoral cynicism and a new pact with the Catholic Church, especially between Ortega and Murillo, on the one hand, and former Archbishop Miguel Obando y Bravo, on the other. But the 2007 vote was not held under any electoral pressures. Nonetheless, FSLN representatives all voted to uphold the ban (or they conveniently did not go to the Assembly that day). The explanation I heard from many proponents of the right to therapeutic abortion was that Ortega and Murillo are true believers and that for them opposing abortion even to save the life of the woman was no longer a matter of electoral politics, it was a matter of conviction. According to Andrés Pérez Baltodano, the transformation of Sandinista political discourse from a secular one promoting the "logic of the majorities" to a religious

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(UN Office on Drugs and Crime 2007:65–66). According to statistics reported by the nongovernmental Women's Network Against Violence, reported rapes increased dramatically during the last decade (including the first two years of the second Ortega administration). "In 2000 the Comisarías de la Mujer…received reports of 4000 cases of interfamily sexual violence, but in 2009 the figure had increased to 31,000 reports" (Agencia DPA 2010). That may be because sexual violence has increased, or it may be because there are now more governmental and nongovernmental efforts to stop such violence, and more social support for victims of violence.

[12] Martha Solano Martínez (2009) reproduces the exact language of the Penal Code that was passed in 2007, codifying the 2006 ban. The ban is addressed in several articles of the Penal Code, with different penalties for a person who performs an abortion with the woman's consent, for the woman who has the abortion, and for a person who causes a woman to "abort" in the course of hitting her (in Spanish the word "aborto" is used for both abortion and miscarriage; there is no distinction in the Penal Code). A person who performs an abortion will be sent to prison for 3–6 years if it is performed without the woman's consent or if the woman [sic] is under 16 years old, or 1–4 years in prison if the woman is 16 or older and she consents. If the abortion leads to injury to the woman, the penalty is 4–10 years and if it leads to her death, the penalty is 6–10 years in prison. If the person who performs the abortion is a doctor, surgeon, pharmacist, or midwife, the penalty is 5–10 years in prison (Article 162). If the abortion was performed to "cover up the dishonor of the woman" either by herself or with the help of another, then the penalty is less severe, 1–2 years in prison and 3–6 years if the woman dies (Article 163). In contrast, if the abortion [i.e., miscarriage] occurs because someone is hitting or committing violence against a woman but he only intends to beat her up, not to cause a miscarriage, then the penalty is 6 months to two years in prison (Article 164). So performing a safe abortion (i.e., one that does not lead to the woman's death or injury) with the woman's consent is penalized with up to 10 years in prison while beating up a woman and leading her to miscarry is penalized with no more than 2 years in prison.

one, promoting class reconciliation instead of social justice, is something that started long before 2006 (Pérez Baltodano 2009:139, 147–158). “It is a mistake to assume that the FSLN is simply manipulating the religious culture of the Nicaraguan masses. They are part of this culture” (Pérez Baltodano quoted in Rogers 2010).

I asked María Lidia Mejía, who represents the FSLN in the National Assembly, and who is also Coordinator of the Executive Commission of AMNLAE, about the ban on therapeutic abortion. Her answer was a nice illustration of the tensions within Sandinismo itself. She started with a tactical analysis of the vote. “We lost because we women could not come to an agreement. While 150 women [marched for therapeutic abortion rights] the Church came up with a huge march.” By using the phrase “we lost” she identifies herself with those who fought to preserve the right to therapeutic abortion. In fact AMNLAE, the Sandinista women’s organization, which is formally autonomous from the party, is on record as opposing the ban on therapeutic abortion (though it did not take that position until after the 2006 vote). But I knew that the FSLN block in the National Assembly had voted unanimously in favor of eliminating therapeutic abortion and so asked her directly if she had voted to eliminate it. She said no, she was in Panama at the time.

But then her discourse shifted from presenting the ban on therapeutic abortion as an unfortunate mistake, to presenting it as not really important for women. “It was a situation in which the political parties also used therapeutic abortion for political purposes and not as a matter of women’s rights. [With] holistic health care there is no need for therapeutic abortion.” I suggested that good healthcare was not always enough, that there were cases of women who bled to death during miscarriages because doctors did not intervene to stop the hemorrhaging, out of fear they might kill a still living fetus in the process and face prison.[13]

In response she pointed to the Equal Rights Law (Ley de Igualdad de Derechos y Oportunidades), passed in 2008,[14] and emphasized the importance of “holistic health.” “A lot of the radical feminist women’s movement [activists] were performing a lot of abortions and they weren’t even providing much follow-up.” She listed several problems this caused, including many women ending up sterile. Since the ban on therapeutic abortion, she said, maternal mortality rates had dropped down to 12 maternal deaths in the year 2007–2008. There was less maternal mortality because of better healthcare including projects like the Women’s and Children’s Houses (Casas Materna-infantil) that AMNLAE ran in cooperation with the Ministry of Health where women can safely give birth (interview, María Lidia Mejía,

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[13] 22-Year-old Francis Zamora, who died as a result of a miscarriage, was one of the many victims of the ban on therapeutic abortion though she herself never sought a therapeutic abortion. Zamora’s mother (quoted in Sirias 2007) explained: “They let my daughter die, the doctors at Alemán [Hospital] told me that they could not do the curettage [*legrado*] until she expelled the fetus. She suffered from when we arrived on the January 25 in the morning, until four in the afternoon the next day when she expelled the fetus… . They told me they could not do anything, that the laws in the country had changed and that they had to wait until the fetus came out on its own. Maybe if they had done the curettage earlier, she would not have died.”

[14] See Cabrales Aráuz (2010:172–196) for the full text of the Ley de Igualdad de Derechos y Oportunidades.

December 11, 2008). By 2010, there were 73 such houses across the country serving thousands of women, mainly those from rural areas who lacked easy access to hospitals (Bonilla 2010b).

Mejía's claim that maternal mortality in 2007–2008 was only 12 cases (or she might have meant, 12 per 100,000 live births, a common way of calculating) is inconsistent with a study based on data provided by the Ministry of Health. In 2007, the first year of the new Ortega administration, there were 115 cases of deaths due to pregnancy, or a rate of 82 per 100,000 live births. A chart that compares the years 2003–2007, shows that the 2007 rate was higher than the two previous years (73/100,000 in 2005 and 76/100,000 in 2006) though it was lower than the 2003 and 2004 rates (83 and 94/100,000 respectively). The data does not prove that the increase in maternal mortality was due to the ban on therapeutic abortion in late 2006, but it is consistent with that thesis. Given improvements in access to obstetric care after the Sandinistas eliminated fees for health care, one would have expected a drop in maternal mortality but instead it went up (Padilla 2008:7).

Feminist State-Society Relations

The return of Daniel Ortega has led to some socioeconomic policies that could be praised from a feminist perspective. That could not be said of Ortega's relationship with feminist activists. When I sat down with her in December 2008, Ana María Pizarro[15] started by asking when was the last time I was in Nicaragua. Hearing the answer – December of 2006 – she said that things had changed a lot, explaining that was still a time before "the persecution against us [the feminists]" (interview, December 1, 2008).

Sandinismo, like any political movement, had always been characterized by internal disagreements, especially regarding the role of feminism within revolutionary politics. And as I argued earlier, Ortega has always been a partisan of the least feminist school of thought within Sandinismo. But conflicts regarding Sandinismo and feminism did not generally focus on him personally until 1998, when his stepdaughter Zoilamerica Narváez publicly accused him of having sexually abused her from the age of 11, and having raped her over a period of years beginning when she was 15. From that point, when a number of feminist organizations stood with Zoilamerica (who until then had no involvement with the feminist movement), Ortega, his wife Rosario Murillo and the feminists have expressed mutual hostility (e.g., Murillo 2008), hostility that was manifested in the ban on therapeutic abortion and in a series of actions after Ortega took office.

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[15] A medical doctor, Ana María Pizarro was born in Argentina, joined El Salvador's FMLN when she was living in Costa Rica in 1980, and when in 1982 she learned that she was in danger of being extradited to El Salvador (where she would have faced near certain torture and death) she fled to revolutionary Nicaragua. She has lived there ever since. In the 1980s, she worked with the health ministry and AMNLAE (Asociación de Mujeres Nicaragüenses Luisa Amanda Espinoza), especially on women's health. In 1991, she founded the feminist clinic Sí Mujer (Servicios Integrales para la Mujer), and she became a naturalized Nicaraguan citizen in 1996. A prominent advocate for reproductive health rights and a member of the MAM (Movimiento Autónomo de Mujeres), she was a target of both Arnoldo Alemán's and Daniel Ortega's campaigns against the NGO sector, campaigns that I will discuss later.

Roger Burbach offered a nice summary of the public campaigns waged against Ortega's two principle critics, the independent press and the feminist movement. He notes that in 2008,

> The Ministry of Government launched a probe into NGOs operating in the country, accusing the Center for Communications Research (Cinco), which is headed by [Carlos Fernando] Chamorro, of "diverting and laundering money" through its agreement with the Autonomous Women's Movement (MAM), which opposes the Ortega-endorsed law banning abortion. This agreement, financed by eight European governments and administered by Oxfam, aims to promote "the full citizenship of women." First lady Murillo called it "Satan's fund" and "the money of evil." Cinco's board of directors were interrogated, and a prosecutor accompanied by the police raided the Cinco offices with a search warrant. Warned in advance of the visit, some 200 people gathered in the building in solidarity, refusing the police entry. Then as night fell, the police established a cordon around the building and, in the early morning, police broke down the door. After kicking out the protesters, the police stayed in the office for 15 hours, with supporters and onlookers gathered outside, shutting down traffic for blocks around. The police rummaged through offices, carting off files and computers. No formal charges were been filed, but Cinco and the MAM were officially investigated for money laundering. Along with MAM, the broader women's movement in Nicaragua, which firmly opposes the Ortega government, was among the first to experience its repressive blows. In 2007 the government opened a case against nine women leaders, accusing them of conspiring "to cover up the crime of rape in the case of a 9-year-old rape victim known as 'Rosita,' who obtained an abortion in Nicaragua in 2003" (Burbach 2009:36–37; on this campaign and on intimidation of feminists by the police, AMNLAE and CPC activists, and gangs of delinquents affiliated with the president see Aguilera 2009; Lara 2008a, b, c, 2009b, c; Larios 2009; Amnesty International 2010:9–10).

Apparently, no evidence that supported these allegations was found, and eventually, after more than 2½ years, all charges and accusations were dropped (La Boletina 2010).

So, if there was no evidence to back these charges, why were they made? Of course one answer could be that President Ortega expected to find evidence, which is why he sent police to raid the office of the journalistic think tank, CINCO, and why several years were spent investigating independent feminists for crimes including money laundering and conspiring to cover up the crime of rape. That is the position suggested by FSLN National Assembly representative (and AMNLAE executive board member), María Lidia Mejía.

I had not mentioned this campaign when Mejía brought it up in response to a different question. She referred to the "the position of the government regarding CINCO," noting, "I think the president is right. Organizations here profit off of women's poverty. They give a workshop, they give them each a plate of food, and there they are done with their work… . Many organizations receive millions and you can't see any impact… . Why can they have television programs? Because they have huge amounts of money. We don't" (interview, December 11, 2008). Mejía's argument did not address the specific accusations leveled at the independent feminists and press, but rather was a more general accusation that these groups raised funds by obtaining enormous grants from foreign sources, and then did little with the money (for a more brutal version of this argument, see La Voz del Sandinismo 2008).

What was striking to me about the argument is that it was almost identical to one made years earlier by former President Arnoldo Alemán of the PLC, when he set the stage for his own campaign against nongovernmental organizations. Alemán first made the case that NGO workers were just out for themselves and did little to help ordinary Nicaraguans in a book that was released during his campaign for president.

> If with the millions of dollars that have been sent in the past as aid or 'subsidies' for hundreds of 'projects,' that have perhaps made Nicaragua the country that 'has the most projects in the world,' if only a very few [of those dollars] had been channeled and carried out adequately, with honesty, plausible and transparent realism, surely we would have made significant and visible advances in many areas. But where are the results and the realities? We don't want to continue to be a 'project'! Nor do we want to be anybody's place for 'experimentation and dumping garbage'! (Alemán 1996).

Blaming people who try to address the needs of poor people for causing or at least benefitting from their poverty, is common to both Ortega and Alemán's campaigns against rivals in civil society. Another striking commonality was that Daniel Ortega and Arnoldo Alemán both focused their hostilities on women who were associated with the Nicaraguan feminist movement (on Alemán's 2000–2001 campaign see Kampwirth 2003; for a discussion of similarities between the campaigns see Martínez 2008).

But the campaigns were far from identical. Sofía Montenegro identified a number of differences. Montenegro, who was personally targeted by the campaign, is one of the founders of the journalism NGO CINCO, as well as an activist in the Autonomous Feminist Movement (Movimiento Autónomo de Mujeres or MAM). A collaborator with the FSLN from long before the 1979 overthrow of the dictatorship, she spent most of the 1980s and 1990s working as a journalist for the official Sandinista newspaper *Barricada* until journalists like Montenegro and *Barricada*'s editor in chief, Carlos Fernando Chamorro, were purged in 1994, as the FSLN tried to reassert control over the editorial policies of the paper. The paper then stuck to a fairly boring party line, and, in a bit of poetic justice, closed in 1998 due to poor sales.

For Sofía Montenegro, Ortega's campaign against feminist NGO activists was worse than Alemán's in a number of ways. In the case of Arnoldo Alemán, the campaign was a matter of "retaliation [against those who competed with him for foreign funds] without a larger political perspective." In contrast, Ortega's campaign "is part of a political project aimed at stopping the autonomous activists, the press, and the NGOs. Alemán did not see them as enemies. Daniel does see them that way… . Alemán finally gave up on that road because he is much smarter than Daniel Ortega." Montenegro suggested that Alemán was more concerned than Ortega seemed to be that his attacks on civil society would lead to his losing access to foreign aid (interview, December 9, 2008). Major country donors in fact did cut off grants to Nicaragua during the presidencies of both men in protest of their less than democratic politics.

But Alemán also faced a problem that Ortega did not face. In response to his campaign against feminist NGOs, the international solidarity movement launched a mass campaign to defend NGO activists, especially those, like Dorothy Granada, who were foreign born and retained strong ties to the north (see footnote 5). Daniel Ortega had the advantage of facing a solidarity movement that could not, or would not, launch an effective response. The problem was rooted in the fact that the Nicaraguan solidarity movement had been created to defend Sandinismo against the violence of the Reagan administration and the Contras. But both Ortega and his opponents traced their political histories to the revolution. They all remained Sandinista, though his opponents had become dissident Sandinistas. So many in the solidarity movement, which up until that point had made an effort to remain neutral regarding the many interpretations of Sandinismo, had a hard time responding.

Not only were there differences in the international reaction to Alemán and Ortega's antifeminist NGO campaigns, but there were domestic differences. Juanita Jiménez, a lawyer, MAM member, and former activist in the Sandinista Youth, was also a target of Ortega's anti-NGO campaign. She explained that in 2000 and 2001, the campaign was one of a Liberal president attacking Sandinistas in civil society.

> Who were those of us who were most prominent in the organizations? People who had come out of the revolution. So to clash with the NGOs was to clash with Sandinismo. [Dorothy Granada's] cooperative in Mulukukú was attacked so hard. [The cooperative] really came out of the revolution itself so [Alemán's campaign] had a different slant because it was anti-Sandinista. A different slant, with the particular detail that at that time there still was an opposition party [the FSLN] that was ideologically coherent.

In 2000 and 2001, the FSLN had the strength and the will to defend the organizations. For all their differences with the FSLN, feminists like Jiménez felt that the FSLN was an ally against Alemán. "So Arnoldo did not get what he wanted. He had to accommodate and accept the organizations… . In the end I feel that in the case of Alemán, [despite] his authoritarian attitude, essentially he was willing to accept democracy. Because that is what sells neoliberalism: the free market and democracy."

One of the reasons Ortega's campaign was worse was because, from Jiménez's perspective, the party had changed. "You can't characterize the current FSLN. It has many discourses…a revolutionary discourse, a populist discourse, a fundamentalist discourse. That is completely unnatural for a revolutionary party. By any means it is going to stay in power and this 'by any means' has awful implications for the country… . The most painful thing is that we are Sandinistas too… . On the one hand, we stood by Zoilámerica. On the other hand, we were promoting an alternative force which is the MRS. That is high treason" (interview, December 4, 2008).

In addition to the feminists' domestic treachery, it maybe be just as bad that they have been instrumental in humiliating Daniel Ortega on an international stage, at what should be a time of triumph for him, as a senior member of the Latin American electoral left. It turns out that feminists, like Ortega himself, have international allies. Those allies have repeatedly shown up to noisily denounce him for the allegations that he repeatedly raped his stepdaughter, and for his campaign against individual feminists. In some cases, the feminists who denounced him were appointees of his presidential allies.

> The minister of women's affairs in Paraguay's new left-wing government, Gloria Rubin, whipped up a media storm in August by calling Ortega a "rapist" and protesting his invitation to President Fernando Lugo's inauguration — an event Ortega eventually skipped to avoid the heat. A week later in Honduras, Selma Estrada, minister of the National Institute of Women, resigned her government post in protest over the official invitation of Ortega to Tegucigalpa (Rogers 2008).

This campaign continued through the years of Ortega's presidency. For instance, in 2010 he apparently was forced to cancel his plans to attend Uruguayan leftist José Mujica's presidential inauguration in response to planned feminist protests (Uriarte 2010). Even when he did attend international gatherings, he did so under a humiliating cloud of protest, sometimes having to sneak in back doors to avoid protestors. That hardly befit the triumphant return of the leader of the party of the Sandinista revolution.

Sexuality

Sandinismo has often been conflicted regarding lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transsexual (LGBT) rights. The first gay rights groups were founded during the revolution in the late 1980s by Sandinistas who were active in various revolutionary activities. They were quickly called into the Ministry of the Interior for questioning, and told they needed to stop their organizing work, that the revolution could not afford controversy during a time of war and economic crisis. But many of them eventually found political shelter and the opportunity to organize around the issue of HIV-AIDS in the Ministry of Health, then headed by Dora María Téllez. After the FSLN lost the 1990 election, gay and lesbian Sandinistas felt much freer to organize for themselves and the early 1990s saw the emergence of many autonomous gay and lesbian rights groups, often in alliance with the emerging autonomous feminist movement.

Now in the opposition, many Sandinista leaders took a somewhat different stance regarding gay and lesbian activists, and toward autonomous social movement organizing in general, perhaps recognizing that these activists were potential allies who shared the values of Sandinismo, even if they differed on specific interpretations. So when, in 1992, right-wing representatives to the National Assembly proposed an extremely punitive antigay bill, Article 204,[16] the FSLN block in the Assembly voted unanimously against it, though it passed anyway.

For 15 years, Article 204 remained on the books, giving Nicaragua the distinction of having the worst antigay legislation in the Americas. It was quietly removed from the draft of the new Penal Code in 2006, and when the final Penal Code was ratified by the National Assembly in 2007, it was gone. So the Penal Code presents us with a puzzle: it both severely restricted reproductive rights by eliminating the right to therapeutic abortion, and it greatly expanded LGBT rights by eliminating Article 204 (Morel 2007).

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[16] Article 204 read: "Anyone who induces, promotes, propagandizes or practices sex between people of the same sex in a scandalous way commits the crime of sodomy. It will be penalized with one to three years of prison." In reality, Article 204 was rarely applied but its existence was intimidating to LGBT Nicaraguans, and to anybody who wished to publicly support gay rights.

That was not the only example of the Ortega administration supporting gay rights. In late 2009, Omar Cabezas, who headed the state human rights agency, the Ministry for the Defense of Human Rights (Procuraduría para la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos or PDDH) named María Samira Montiel Sandino as a special attorney for Sexual Diversity (Pérez Solís 2009; Lara 2009d). Samira Montiel, as she is usually called, is the first governmental LGBT advocate in the country, and so this is an impressive turn around given that just 2 years earlier, even advocating for gay rights was punishable with prison time. And yet, Montiel's position within the Procuraduria, at least as indicated by its website, was not very prominent. When I looked at the website in February 2011 (and on a number of earlier occasions), I could find no reference to Montiel nor to the existence of her position, nor to the fact that the Human Rights Attorney General's office included sexual diversity among the long list of issues addressed by that institution, nor did Montiel appear on the list of other special attorneys (the special attorneys for women, for children and adolescents, for prisoners, etc.). She did get interviewed a number of times by both major newspapers, so people who read the papers regularly might have known about her, but her absence from the Human Rights agency website seemed odd. In fact, it was parallel to the way Article 204 had been eliminated – extremely quietly – a stark contrast with the very vocal way in which therapeutic abortion was eliminated or the equally vocal way in which various socioeconomic programs for women were promoted.

Another example of the Ortega administration reaching out to sexual minorities started in 2008, when the special attorney for women's rights, Deborah Grandison, was in contact with organized sex workers in the city of León (Lara 2009e). As a result of these activities the

> PDDH signed an agreement with the Network of Sex Workers of Nicaragua [Red de Trabajadores Sexuales de Nicaragua, Red Trasexnic], which is made up of the groups from the cities of Matagalpa and Estelí, Girasoles Nicaragua and Las Golondrinas, whose purpose is to work for the promotion and defense of human rights, and to promote the inclusion of this union in policy making to reestablish their citizenship rights (Lara 2009d).

While it is possible that the staff of the Attorney General for Human's Rights office is more sensitive to sexuality related rights than the Ortega administration as a whole, it is worth mentioning that the widely distributed booklet "Gender Politics: Draft Proposal" notes the importance of "Always maintaining respectful and polite behavior in dealing with other people, considering their ideas and contributions, without discriminating by sex, age, social or ethnic origin, creed, nationality, *sexual preference*, political affiliation or office" (Gobierno de Reconciliación y Unidad Nacional n.d.:18; my emphasis). Despite mutual hostility between the feminist movement and Daniel Ortega, the FSLN has clearly evolved from its origins as a Marxist-Leninist organization, at least in some ways.

Swimming in the Pink Tide: Nicaragua in Regional Perspective

How do the gender policies of the Ortega administration compare to those implemented by the other pink tide governments? Elisabeth Friedman (2009) evaluates the gender policies of four of them, the governments of Lula in Brazil, Evo Morales in Bolivia, Michelle Bachelet in Chile, and Hugo Chávez in Venezuela. Drawing on her work, and a number of other sources, it is clear that many of the patterns I identified in Nicaragua hold true for pink tide presidents across the region.

Friedman argued that Hugo Chávez, Lula and Michelle Bachelet "seem to be making good on the left's promise to ameliorate the material inequalities among their male and female citizens" (2009:419). Similarly, shortly after his inauguration in 2007, Ecuador's Rafael Correa made microloans for poor women a priority of his government, earmarking "seventy million dollars to a National Microfinance System Program" (Brenner n.d.). Dilma Rousseff (Lula's chosen successor) who took office in January 2011, appointed a Minister of Women's Affairs who promised to help working women by overseeing the construction of 6,000 new day care centers. She also promised to extend small loan programs for women (Assessoria de Imprensa Iriny Lopes 2010).

All four presidents evaluated by Friedman did a reasonable job of appointing women to their cabinets, and had some success in promoting women's participation in legislative positions (2009:425–426). Similarly, Rafael Correa's first cabinet was made up "with an almost equal number of male and female ministers for the first time in the history of Ecuador." He also broke barriers by naming a woman as Minister of Defense (Palacios Jaramillo 2008). "On the issue of violence against women, stronger legislation has been put into place in Chile, Venezuela, and Brazil. But in this area, the state is far from taking the lead, as illustrated by Lula's dilatory action and Chávez's backsliding on fulfillment" (Friedman 2009:427).

On the issue of reproductive rights, especially abortion, Friedman notes that "leftwing executives seem either unable or unwilling to back a policy that deeply challenges gender roles – and religious beliefs" (2009:428; also see Azize Vargas 2009:46–47).[17] Still there were a number of efforts to expand reproductive rights. In Bolivia, there were some legislative attempts to codify that "men and women are guaranteed the exercise of their sexual and reproductive rights" (2009:427). In Venezuela, there were some feminist efforts to include the right to a first trimester abortion in the Constitution, but they failed.

In 2008, in Uruguay both the House and the Senate, passed a bill to decriminalize abortion. Despite polls showing that the majority supported decriminalization, leftist president Tabaré Vázquez vetoed the bill (Gallego-Díaz 2008). The Health

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[17] An overview of abortion policy in Latin America is notable in that there seems to be no pattern distinguishing countries governed by left-wing and right-wing presidents (Aquevedo 2009). With the exception of Nicaragua's Daniel Ortega, none of the new left presidents promoted a ban of abortion to save the life of the woman, but in the countries where such bans were already in place (Chile and El Salvador), the election of a leftist did not result in a restoration of limited abortion rights.

Minister of his successor, José Mujica, signed a decree that guaranteed access to emergency contraception, birth control pills, and condoms through the national healthcare service (LR 21 2010).

Ecuador's Rafael Correa has strongly opposed decriminalizing abortion, but he has promoted contraception, especially for young people. He spoke directly to them in one of his weekly addresses. "Take care of yourselves, we have to talk about these things: family planning, the use of condoms, contraception. We can't continue to allow our teenagers to get pregnant and to already have children at the age of 17 or 16 and the irresponsible father doesn't even worry about the child he fathered" commented Correa" (EFE 2011).

In Chile, under Michelle Bachelet, the health ministry provided women, and girls over the age of 14, with access to all reproductive methods in its clinics. Those methods included the morning-after pill until a court ruled against the health ministry. Bachelet's party also (unsuccessfully) sought to decriminalize therapeutic abortion which had been banned during the Pinochet dictatorship (Friedman 2009). Like Chile, El Salvador is one of a handful of countries in the world in which abortion is banned under all circumstances, even to save the life of the pregnant woman. Many hoped that the 2008 election of Mauricio Funes, representing the FMLN, would lead to a restoration of therapeutic abortion, if not outright legalization. Supporters of therapeutic abortion rights had reason for optimism, as Funes had indicated his approval when the Mexico City legislators had decriminalized abortion in 2007. On March 11, 2008, during his campaign for president, he met with representatives of 30 Salvadoran feminist organizations, stating that the issue of therapeutic abortion had to be analyzed and that he was in favor of making sure girls and teenagers had access to reproductive healthcare. But on March 23, after the archbishop of El Salvador called on presidential candidates to condemn abortion, Funes cut some of his ties to the feminists by stating "I already said that I am a candidate who opposes depenalization of abortion… . I can't say it any more clearly" (El Diario de Hoy 2008). Two years into his presidency, Funes maintained that position.

> The vice minister of Health, Violeta Menjívar, and the assistant chief of the FMLN block in the legislature, Norma Guevara, lamented the position of president Mauricio Funes with respect to the absolute ban on abortion in El Salvador, a topic that is extremely sensitive within the leftist party, in which there are sectors who hope that the legislation will be revised (Valencia Caravantes 2010).

Brazil's Lula was ambivalent, supporting a law to decriminalize abortion but also publicly stating his opposition to abortion (Friedman 2009). Abortion was a major issue in the last days of Dilma Rousseff's campaign for president in 2010. Green candidate Marina Silva unexpectantly surged in the last days of the first round as she and many evangelical ministers questioned Rousseff's antiabortion credentials. Silva came in third place with 19% of the vote, enough to deny frontrunner Rousseff an expected first round victory. Campaigning in the second round, "both Rousseff and Serra said they would be against changing Brazil's ban on abortion if elected, although videos surfaced in which Rousseff apparently signaled she'd support its decriminalization. Both candidates also said they were against gay marriage. 'We have shown in the elections that we have a lot of power,' an evangelical preacher told BBC News" (Hernandez 2010). In contrast, Rousseff's Woman's Minister, Iriny Lopes, favored expanding access to legalizing abortion. At the very least this indicates that there continue to be disagreements within the leftist PT about what to do about the issue of illegal abortion, the fifth leading cause of death for Brazilian women. Lopes also promised to prioritize family planning campaigns and expanding access to tubal ligations and vasectomies (Salomon 2010).

In a 2010 report, Human Rights Watch noted that the election of Argentina's first female president – Cristina Fernández de Kirchner – did not lead to better reproductive services for Argentine women. "The new government that took office in December of 2007 – says the report – has not improved women's capacity to exercise their health and reproductive rights, and it even has turned back some of those gains" (García 2010). But Argentina was unusual, there was modest backsliding in reproductive rights in only a few of the other pink tide countries. Usually there was some limited progress. None of other leftist presidents sought to end preexisting reproductive rights as did Daniel Ortega with the ban on therapeutic abortion.

The left wing governments varied in their relations with organized feminists. At best, in Chile and Brazil, feminists enjoyed significant access to the state (Friedman 2009:423). At worst, in Bolivia, during the Morales years the women's movement was divided by a "pre-existing polarization between feminists who worked with pre-Morales governments and those who rejected engagement with the state." This sort of divide in the feminist movement was also present in Venezuela (2009:422). Former bishop and current president Fernando Lugo of Paraguay never had particularly good relations with the feminist community due to his refusal to address many of their concerns, especially regarding abortion and contraception. That relationship only worsened when it came out that, as a priest, he had impregnated a number of young women, and abandoned their children (CMP 2009).

Mauricio Funes' rocky start with El Salvador's feminists, when he went back on his earlier support for limited abortion rights during the 2008 campaign, worsened when the director of the state women's institute (ISDEMU), Julia Evelyn Martínez, was fired. According to a press release, she was fired by the entire board of the women's institute due to their lack of confidence in her work. But feminists accused the first couple, Mauricio Funes and his wife Vanda Pignato (who is the chair of the board of ISDEMU), of having orchestrated the firing, arranging to have her fired in the absence of the board members from feminist organizations. During a demonstration in support of Martínez, feminist activists accused El Salvador's first couple of modeling themselves after Nicaragua's first couple. "It worries us that this could become like the pair in nearby in Nicaragua, Daniel Ortega-Rosario Murillo; it worries us that it could happen at some point that power is exercised at the whim of Funes and Pignato, however they like" (CONTRAPUNTO 2010).

Despite this accusation, neither Funes nor any of the pink tide presidents had such bad relations with organized feminists as Daniel Ortega. None of his leftist colleagues led a campaign against their feminist movements, None of them defamed individual feminists in the press, threatened them with prison, and had them attacked them on the street.

How can we explain the patterns within the pink tide regarding gender politics? One obvious hypothesis is that female presidents would put more energy into promoting gender equality than male presidents. So far, three of the pink tide presidents have been women (Michelle Bachelet of Chile, 2006–2010, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner of Argentina, 2007-present, and Dilma Rousseff of Brazil, 2011-present). While they have been no worse than their male counterparts, they have not been notably better regarding gender equality either.

In symbolic terms, it is important that these countries are, or have been, governed by a female chief executive. While symbolism is extremely hard to measure, it does matter if people are socialized to think of women as being as potentially powerful and competent as men. But in terms of policy, there is no clear pattern, women seem to be neither better nor worse in promoting women's rights. In fact, arguably it is harder for a female president to promote gender equality or to be identified with organized feminists, than for a man.

> The election of Dilma Rousseff is a paradox from a feminist perspective. The arrival of the first female president in the history of Brazil marks an unprecedented advance for women in the halls of power. But the government of Dilma does not promise any advance in the most polemical points in the feminist agenda (Salomon 2010).

None of the female new left presidents identify themselves as feminists. Surprisingly perhaps, the first self-identified feminist among the pink tide presidents is Venezuela's Hugo Chávez. As he told a gathering of the World Social Forum in Brazil in 2009, "Now I have declared myself to be a feminist. I am a feminist. And I also say, I think, with all respect, I think that a true socialist has to be a feminist." He went on (to cheers and a few boos), "if not, there is something missing, there is something missing."[18]

He turned to Rafael Correa, who was sitting next to him on the podium and asked, "You are also a feminist, right?" Correa nodded and smiled (whether in agreement or embarrassment is hard to tell). Chávez observed that Correa is "profoundly" feminist (Guamber 2009). On multiple occasions, Chávez has referred to himself as a feminist. While, to my knowledge, Correa does not normally self-identify as feminist, he has been "accused" of being a feminist because of powerful public service announcements that form part of his campaign against domestic violence (Saulotemplar 2010).

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[18] Hugo Chávez's announcement that he is a feminist, and that all socialists should be feminists, signals real evolution in his thinking since he became president more than a decade ago. "Chávez named no new women to his first cabinet…or to high-ranking positions. His language was sexist (i.e. off-color jokes in public) and his actions paternalistic; he spoke to and about women only as self-sacrificing mothers and victims of poverty and racism. Then it was revealed that CONAMU [the state women's ministry]'s budget would be cut by 80 percent, and rumors circulated that Chávez planned to name the wife of a military officer as its director. Among the persons he handpicked for the constituent assembly, there were few women (less than 5 percent)" (Rakowski and Espina 2010:261). Rakowski and Espina argue that the role of women in Chávez's "Bolivarian Revolution" changed as a result of the educational efforts of women from parties that sympathized with Chávez's government along with the efforts of feminists within civil society.

Most of my findings regarding the gender politics of pink tide presidents are not that different than what one might expect, knowing something about how the Latin American left has traditionally addressed gender issues. The new left, like the old left, is good at addressing gender issues that can be fit into a class framework. So, socioeconomic issues are the easy to address in the sense that they are not politically controversial, at least not among leftists, though they are difficult in the sense that it costs money to address them. Appointing women to political positions is also generally not controversial and it does not cost any more to appoint a woman than to appoint a man, although the governments were not always consistent regarding appointments.[19]

Domestic violence is somewhat delicate since it opens the risk of seeming to attack the family, and nobody – not even a new leftist – wants to attack the family. Reproductive issues are even more delicate though many of these elected leftists were willing to support some expansion of reproductive rights. None of them fought to eliminate abortion under all circumstances as did Ortega. Finally, autonomous feminists are a problem for any government, of the left or the right, precisely because they are autonomous and have ideas and demands of their own. Perhaps autonomous feminism presents even more difficult problems than other autonomous social movements for leftists who try to balance the demands of new and old left constituencies.

Probably the biggest surprise is that, just about all the pink tide governments made progress in promoting sexual rights. In Venezuela in 2007 and Bolivia in 2009, the constitutions were amended to prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation (Hurtado 2010). In 1998 "the Chilean parliament repealed the sections of the penal code that criminalized same-sex relations between consenting adults… the Civil Registry now allows for name and sex changes without undergoing sexual reassignment surgery, and the Labour Bureau will investigate claims against unjust firing on the basis of homophobia or transphobia." But as Friedman notes, it is "Lula's government [that] has taken the most wide-ranging steps to fight homophobia and promote LGBT rights." She lists too many accomplishments to summarize here but they include civil union legislation, special consideration for LGBT people in antiviolence work, federal sponsorship of a national conference for LGBT rights and of the world's largest Gay Pride march, as well as leading multiple international efforts to promote sexual rights (Friedman 2009:428–429).

The government of his successor, Dilma Rousseff, who took office in January 2011, promised to continue this work. Her newly appointed women's rights minister identified defending the rights of sex workers as a major concern (Salomon 2010). And her human rights minister, María do Rosario, promised to fight homophobia and to guarantee adoption rights for gay couples (ANSA 2010). While during the campaign, Rousseff herself had said she was against letting same-sex couples marry, she is on record as favoring civil unions.

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[19] Others have also found leftists politicians to be relatively willing to appoint women to key positions. In their study of 18 Latin American democracies from 1980 to 2003, Escobar-Lemmon and Taylor Robinson (2005) found that presidents from left-wing parties were more likely to appoint women to cabinet positions than presidents from right-wing parties.

It is worth noting that Nicaragua and the four pink tide countries analyzed by Friedman are part of a regional trend. In El Salvador, a "Sexual Diversity Unit" has been created within "the Social Inclusion Secretariat of the Presidency, headed by First Lady Vanda Pignato" (CISPES 2010). A May 2010 Executive Degree banned discrimination due to sexual orientation or gender identity in public administration in El Salvador. Representatives from the Sexual Diversity Unit of the Social Inclusion Secretariat even marched in the June 2010 gay pride parade in San Salvador (Presidencia de la República 2010). Prior to the election of Mauricio Funes, Salvadoran legislators had proposed constitutional amendments that would have closed off "any possibility of marriage or civil union between homosexuals, or the adoption of children by same-sex couples…n the previous legislature, the [leftist] FMLN supported the constitutional amendments… . But during the campaign for the March 2009 elections in which President Mauricio Funes was elected, the party changed its position and now maintains that the changes violate the civil rights of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual (LGBT) community" (Ayala 2009).

Since 2009, gays and lesbians in Mexico City are permitted to marry and adopt children, a right that was upheld by a 2010 court ruling. In 2009, Uruguay became the first Latin American country where gay couples may adopt children.

> This is the third such legal action taken by the Uruguayan government in the last two years to extend more rights to homosexuals. In December 2007, the Congress legalized civil unions for gay and lesbian couples. In May of this year, Tabare Vazquez, the first leftist president in Uruguayan history, opened access for homosexuals to military schools (Longmire 2009).

In Ecuador, the 2008 Constitution guarantees gay and lesbian couples the right to enter into civil unions (BBC 2010).[20] Finally, in 2010, Argentina became the first country in the Americas to grant full marriage rights to gays and lesbians (La Nación. 2010; Warren 2010).

Though Cuba is not normally considered a pink tide country (as the same unelected government has ruled since 1959), in significant ways, Cuba has changed as the Latin American left has changed. Perhaps that is not surprising as under Raul Castro, Cuba is strongly influenced by Latin America's new left, at least in some ways. It is a member of the ALBA, it is very close to Venezuela's Hugo Chávez, and it is so isolated from most international circles that it might be expected to be more influenced by the pink tide countries than it would be if it were better integrated into international politics.

For decades, Cuba probably was more brutal in its treatment of gays and lesbians than any other country in the hemisphere. So the change in Cuba's policy toward its gay citizens is remarkable, generally attributed to the fact that Raul Castro's daughter, Mariela Castro, is head of Cuba's National Center for Sexual Education and a strong supporter of LGBT rights. Now in Cuba there are official celebrations of the "International Day Against Homophobia," a bill was proposed to legalize marriage between partners of the same sex (though it failed, supposedly under pressure from the Catholic Church), and transsexuals who wish to have sex reassignment surgery can have it for free (Acosta 2008; Dufrechou 2010; Lopez Torregrosa 2010).

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[20] The BBC article, which is written in English, says that the Constitution "allows civil marriage for gay partners." Though I have not read the Constitution, I have read enough articles in Spanish related to the Constitution that I am confident that this is a mistranslation, "civil marriage" should be "civil union," a rather different thing.

Why is the new left so good on LGBT rights, especially when compared with its relationship with feminists, and its positions on the expansion of reproductive rights, ranging from less than enthusiastic to hostile?[21] From the perspective of Nicaragua, the governing couple – Daniel Ortega and Rosario Murillo – have historically had a far more hostile relationship with organized feminists than with organized LGBT rights activists. Certainly the FSLN was unfriendly to LGBT activists in the 1980s but to a large extent that changed in the early 1990s with the battle over Article 204, a battle in which the FSLN ended up siding with gay rights and feminist organizations against social conservatives. A difference between the gay rights and feminist organizations that united in 1992 to oppose Article 204 could be that, in 1998, the feminist groups then took the side of Zoilámerica Narváez as she accused her stepfather Daniel Ortega of having sexually abused her for years. In contrast, LGBT groups did not play a prominent role in that battle, on either side. Also, in 2006, some autonomous feminists, who called themselves the MAM signed an agreement with the dissident Sandinista party, the MRS. Again, the LGBT groups did not take public positions on these conflicts within Sandinismo.

Elisabeth Friedman suggests that it is possible "that the rights-based arguments used by activists, which do not raise debates over the inception of life, can be more persuasive in a region deeply influenced by human rights groups" (2009:431). It is also possible that the fact that the LGBT movement is almost always quite a bit smaller than the feminist movement means that it is more easily co-optable than the feminist movement. The way in which rights have been extended to gays and lesbians suggests that, at least in Nicaragua, the goal has been to gain a new constituency without antagonizing the right too much. I mentioned that a special attorney on sexual diversity now serves within the Nicaraguan state human rights agency, but her existence does not appear anywhere on the web page of the agency. Gay rights activists presumably know she exists, if not for the press coverage then because she is a member of the lesbian rights organization, Grupo Safo, but that may not be true for most of their opponents (but see Escobar Sandino 2009). Another example of very quietly reaching out to gay constituents regards the Penal Code, while both the right to therapeutic abortion and Article 204 were eliminated as part of the same revision of the Penal Code, therapeutic abortion was the subject of mass mobilization

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[21] From this point on, I am referring to the pink tide countries, which do not include Cuba. For decades Cuba has been the only Latin American country in which women have enjoyed full reproductive rights, including the unqualified right to abortion. The question for the pink tide presidents is why they have been much stronger on LGBT rights than reproductive rights. The question for Cuba is the opposite, why it has historically been so bad on LGBT rights despite its progressive stance on reproductive rights.

(on both sides) while the antigay Article 204 was the subject of silence (again, on both sides).[22]

Conclusion: Revolution, Social Justice, and the Problem of Democracy

In the introduction to their edited volume on 30 years of Sandinismo, Salvador Martí and David Close argue that, in the 1980s, the FSLN made at least four major contributions to the transformation of Nicaragua into a more democratic country.

> The first was overthrowing a personalistic dictatorship that had held power for four decades. The second was the implementation of important social and economic reforms – like agrarian reform, and policies in the area of housing, health and education – that even though they did not survive the change of government [in 1990], still represented the first steps toward greater equity and justice. The third…was the change, represented by the revolution, in the way in which Nicaraguan citizens saw politics, causing a transformation in political culture. And the fourth and final [contribution] was the creation of an institutional framework…the Sandinistas were the first in Nicaragua who acted in compliance with the principle of rule of law Martí i Puig and Close (2009:19–20).

This is not to say that all Sandinistas always lived up to their own values, as Martí and Close also discuss. And the weight that should be given to the different values was always debated among Sandinistas. But those values were part of a single package: the end of personalistic strongman politics was tied up with democratization, which in turn was tied up with economic justice, social justice, and the rule of law. Today that package has unraveled.

After the FSLN's 1990 electoral loss, the unraveling began as (in the early 1990s) Sandinista popular organizations, most notably women's organizations, began to demand autonomy from the FSLN, then, (in the mid-1990s) as the party itself broke apart, with most of the historic leaders of the FSLN leaving to form the MRS, and most of the rank and file staying within the FSLN. The FSLN ended up keeping the party's name, flag, and supreme leader, Daniel Ortega. Then remarkably (in the late 1990s and early 2000s), Ortega entered into a series of pacts with the supreme leader of the major rival to the FSLN, Arnoldo Alemán of the PLC. Through the pact those men both preserved their own personal power and transformed the logic of partisan and social movement politics.

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[22] The ban on therapeutic abortion and the abolition of antigay Article 204 were part of the same revision of the Penal Code. But while the politics of therapeutic abortion were a near constant in press coverage of the Penal Code from August to November of 2006, the press was close to silent on the implications of the Penal Code for LGBT rights during that same period. When I did interviews with proponents and opponents of therapeutic abortion (in November and December of that year), only one person mentioned, almost in passing, that the new Penal Code was going to eliminate Article 204 (and she, an opponent of therapeutic abortion, was unhappy that "sodomy" was going to be legalized). I brought that up when I presented my research in mid-December 2006 to a gathering of perhaps 40 feminist activists at the very gay friendly feminist NGO Puntos de Encuentro, asking if they were aware that Article 204 was about to be eliminated. There was some mumbling in the crowd and someone said, yes that was true, but just as quickly they dropped the topic of Article 204 to return to therapeutic abortion.

From the time the Sandinistas overthrew the Somoza dictatorship in 1979 until the year 2006, "Nicaraguan politics followed a bipolar logic: Sandinistas and anti-Sandinistas" (Martí i Puig and Close 2009:20). The pact between Ortega and Alemán did not change that bipolar logic. What it did was to superimpose a new axis on top of the old one, that of pro-pact vs. anti-pact (2009:26–27).[23] In the 2006 election that Daniel Ortega won (thanks in large part to years of pact making with Arnoldo Alemán),[24] there were four major contenders, divided up along the logic of the two cross-cutting poles: the FSLN (pro-Sandinista and pro-pact), the PLC (anti-Sandinista and pro-pact), the ALN (anti-Sandinista and anti-pact), and the Alianza Herty-MRS (pro-Sandinista and anti-pact).[25]

That cross-cutting logic makes for strange bedfellows. It also leads to constant accusations among leftists that former allies in the revolution are no longer leftists. For many Sandinistas within civil society and the MRS, the FSLN is no longer leftist as it has made pacts with the PLC and the Church and even some former Contras. The party is no longer leftist as, through its actions, it has renounced its former commitment to a model of social equality that includes equality between men and women. And even when it defends the interests of poor people, it too often does so in a cynical way (e.g., organizing demonstrations against free trade agreement CAFTA-DR and simultaneously voting for that agreement in the National Assembly) or in a clientelistic way, providing resources to its poor people and denying them to other poor people.

For Sandinistas who have remained with the FSLN, the dissident Sandinistas of the MRS and civil society are no longer leftists, as they are now willing to join protest marches with anti-Sandinistas, with proponents of the neoliberal model that made Nicaraguans sicker, poorer, and more unequal during the 16 years (1990–2006) when the neoliberals governed. Anti-pact feminists also found themselves with allies who sometimes made them uncomfortable. Juanita Jiménez told me that in demonstrating against the pact and for democracy, “We were side by side with Humberto Belli – the great fundamentalist – who has attacked the feminist movement.” Nonetheless they marched with him as they agreed on the value of democracy “including the right to disagree” (interview, December 4, 2008).

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[23] In my experience, pro-pact sentiments were far more muted than anti-pact sentiments. Supporters of the FSLN and PLC sometimes argue that it was a necessary evil, or sometimes they just accept it even though they are embarrassed that the leader of their party would make agreements with his main political enemy. In contrast, anti-pact sentiment is a strong motivating force for many people and they are proud to oppose the pact.

[24] One result of the pact was that the electoral rules were changed so that a presidential candidate could win on the first round with only 40% of the vote or 35% if there were at least five points between him and the next runner up. Without that rule change, Ortega, who only received 38% of the votes, would not have been elected president.

[25] Depending on which axis one considers in evaluating the 2006 election, the conclusions are completely different. The official results in 2006 were Ortega (FSLN, pro-Sandinista and pro-pact) 38%, Montealegre (ALN anti-Sandinista and anti-pact) 29%, Rizo (PLC, anti-Sandinista and pro-pact) 26%, and Jarquín (MRS, pro-Sandinista and anti-pact) 6%. "This result, seen from the perspective of the old 'Sandinista vs. anti-Sandinista' cleavage shows a 3:2 vote ratio against Ortega… . Nonetheless, if one instead focuses on the Alemán-Ortega pact angle, the new president enjoys a comfortable majority given that 66% of the voters favored a strong-man and hyper-presidential style candidate" (Martí i Puig and Close 2009:28).

For many FSLN supporters, the willingness of dissident Sandinistas to ally with open neoliberals like Eduardo Montealegre, and with open fundamentalists like Humberto Belli, is proof that the dissidents are no longer leftists. And there is also a largely unspoken implication that they are not leftists since their numbers are comprised of intellectual Sandinistas much more so than working class Sandinistas.

There is one question that lies below the surface of all these mutual accusations. What is Sandinismo really? Is it, on the one hand, a movement to end Somocismo, to end the caudillo tradition in Nicaraguan politics, to make Nicaragua a truly democratic republic, to provide for justice in and out of the home? Or is it, on the other hand, a movement that, at least, tries to provide for the basic necessities of Nicaragua’s poor majority and, at best, works to end class inequality and the political exclusion of the majority? It used to be both of those things. The tragedy of Nicaraguan politics during the second stage of the revolution seems to be that the answer is now one or the other, but not both.

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