An Examination of Young Women in the Nicaraguan Women's and Feminist Movement

by

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of

The University of Manitoba

in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of Political Studies

University of Manitoba

Winnipeg

Abstract

More than thirty years after the Nicaraguan Revolution of 1979, the women's and feminist movement has developed into one of the country's foremost social movements. However, some observers of Nicaraguan civil society claim that young people today are disengaged from political and social mobilization, unlike previous decades where they were a key demographic in the revolutionary cause. If true, the women's and feminist movement may fail to attract new members and may cease to be a strong leader of women's rights and democratic principles. This study seeks to further previous analyses of the movement by considering the perspective of its younger participants. As such, qualitative interviews were conducted with twenty young women members of the movement in the spring of 2011 to understand two questions: why do young women participate in the women's and feminist movement in Nicaragua, and how do they view their role within the movement? The interviews suggest that 1) moral shock and framing, which were important in the recruitment of members to the revolutionary movement, are not as prevalent today; 2) feminist activism is still relevant for the younger generation though the term 'feminism' is ever changing; 3) the young participants in the women's and feminist movement in Nicaragua are ensuring its continuity during a period which is largely unfavourable to its demands. The study is guided by two bodies of literature: the recruitment of individuals to social movements, and trends of generational change within women's and feminists movements in English-speaking democracies. Additionally, it is framed by the history of social mobilization of women and youth throughout Nicaragua in the 20th century.

Keywords: Women, Feminism, Youth, Politics, Social Movements, Nicaragua, Latin America

Preface

The inspiration for this thesis came during two visits I made to Central America in the summers of 2008 and 2009. As part of a Canadian delegation visiting social movement organizations in Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua, I had the privilege of meeting many inspiring individuals who were dedicated to the pursuit of social justice.

In meetings with different groups, the impact that the civil conflicts of the late twentieth century had on the region, and the psyche of its citizens, became apparent. In one particular meeting I recall a young man who, while speaking of the current situation in his country, apologized for having no personal knowledge of key events in his country's history. It seemed as if he felt that his voice was insignificant because he had not experienced the war first-hand. I also met other young people who recounted stories of their childhoods marked by conflict and revolution.

These experiences led me to ask, what legacy have the conflicts, such as Nicaragua's War of Liberation and the Contra War, left on today's young people? Specifically, I wanted to understand the dynamic between the younger population and those social movements which emerged during periods of great contention. Upon my return to Canada, I began researching the history of social mobilization in the region. These investigations led me to the many works on women's organizing in Nicaragua.

I am continuously inspired by the women of Nicaragua and their perseverance to overcome obstacles. I have great respect for the young women whom I interviewed for my field research in March 2011. A number of the young interviewees thanked me for taking an interest in their country and their stories. By doing so, they reminded me that, as a researcher, I have a great responsibility to convey their stories which they so generously shared with me.

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Winnipeg, Manitoba

June 2013

Acknowledgements

I could not have completed this work without the assistance, guidance, and support of others. I would like to recognize and thank the following people:

Dedication

I dedicate this work to my daughter, Amelia Rose. May you never take for granted the rights and opportunities available to you which so many others struggle to gain.

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Abbreviations

	English	Spanish
AMNLAE	Luisa Amanda Espinosa Nicaraguan Women's Association	Asociación de Mujeres Nicaragüenses Luisa Amanda Espinoza
AMPRONAC	Association of Nicaraguan Women Confronting the Nation's Problems	Asociación de Mujeres ante la Problemática Nacional
CEBs	Christian Base Communities	Comunidades Eclesiales de Base
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency	
CPC	Councils of Citizen Power	Consejos del Poder Ciudadano
CSE	Supreme Electoral Council	Consejo Supremo Electoral
CST	Sandinista Workers' Central	Central Sandinista de Trabajadores
EU EOM	European Union Election Observer Mission	
FSLN	Sandinista National Liberation Front	Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional
FTZ	Free Trade Zones	
JPN	Patriotic Nicaraguan Youth	Juventud Patriótica Nicaragüense
MEC	The Working and Unemployed Women's Movement "María Elena Cuadra"	El movimiento de Mujeres Trabajadoras y Desempleadas "Maria Elena Cuadra"
MRS	Sandinista Renovation Movement	Movimiento de Renovación Sandinista
NSM	New Social Movements	
PLN	National Liberal Party	Partido Liberal Nacionalista
RMT	Resource Mobilization Theory	
SMO	Social Movement Organization	
STI	Sexually Transmitted Infections	
UNDP	United Nations Development Program	
UNO	National Opposition Union	Unión Nacional Opositora

Chapter 1 - Introduction

The world recently witnessed a series of uprisings in the Arab world during the 'Arab Spring' of 2011. Worldwide media captured the scenes as thousands of people united in protest to bring an end to oppressive regimes in the hopes of gaining freedom, democracy, and a better future. Time will tell what legacy these revolutions will leave for the citizens of these countries. Over three decades ago, the Central American country of Nicaragua was also launched into the international spotlight as grassroots organizations from all sectors of society mobilized en masse to end the forty-three year Somoza dynasty. On July 19, 1979, these organizations, led by the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (FSLN),[1] marched into the capital city of Managua. Following in Cuba's footsteps twenty years earlier, the Sandinista revolution became another powerful example of revolutionary social mobilization in Latin America. It promised not only liberation from the dictator and his American allies but also a radical transformation of social, economic, and political power.

Now, over thirty years later, the legacy of the revolution can be evaluated. One of the lasting outcomes of this movement has been the rise of a multitude of groups, collectives, and associations working to defend the rights of women. Some identify as 'feminist,' while others as 'women's' organizations, yet they are collaborating to bring change to their country. Indeed, Nicaraguan journalist and political analyst, William Grigsby, claims that this flourishing and dynamic women's and feminist movement has

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[1] Throughout this thesis, I will refer to the *Sandinista National Liberation Front* (*Frente Sandinista de Liberación National*) as the *FSLN*, the *Sandinistas,* or the *Frente.*

become one of the leading networks of civil society actors in the country (Grigsby, Envío, July 2005).

However, a generation after the revolution, Grigsby also maintains that Nicaraguan society has become massively demobilized and unable to produce much activism despite the adoption of substantial neo-liberal policies, the consolidation of power, threats to the country's democratic system, and claims of sexual abuse involving the country's president. Furthermore, the power of the women's movement may be threatened by the disengagement of potential members from its network. A 2005 Envío[2] article written by Grigsby claims that "those born after 1980, particularly those who have passed through the neoliberal-imposed education system, are profoundly apathetic, skeptical, individualistic and even somewhat uprooted" (Grigsby, Envío, July 2005). Feminist activist, journalist, and former member of the FSLN, Sofía Montenegro has also expressed concern with the disengagement of youth since the 1970s and 1980s (Montenegro, Envío, May 2002; Wolseth and Babb 2008, 9). If these claims are true, the women's and feminist movement could fail to attract younger members into its fold, resulting in a lack of future leaders. The effect may be that the women's movement may not continue to be the strong social movement that it has grown to be. Such a situation could leave a great void in the country's civil society network. Conversely, others argue that young people are agents of change who come equipped with innovative ideas, a

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[2] According to its website, Envío is a "publication that provided 'critical support' to Nicaragua's revolutionary process from the perspective of liberation theology's option for the poor" during the 1980s. It continues to offer a reflection on issues in Nicaragua and the region. Thomas Walker, an expert on Nicaraguan political history, once referred to it as "the most useful and scholarly English language periodical devoted to Nicaragua" (1986, 155).

strong educational background, and an aptitude for new forms of expression (Moreno, El Nuevo Diario, November 2011; Wolseth and Babb 2008).

The present thesis sets out to understand the current state of the women's and feminist movement in Nicaragua. Unlike previous studies of the movement, this study will primarily concern itself with the participation of one important but often neglected demographic: young women. According to Sofía Montenegro, women and youth are "…two great majorities in Nicaragua…yet they are often ignored as such in many analyses and programs" (Montenegro, Envío, May 2002). Because they are positioned at the intersection of these "great majorities," young women are well poised to exert much power and demand social change. Nonetheless, challenges to obtaining their full potential as agents of change are two-fold as they contend with marginalization faced by both women and youth. For these reasons, young Nicaraguan women born after the revolution of 1979 represent a unique social actor and point of analysis. This research will thus focus on women between the ages of 19 and 30 in the year 2011[3].

These women grew up in a society that was significantly different from that of previous decades. Politically, they belong to the first generation of Nicaraguans since the 1930s to live free of the Somoza dictatorial dynasty. While they will never experience first-hand the repression and brutality imposed by Somoza, their formative years were marked by periods of great contestation in their country. Following this period, a new,

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[3] I chose these ages because women thirty years of age at the time of interviews were born less than two years after the revolution of 1979. I had intended to interview women as young as sixteen years of age, since that is the age at which Nicaraguans are eligible to vote, but I was unable to connect with any women younger than the age of nineteen.

albeit fragile, democracy has developed which Nicaraguans of all ages must learn to navigate. Socially, these women live in a society that has been plagued by machismo or a belief that men are "…physically, intellectually and sexually superior to women." In Nicaragua, the concept also depicts "…a socio-cultural model of masculinity that, passed on from generation to generation, dictates the attitudes, values and behaviour that men should adopt to be considered men and to feel that they are men" (Welsh 2001, 15)[4]. Consequently, machismo has permeated many aspects of Nicaraguan culture and underlies the country's patriarchal political and social systems. Nevertheless, their mothers and grandmothers established a women's movement that was recognized as the strongest in Central America (González and Kampwirth 2001, 41). Previous studies of the Nicaraguan women's and feminist movement have focused on earlier generations of women, such as those who were first mobilized during the uprising against Somoza or during the Contra War. Today's young women were either not yet born when these events occurred or too young to take part, yet their lives are greatly impacted by these historical events.

While Nicaragua's history of revolution and civil conflict has molded the women's and feminist movement, the movement and its actors are not beyond compare. It will become evident in subsequent chapters that some, though not all, aspects of women's organizing in Nicaragua are similar to those in English-speaking countries such as Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States. In these societies, where

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[4] For a historical account of the construction of gender roles in Nicaragua see chapter ten in *Rascally Sign in Sacred Places* by Whisnant, David E. (1995. H. Eugene and Lillian Youngs Lehman series. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press) or *Men aren't from Mars* by Patrick Welsh (2001. Ed. CIIR.)

women's movements also have long histories, different generations of women engage with each other to determine the movement's goals, orientations, and discourse. These interactions have been well documented and provide an understanding of how young women in these societies conceptualize the women's movement. Because of its history and strength, the Nicaraguan women's and feminist movement provides a good vantage point from which to examine women's organizing from a generational lens in a non-English-speaking, post-revolutionary setting. As such, this study proposes to further previous analyses of both the Nicaraguan movement and contemporary young female mobilization worldwide by examining the questions: why do young Nicaraguan women join the women's and feminist movement, and how do they perceive their role within the current conjuncture of female organizing and feminism?

I. The Revolution

In order to comprehend how the Nicaraguan women's and feminist movement emerged one must first have a basic understanding of how Nicaragua's history has unfolded since the early twentieth century. As already stated, the revolution of 1979 ended a dynastic dictatorship which had been established in the late 1920s when the American Marines, who had occupied the country since 1912, were preparing to leave. Before their departure they helped form the National Guard, placing Anastasio Somoza Garcia at its helm. Somoza Garcia quickly consolidated power and did away with potential detractors. Famously, he saw to the assassination of Augusto C. Sandino, an anti-imperialist, revolutionary who had successfully organized campesinos[5] against U.S.

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[5] Latin American peasants or farmers.

supported troops. With Sandino and other potential adversaries and threats eliminated, Somoza Garcia assumed the presidency in 1937. He maintained strict command of the economic, military, and political spheres of the country. Following his assassination in 1956 Somoza Garcia's first born son, Luis Somoza Debayle, assumed control of the country for a few years until his younger brother, Anastasio Somoza Debayle, took reign. Like his father, Anastasio Somoza Debayle held a firm grip on the country and maintained close ties with the United States government and military. Each of the Somoza men had a different approach to governing. At times it even appeared that the country had democratic institutions, such as elections, political parties and presidents, which relied on popular support. However, despite this republican façade, in reality the system was based on coercion and repression and, ultimately, rule by members of the Somoza family (Walker and Armony 2000, 69).

Throughout the Somoza dynasty, life for the majority of Nicaraguans was extremely difficult. Only those in the highest echelons of society benefitted from any economic growth. There was a small class of capitalists and upper professionals who were relatively comfortable, though any further ambitions were stifled. The rest of the population lived in harsh conditions with little chance of economic or social advancement. Some people continued to look to Sandino as a champion of their cause. His ideas developed into a homegrown ideology called 'Sandinismo' which promote Nicaraguan nationalism and socialism. However, dissent was not tolerated. Feeling as if they had no other choice, people risked their lives to clandestinely organize and to voice

their opposition to Somoza. While isolated protests took place intermittently throughout the early years of the regime they did not result in any major opposition movement.

A turning point came in the early 1960s when several young Marxists found inspiration in Algeria's revolutionary National Liberation Front. These young men decided that armed resistance would be the only answer for change in Nicaragua. In 1961, they formed the Sandinista National Liberation Front, paying tribute to the late Sandino while propagating 'Sandinismo.' The FSLN remained small in scope for many years but grew steadily as the movement spread into urban and rural areas. Different divisions of the movement emerged, each adopting diverse tactics. Kidnappings, guerilla warfare, and collaboration with right-wing opponents of the regime were all used to satisfy the demands of the revolutionaries. As years progressed, Somoza Debayle's power became intolerable to a larger segment of Nicaraguans, including many in the upper and middle classes.

Additionally, both the hierarchy and the grassroots of the Catholic Church played a significant role in the campaign against Somoza. Since the early 1970s, Church leaders had been concerned that Somoza had overstayed his welcome by extending his term in office. Through its network of missionaries around the country, the Church then became increasingly aware of human rights abuses overseen by Somoza, which they condemned (T. Walker 1986, 32). At the same time, global and regional changes in the Catholic Church saw the rise of 'Liberation Theology' in Nicaragua and other Latin American countries. Liberation theology approached Christian teachings from the perspective of the poor and suffering. Though not all members of the Catholic Church subscribed to this

emerging trend, a new movement within the larger Church, known the 'church of the poor' (Canin 1997, 84) or the 'popular church', emerged. Proponents of liberation theology, which included members of the clergy as well as lay people, advocated for political action to achieve social justice. Consequently, many of those closely identified with the struggle being waged by the Sandinistas. For all of these reasons, the Sandinista movement benefitted from a groundswell of support throughout the 1970s. The zenith of this movement was the 1978-1979 War of Liberation and the subsequent fall of the Somoza regime in July, 1979.

II. The Contra War

The initial years following the triumph over Somoza brought numerous changes to both domestic affairs and foreign relations. Thomas Walker, one of the foremost experts on Nicaraguan political history, explains that between 1979 and 1985 the Sandinista government, led by former revolutionary leader Daniel Ortega, promoted a mixed economy, political pluralism, and non-alignment with either of the Cold War powers (T. Walker 1986, 43-44). Social programs intended to improve the lives of the poor majority were also a key policy of the new administration. The Sandinista government quickly implemented literacy crusades and health brigades. These campaigns, which were rather successful, were aimed at combating high rates of illiteracy and preventable diseases among the poor and rural populations. They were unique in that in order to carry out these programs the government relied on the support of its citizens, who worked on a voluntary basis, and grassroots networks to coordinate activities (T. Walker 1986, 90-93).

Because many Sandinista leaders openly identified as Marxist or Marxist-Leninist, members of the Nicaraguan elite and the United States government were apprehensive of the new FSLN administration (T. Walker 1987, 3). The Sandinistas faced opposition on many fronts. Firstly, shortly after the FSLN assumed power a number of former members of Somoza's National Guard launched isolated attacks, from neighbouring countries such as Honduras, against the Sandinistas and their supporters (T.Walker 1987, 24). Secondly, the Archbishop of Managua, Miguel Obando y Bravo, who once acted as a mediator between the revolutionaries and Somoza, also took measures to undermine Nicaragua's new government (Kirk 1992, 59; T. Walker 1986, 115). However, it was the American government that posed the greatest threat to the revolutionary movement. The newly elected Reagan administration claimed that the Sandinistas intended to impose a Soviet-style of governance and would establish a "second Cuba" in the region. Reagan called on the American people to help him liberate Nicaraguans from what he perceived as a communist threat. Thomas Walker disregards most of Reagan's accusations as unfounded propaganda (T.Walker 1987, 3). Nonetheless, Nicaragua became a major battle ground in Reagan's anti-communist campaign.

Consequently, the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) quickly mounted a secret paramilitary counter-revolutionary movement called the Contras. Initially this group was comprised mainly of former members of Somoza's National Guard (Dixon and Jonas 1984, 19; T. Walker 1987, 8). As CIA support for the Contras grew, the attacks intensified. Faced with escalating conflict, the Sandinistas called on Nicaraguans to defend the revolution. For instance, the Sandinista Defense Committees coordinated

community watches in which residents volunteered to monitor their neighbourhoods for suspicious activities (T.Walker 1986, 109). In 1983, it was obvious that voluntary measures were not enough for the FSLN to win the war. The Sandinista government implemented a military draft for young men ages 17 to 26. Despite this measure, the very bloody war went on making life increasingly difficult for the majority of Nicaraguans. Even FSLN supporters began to tire and resent the draft. The cost of the war was staggering in both economic and social terms. The Sandinista social programs of earlier years were replaced by defense programs, which by 1987 accounted for over 60 percent of government expenditures (Lancaster 1992, 5-6). During the war, the economy plunged. Exports fell to approximately 50 percent of their pre-revolutionary levels (Gibson 1991, 28). In 1988, inflation peaked at 33 600 percent. The conflict also had a devastating psychological impact on the country for a myriad of reasons, not the least of which was the loss of over 30 000, mainly young, lives (Gibson 1991, 25). Recently, one Nicaraguan scholar noted that the high death toll had caused the youth of today to "be born in a cemetery" (Baltodano, Envío, April 2006).

In the midst of such chaos Nicaraguans went to the polls. The presidential election of 1990 was the result of a Central American peace process, which had begun several years earlier. Daniel Ortega agreed to hold free and democratic elections in February 1990. In return, the other Central American leaders were to cease support for the Contras. With Nicaragua preparing for an election, the new Bush administration in the U.S.

quickly aligned itself with the National Opposition Union (UNO)[6], clandestinely

contributing 2.5 million dollars to its election campaign (Williams 1990, 21). U.S.

opposition to the FSLN, the country's ruined economy, and wide-spread discontent with

the draft all contributed to the victory of the UNO, led by Violeta Chamorro. The

electorate had spoken. The Nicaraguan people had voted to end the decade-long conflict.

III. A social movement emerges

The revolutionary and the post-revolutionary periods were the culmination of

many events and processes. Chief among them was popular mobilization. Here the

support of two important demographics in Nicaraguan society, women and youth, was

crucial. As will be reviewed in chapter three, both women and young people have been

important agents of change in Nicaragua. While women mobilized from as early as the

1800s, it was not until the uprising against the Somoza dynasty that the participation of

women in grassroots movements soared. Women overwhelmingly supported the

revolutionary cause (Chinchilla 1990, 374). Many offered logistical support to those

fighting Somoza, while others participated directly in the front line of the insurrection. By

July 1979, women – including young teenagers – accounted for up to a third of the

revolutionary troops in the armed struggle (Keen and Haynes 2012, 309). The FSLN

welcomed their participation. Indeed, attaining gender equality was one of their goals. As

such, a Sandinista affiliated women's association was founded in 1977. This organization

became the coordinating body for an emerging women's movement. It was also the

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[6] The National Opposition Union (UNO) was a coalition of 14 political parties that ran against the Sandinistas in the 1990 national elections. Their political ideologies ranged from centre-right to centre-left.

primary advocate for the full participation of women in Nicaraguan society, in particular calling for the economic liberation of women (Isbester 2001, 37).

After the revolution, this association officially merged into the Sandinista power structure. It became known as the Asociación de Mujeres Nicaragüenses Luisa Amanda Espinoza (AMNLAE), bearing the name of the first female combatant to be killed in the uprising. AMNLAE blended the Sandinista identity with the goal of female liberation. This nexus was demonstrated in two of its earlier slogans: "No Revolution without women's emancipation; no emancipation without revolution" and "Building the new homeland, we are shaping the new woman" (Isbester 2001, 48). While AMNLAE was the primary organization for women's participation in the new social order, it was not the only one. Women's secretariats of different sectors of the FSLN emerged during the 1980s. Two such organizations were the Women of the National Union of Farmers and Ranchers and the Women's Secretariat of the Sandinista Worker's Central (CST)[7]. Though none were as closely linked to the Sandinistas as AMNLAE, each of the women's secretariats fell under the party umbrella in some way.

During the early days of the new government, AMNLAE and the other women's organizations worked diligently to elevate the status of women. Three primary issues of focus were education, health care, and legal equality. The first two overlapped nicely with the FSLN's objectives (Isbester 2001, 50). Working hand in hand, the FSLN and the women's organizations ensured that women benefitted greatly from the government's newly implemented social programs and institutions. Elevating the legal status of women

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[7] The CST was the largest trade union in Nicaragua.

was a greater challenge for the women's sector. The FSLN was in favour of certain legal reforms put forth by the various women's organizations, though not all (Isbester 2001, 52-53). It was only through much effort that AMNLAE and the other women's organizations were successful in passing reforms for equity in the family and land ownership (Isbester 2001, 53; Molyneux 1985, 249).

However, this period of progress for women did not last long. In light of the war, the FSLN adopted a new gendered discourse. The success of the revolution, by means of defeating the contras, trumped gender equality. Resources were no longer available for the liberation of women (Isbester 2001, 56). Consequently, in 1982 the leaders of AMNLAE decided to stop demanding legislative gender reforms to concentrate their efforts on defending the revolution. For example, support to mothers of those drawn off to war and women combatants was prioritized (Bayard de Volo 2001, 36). According to Kampwirth, this decision "…set the tone for many of AMNLAE's policies in the mid-eighties" (Kampwirth 2004, 33).

Furthermore, despite the widespread support for AMNLAE and the other women's secretariats from women around the country, the decision-making power for these groups was controlled by those at the top and closest to the party. Women's access to positions of leadership remained limited; the more vocal women who reached the upper echelons of decision making bodies were replaced by men or by other women who accepted their subordinate position to the male leaders (Heriberta Valle 2009, 225). In short, during the years of the FSLN government Nicaraguan women's organizations were often simply an appendage to a larger male-dominated Sandinista organization. The

women in these organizations had little real control because they had to abide by the rules and orientation set out by the party. Control was held tightly by those who towed the party line. As a result, women's issues were viewed only through the class based lens of the FSLN party at the peril of ignoring cultural barriers to women's liberation.

Following the electoral defeat of Ortega in 1990, AMNLAE was forced to reflect on its identity and objectives. The association represented the women's movement, yet its primary mission of late had not been to promote the liberation of women but rather to defend the revolution and the male dominated FSLN. With the Sandinistas no longer in power, space became available to those who wished to voice criticism and discontent with the party's policies regarding women. Several women who had played important roles in the movement cut ties with the party and established new associations or joined other small autonomous groups, which had emerged during the 1980s. By the early 1990s, the women's movement had reached a crossroads. A schism effectively occurred in the movement: AMNLAE and other secretariats remained associated with the FSLN, while other groups emerged as an autonomous branch of the movement. While AMNLAE has remained an important organization in the country, it has kept a lower profile than during the revolutionary years. Likewise, less has been documented in literature about its role in the contemporary Nicaraguan women's and feminist movement. On the other hand, the autonomous movement, which is comprised of countless groups, associations, and collectives, has been at the forefront of discourse about women's issues and rights. Additionally, the women's and feminist movement, and in particular the autonomous branch, has been vocal on local and national issues such as

the defense of democratic principles, the formation of laws, the economy and structural adjustments, and health and education services.

IV. Contemporary issues facing Nicaraguan social movements

The country's president and the policies of the day have molded the various women's movement organizations as the latter reacted to the former. In short, challenges and opportunities created an atmosphere in which the women's and feminist movement has needed to reflect on strategies and goals. Since the election of 1990, the movement has had to forge new relationships with each successive government. Many of these relationships have been tense, though perhaps none as antagonistic as with the current administration. In 2006, Daniel Ortega, who previously had been a revolutionary leader turned president of the republic, was re-elected to the presidency. His second term was strikingly different than his first. In the sixteen years since he held power Ortega and his party shed many of their revolutionary ideals. The party has forged closer ties to both their old political foes and traditional Christian communities (the Catholic Church and Evangelical churches) in exchange for a greater share of power.

Many Nicaraguans who once identified as Sandinista, including many of the leaders of the women's and feminist movement, have been forced to reconsider where they fit in Nicaragua's political spectrum. Even individuals who previously supported Ortega are now contesting him by means of a new party, the Sandinista Renovation Movement (MRS), which was formed in 1995. In terms of the women's and feminist movement, the new alliances between the FSLN and their former adversaries deepened the wedge between the party and many groups fighting for the rights of women.

Though each individual organization within the movement has its own goals and strategies, the autonomous branch of the movement has made democratic principles, citizen rights, and political participation priorities at both local and national levels. The autonomous branch has mobilized public demonstrations to defend both the rights of women and democratic rights of all citizens. A 2009 report on the movement explains that "many of these demonstrations and public protests have not been massive, but they have been loaded with strong symbolism for both women and for the rest of society" (Cuadra Lira and Jiménez Martinez 2009, 9). The autonomous groups have been particularly outspoken against Ortega's controversial third term in office. Under previously existing constitutional rules he could not have sought re-election after his second mandate came to a close in 2011 on two accounts. Firstly, the Nicaraguan constitution prohibited a president from serving more than two terms. Secondly, these terms could not be served consecutively. However, the FSLN amended the constitution to ensure that Ortega remained eligible to contest the presidency. He was then re-elected, albeit the election was contested on grounds of fraud, intimidation and irregularities.

Following the presidential election of November 2011 the European Union Election Observation Mission (EU EOM 2011) wrote:

> The 6 November elections constituted deterioration in the democratic quality of Nicaraguan electoral processes, due to the lack of transparency and neutrality with which they were administered by the Supreme Electoral Council (Consejo Supremo Electoral, CSE.) Throughout the process, a CSE that was virtually monocolour…at each of its levels demonstrated scant independence from the ruling party and created unequal conditions for competition as well as outright obstructions to the opposition, who were prevented from having any effective representation within the election administration (EU EOM 2011).

In light of this concentration of power, some Nicaraguan activists have been left wondering what has become of the social movements that brought about one of the largest popular revolutions in recent Latin American history. Additionally, the women's and feminist movement has been disheartened that it, and other social movements, have been unsuccessful at convincing Nicaraguans to act en masse against such the treats to their democracy. While Ortega's re-election of 2011 is a recent example of the fragility of Nicaragua's democracy, it is not the first. Nor is it new for social movements, such as the women's and feminist movement, to be concerned. In the April 2002 edition of Envío, social researcher José Luis Rocha pointed to economic, political, and social matters asking "What can explain today's social anomie and political anemia, the lack of mass demonstrations, when there are so many reasons to protest?" (Rocha, Envío, April 2002). In May 2002, Sofía Montenegro wrote:

> The women's movement is a social movement because it proposes to transform culture and the political system, and demands the inclusion of half the nation. We women demand democracy as well as development, because there can be no development without democracy, no equity in a sea of authoritarianism (Montenegro, Envío, May 2002).

Reflecting on the role of women in demanding and creating social change in Nicaragua, it is evident that the women's and feminist movement is a vital actor for the advancement of the status of women in the country and, more globally, to Nicaragua's society as a whole. Looking forward, it is not known if this task will be assumed by the next generation of women or if they will choose to disengage from social and political mobilization. Ultimately, their decision has the potential to have repercussions

throughout all of Nicaraguan civil society. It is in this light that the research for the work was conducted.

V. The research

For this qualitative research, I conducted twenty interviews in March and April 2011 with women between the ages of 19 and 30, in the cities of Managua, León and Matagalpa. The two main criteria for participation in this study were age and involvement with a local or national women's or feminist SMO. Eighteen of the interviews were conducted in person. The other two interviews were done electronically because the respondents were not available for a personal interview. Contact with the women was made through one of three ways:

1. Meeting at the 20th anniversary celebration of the autonomous women's movement in Matagalpa.
2. Meeting at the March 8th Women's Day march in Managua.
3. Recommendations made by local Nicaraguans involved in the movement and members of the expatriate North American community in Nicaragua.

Every effort was made to interview women who represent a diverse range of organizations. In total, the twenty interviewees are active with fourteen different social movement organizations (SMOs), with some of the respondents being involved in two SMOs. Seventeen of the women belong to organizations that are associated with the autonomous branch of the movement. Of these, four women are members of feminist SMOs in which young women are the primary actors. Three others belong to a youth movement whose main mission is to defend the rights of both young women and young

men. Still, women from this group were included in this study because representatives of this organization were in attendance at the Women's Day march. Also, it was explained during the interviews that the group has a strong connection to a feminist SMO. Finally, three of the interviewees are affiliated with AMNLAE.

To conform to ethical standards, the study was explained to the participants in their native Spanish prior to the interview process. They each gave their consent, in writing, to participating in the study. Additionally, all were informed that they were free to end the interview at any time. To protect the identity of the women pseudonyms are used throughout this thesis in place of real names. In the same line, the name of the social movement organization(s) in which each is involved will be withheld, notwithstanding the case of AMNLAE for reasons explained later. A complete list of the organizations represented by the interview participants is included in Appendix 2.

Conclusion

This thesis is comprised of five chapters. The present chapter has outlined the purpose and motivation for writing this thesis. The second chapter is devoted to a review of two bodies of literature. First to be examined will be social movement theory, particularly those features which are relevant to recruitment and movement participation. A review of topics confronting women's and feminist movements in English-speaking democracies will follow. The culminating effect of chapter two should be to present a theoretical foundation for the subsequent discussions regarding the participation of young Nicaraguan women in the women's and feminist movement. Chapter three will contextualize the political, economic, and social climate of the country from a historical

perspective. It will also include an analysis of the response of civil society during different time periods. This chapter argues that the participation of women, and youth and young adults has been vital to social mobilizing in Nicaragua throughout the 20th century. The fourth chapter will open with an account of the current climate in which young Nicaraguan women live, outlining how members of this demographic are both victims of their society and potential powerful agents of change. The rest will be devoted to fieldwork findings, including a detailed discussion of answers given by respondents of this study to questions regarding their participation in the women's and feminist movement in Nicaragua.

The final chapter will compare and contrast the findings and the themes addressed in the second and third chapters. The primary arguments contend that 1) moral shock and framing, which were important in the recruitment of members to the revolutionary movement, are not as prevalent today; 2) feminist activism is still relevant for the younger generation though the term 'feminism' is ever changing; 3) the young participants in the women's and feminist movement in Nicaragua are ensuring its continuity during a period which is largely unfavourable to its demands. This study is not meant to be exhaustive or generalizable to all young women in Nicaragua. Rather, the intent of this thesis is to shed light on the experiences of a select group of women from a demographic that is often overlooked. In doing so, it will advance research on female social mobilization in Nicaragua, and more generally on that on the role of young women in women's and feminist movements globally.

Chapter 2 – Theorizing the Participation of Young Women in Social Movements

This chapter will provide a theoretical framework for two questions that form the basis of the discussion through this thesis: why do young Nicaraguan women join the women's and feminist movement, and how do they perceive their role within the current conjuncture of female organizing and feminism? Answering these questions requires drawing on two distinct bodies of literature. Social movement theory will be useful in answering the first question. Literature on women's mobilization and feminism will act as a reference point for the second question.

Throughout history individuals have united to protest conditions that they found unsatisfactory. Such manifestations of social mobilization have long been the object of study. Before the mid-twentieth century, theorists viewed social movements as mobs of irrational, disjointed individuals rather than as a legitimate part of society (Stryker, Owens and White 2000, 2). Early studies within the collective behavior theory, which was popular from the end of the 19th century until the 1970s, concluded "…that collective behaviour comes about during a period of social disruption, when grievances are deeply felt, rather than being a standard part of the political process" (Staggenborg 2008, 11). The study of social movements has evolved significantly since that time and the notion that individuals involved in social movements are fundamentally irrational has fallen out of favour.

Today's growing body of literature on social and protest movements, by contrast, demonstrates that social movements are part of the fabric that make up a society's political culture. Seen this way, any comprehensive understanding of how power is structured must include an examination of social mobilization. Therefore, after a discussion of the characterization of social movements, two important paradigms will be examined before turning to an overview of different theories explaining the participation of individuals in social movements.

I. Conceptualizing social movements

There are numerous ways of conceptualizing a social movement. Charles Tilly points out that the term 'social movement' is part of public discourse; the term is used by academics, activists, and critics in a variety of ways. Nonetheless, in his work on the history of social movements in Western countries, Tilly describes three major elements that he considers fundamental to a social movement. These are 1) collective campaigns that target those in power; 2) various venues and instances in which claims or demands are communicated; and 3) public manifestations of the group's legitimacy (Tilly 2004, 7).

Another leading theorist of political protest and social movements, Karl-Dieter Opp, begins by defining a protest group as "…a collectivity of actors who want to achieve their shared goal or goals by influencing decisions of a target" (2009, 41). To Opp, a social movement is a special type of protest group characterized by its size, its degree of formal association, and its prolonged existence. Because of the difficulty in qualifying these characteristics, Opp proposes a quantitative concept to define a social movement: the larger the protest group, the more formal its association, and the longer

the group is in existence the more it will be characterized as a social movement (Opp 2009, 41). According to this classification, a women's movement, which traditionally falls under the rubric of 'social movement', is actually a 'protest group' which becomes more or less a social movement as the above-mentioned characteristics change.

Jeff Goodwin and James M. Jasper add that social movements attempt to bring about societal change through "conscious, concerted, and sustained efforts…by using extra-institutional means." They also note that ordinary citizens form the bulk of the membership and drive the movement, though members of the military or legislative bodies may also participate (Goodwin and Jasper 2003, 3). Sidney Tarrow's definition follows along the same lines but highlights different characteristics. In his work, four properties are common to all social movements: a "collective challenge," a shared goal, a "collective identity," and long term interaction. It is important to note that according to both Opp and Tarrow, longevity is a key feature of a social movement. This point diverges from the old view that social movements were simply random mobs of angry people. According to Tarrow's conceptualization, the bulk of movement actions are contentious in nature in that they set out to disrupt the status quo by interfering with the actions of the target group. Ultimately, "…changes in political opportunities and constraints create the most important incentives for initiating new phases of contention" (Tarrow 1998, 4-7).

Another perspective regarding social movements is found in the work of anthropologist David Aberle (1966). He conceptualizes social movements based on the level of desired change, partial or total, and the locus of desired change, individual or

social structure. In his analysis, a partial change of social structure would be reformative, whereas a total change would be revolutionary. In a similar vein, Tarrow maintains that while many movements challenge the actions of political actors and structures they may also target elites, other groups, or cultural norms (1998, 4-7).

As outlined above, theorists have attempted to make sense of collective action by delineating the features of a social movement. Further to the conceptualizations discussed in the previous section, Mayer N. Zald and Roberta Ash (1966) clarify that, practically speaking, social movements are not a single entity. Rather, they are often a consortium of various organizations. For instance, as was demonstrated in the preceding chapter, the women's and feminist movement in Nicaragua includes two different branches, one that is connected with the FSLN and another that is autonomous. Each branch is comprised of groups, collectives, and associations of varying sizes. Some have a national presence, others only local. The common thread is that they have similar goals. For this reason, Zald and Ash pioneered the term 'social movement organization' (SMO) to distinguish between a social movement as a whole and the many organizations that work toward achieving the movement's goals (Zald and Ash 1966, 327). SMOs are not homogeneous. They differ in their structures, strategies, and levels of commitment sought. While they work collaboratively to achieve a common objective they often also compete for resources. Therefore, for the sake of clarity, the distinction will be made throughout this thesis between a social movement as a whole, such as the women's and feminist movement of Nicaragua, and the various organizations which form the movement.

1. Two paradigms

Social movement theories are generally divided into two paradigms: the resource mobilization theory paradigm (RMT) and the identity-oriented paradigm, also known as the new social movements approach. According to the former, rational actors are motivated to mobilize for strategic gains of objective variables such as resources, opportunities, and interests. Ultimately, collective action strives to increase material or financial resources (Cohen 1985, 675). This approach sets out to answer the questions: how do different factors promote social movement mobilization and what are the structural reasons for mobilization (Canel 1997; Carroll 1997, 8)? RMT was first articulated by social researchers as a response to the irrational characterization of social movement actors. It advanced the study of social movements beyond the "mob mentality" approach that prevailed hitherto (Stryker, Owens and White 2000, 2). RMT is a predominantly American perspective that places class struggles at the nuclei of the theory. Simply put, this viewpoint assumes that mobilization occurs when one group or class seeks the same resources or share of resources that another group possesses.

In a break with RMT, scholars in Europe and Latin America began to examine social movements in terms of identity formation rather than shared resource interests. The term 'new social movements' (NSM) came to depict many of the approaches taken by these theorists. According to Melucci,

> More and more, production no longer consists solely in the transformation of the natural environment into a technical environment. It is also becoming the production of social relations and social systems; indeed, it is even becoming the production of the individual's biological and interpersonal identity (1980, 218).

Defending one's biological, psychological, and interpersonal identity has thus become

cause for collective action. However, the dichotomy of 'old' and 'new' can be

problematic. For example, women's movements have been categorized as both a

traditional social movement and a new social movement. Therefore, some theorists prefer

to use the term 'identity-oriented paradigm' to encompass those theories that approach

the study of social movements through the lens of identity formation. Without engaging

in a theoretical discussion of these terms, which would extend beyond the scope of the

present work, this paper will employ the term identity-oriented, except for citations. Still,

an understanding of the dichotomy of 'old' and 'new' serves to highlight the paradigm

shift between RMT and the identity-oriented (or NSM) approach.

The feature of the RMT that is marked as 'old' is the traditional discourse in

which class relations and material concerns are at the heart of the discussion.

Traditionally private issues have now made their way to the forefront of political

discourse which, as Touraine argues, results in the blurring of the boundaries between

public and private life (Touraine 1982). 'New' social movements therefore mobilize

around a wider range of issues, many of which are related to one's identity outside of the

traditional notion of class, such as race, gender, or age (Canel 1997; Cohen 1985;

Veltmeyer 2007, 181). In other words, new identity-based theories "…mark a departure

from the state-centred, instrumentalist, and modernist political practices attributed to the

old left" (Carroll 1997, 17). The identity-oriented paradigm focuses on the internal

process of identity formation. It posits that people will organize in homogeneous groups

to defend their common experiences, thus drawing attention to the cultural dimensions of

a movement. Collective actions are carried out on the basis of "social integration, normative contestation, control of cultural production and expressive action (constitution of new identities)" (Canel 1997). This approach is best suited to answer why social movements form (Canel 1997) and more specifically "…why specific forms of collective identity and action have appeared in late twentieth-century Euro-North American societies" (Carroll 1997, 8).

Though the RMT and identity-oriented paradigms have been juxtaposed as competing perspectives they share certain features. According to Cohen, both posit social movement participants as rational actors and view "conflictual collective action" as part of a normal political process. Each distinguishes between two types of collective action: public manifestations such, as strikes and protests, and more private organizational matters, such as communication within the group. Finally, both paradigms recognize the longevity of social movements. In other words, members do not simply mobilize haphazardly, as was once believed, but rather there is much prior planning, at least by certain individuals, to ensure that action occurs (Cohen 1985, 673). Recently, there has been a move on the part of some theorists to draw from the two approaches. For instance, Canel contends that social mobilization occurs through two different processes, each occurring at a different level. Therefore, both levels must be studied. He argues that the identity-oriented approach best addresses one level: conditions external to the movement such as "the processes through which collective identities are constituted and legitimized, including political and cultural traditions." On the other hand, the RMT approach responds to the level that includes internal questions such as "resource management" and

"organizational dynamics." Canel argues that because both levels of processes impact collective mobilization, social movements "can best be studied through a more eclectic approach that borrows from both…paradigms" (Canel 1997).

2. Levels of analysis

Theorists from various theoretical perspectives will approach questions about social mobilization differently from one another. As such, they will contribute to the understanding of social movements by offering diverse analyses and explanations that each contribute to our broader understanding of collective mobilization. As with Canel, Suzanne Staggenborg deems it necessary to understand both RMT and identity-oriented approaches. However unlike Canel, Staggenborg points to three different levels in which social movements can be analyzed: the macro (large-scale or societal) level, the meso (organizational) level, and the micro (individual level) (Staggenborg 2008, 27). Each level addresses specific questions about social mobilization. According to this conceptualization, studies at the micro level will strive to understand social movements from the point of view of the individual actor. Such studies will ask why individuals decide to join a movement, or how participation affects individuals. Other studies focus on meso level issues such as resources and techniques that are used to organize, and macro level issues including cycles of protest. Despite agreeing that the two paradigms should be studied because they offer insight into different levels of analysis, Canel and Staggenborg's level of analysis differ in their categorization. Most notably, Staggenborg clearly identifies a level which places the individual at the core of the study, whereas Canel does not. Rather, for Canel, the analysis of the individual is embedded within the

two other levels. Indeed, much social movement theorizing focuses on what Staggenborg identifies as the macro and meso levels of analysis, at the peril of not comprehending the micro level.

The present examination of the involvement of young Nicaraguan women in social movements will be informed by both the RMT and the identity-oriented paradigms as both can serve as important conceptual tools. As for the level of analysis, Staggenborg's categorization is most useful because of its emphasis on the individual in the micro level. Therefore, attention will be paid in the following section to theories within both the RMT and identity-oriented perspectives which examine movement participation at the (micro) individual level. Analysis of the macro and meso levels will be touched upon as necessary.

3. Micro level: theories of the involvement of individual actors

The bulk of the studies that examine social movements at the micro level have been concerned with issues of recruitment and sustained participation (Goodwin and Jasper 2003, 51; Klandermans and Staggenborg 2002, 324). Suzanne Staggenborg explains that recruitment occurs when an individual gives personal resources, such as her time, money and skills, to a movement (Staggenborg 2008, 26). However, once recruited there is no guarantee that individuals will continue to commit personal resources to the cause. Consequently, the recruitment of participants is a recurring process as SMOs continuously try to increase their membership, replace members that have disengaged, and retain active members. SMOs employ many strategies to persuade prospective recruits and existing members to commit their time, money, and skills to the movement.

However, not all individuals who are sympathetic to or identify with a movement are willing to participate in its campaigns. McCarthy and Zald distinguish between 'adherents' of a movement or "…those individuals and organizations that believe in the goals of the movement" and 'constituents' or those who actually offer resources to the movement (McCarthy and Zald 1977, 1221).

While he does not employ the terms laid out above, Bert Klandermans also explores 'mobilization potential', referring to those members of society that, broadly speaking, would be willing to support the movement. He argues that SMOs must undergo two types of recruitment campaigns: consensus mobilization and action mobilization. Using the terms as set out by McCarthy and Zald, the first type of campaign strives to obtain adherents while the second attempts to recruit constituents to actively support the movement (Klandermans 1984, 586). These findings point to an important micro level question: why do some individuals join a movement while others remain supportive of the movement's goals but fail to take action to champion the movement's cause? Social movement theorists who have concerned themselves with micro level processes provide an array of reasons that individuals join, remain active with, and quit a movement. Five of these are outlined below.

A. Networks

Early studies in collective behaviour theory attempted to understand the characteristics of people who joined movements. Personal characteristics, such as dogmatism and marginalization, were said to favour participation (Goodwin and Jasper 2003, 51). Recognizing that not all people who shared these characteristics became

adherents of a movement, RMT dismissed these explanations. Instead, it turned to understanding the structural conditions which favour movement participation. While RMT is mostly concerned with this question from the macro or meso levels, it also offers structural reasons for why individual actors choose whether to partake in an SMO.

A common structural explanation for movement participation that is generally accepted by theorists of both RMT and the identity-oriented paradigm is that movement participants are often recruited through established networks and organizational ties. Fireman and Gamson theorize that individuals are more likely to be in solidarity with a cause or a group if they have a connection to people in the group (1979, 22). Even Bert Klandermans, who has criticized the RMT framework for overemphasizing structures (1984), states that "mobilization potential is of little use if social movements do not have access to networks through which to reach people" (Klandermans 1993, 388). Recruitment has traditionally taken place through formal networks, such as church groups. Still, informal networks play a large role in collective action mobilization, particularly in instances where formal associations are not permitted (Tarrow 1998, 49).

Responsibilities and relationships external to the movement also influence participation by contributing to or hindering one's commitment to the cause. An individual is more apt to be active in a movement if she has few responsibilities or relationships outside of the movement. However, as loyalties outside the movement grow, one's commitment to the movement is likely to decrease, unless those external actors also support the movement (Stryker 2000, 319-320).

i. Identity from networks

The network model is rooted in the RMT perspective. Some theorists who draw from both the RMT and the identity-based paradigms maintain that networks and identity creation are closely linked because individuals long to belong to a network. Therefore, joining an SMO or another organization is simply a means of satisfying the need to create or maintain a personal identity by adopting the identity of a larger network. In certain cases, the organization's mission is of little importance. Snow, Zurcher, and Ekland-Olson (1980) found that individuals were likely to join a particular religious movement simply because they were invited to attend a meeting. Rather than being initially attracted to the movement because of its teachings, the participants only adopted the belief after interacting with other members. In another study, Baumeister, Dale and Muravan found that in certain instances working for social change was less a priority than interacting with like-minded people and reinforcing their own values (2000, 241). In a similar vein, McAdam, McCarthy and Zald (1988, 708-9) explain that individuals who self-identify as activists are likely to engage in various SMOs as a means of retaining their identity and utilizing their skills.

B. Rational choice and expectations

Rational choice theory, which stems from RMT, also attempts to explain social movements from the individual level. According to this theory, partaking in a movement is a calculated response. Participants are attracted to SMOs because of the material rewards to be gained. An individual will therefore not participate if the costs are greater than the potential benefit. In his 1965 work, *The Logic of Collective Action*, Mancur Olson explains why only a small percentage of people who believe in a particular cause

will become constituents, or active supporters. Given that collective goods will benefit all members of the movement's community regardless of their participation in the movement, Olson judges that rational individuals will choose to "free ride" or benefit from the success of the movement without personally participating or contributing to the cause (Olson 1965, 11). Put differently, rational actors will choose not to participate if they expect that other individuals will work to ensure that the movement succeeds. Rational individuals will take part only if participants benefit from *selective incentives* (which benefit only supporters of the movement and not the whole community) or if potential participants believe that the movement will not succeed without their involvement.

Olson's logic has become one of the most broadly discussed topics within the field of social movement theory. As such, it has come under attack by other theorists. For instance, Schwartz (1976, 166) argues that rational people will indeed participate in activities intended to achieve a collective goal because they are aware that the goal would never be realized if no one participated. In the same vein, Bert Klandermans, who attempts to combine RMT with a social-psychological analysis of movement participation, proposes that rational actors are not as predictable as Olson's "free rider" problem implies (1984, 597). For instance, if potential participants feel that a movement with many participants has a greater chance of success they may perceive their active support to the cause as a positive contribution to the movement's prospective victory. Eric. L. Hirsch refers to this trend as the "bandwagon effect" (1990, 245). However, the same rational person may choose not to participate if she believes there are not enough

participants to create change or that change is not possible even with a great number of movement participants. In the same regard, participants may believe in the mission of the movement but may not agree with the actions proposed to achieve the goal. In some cases, the potential participant may deem the tactic too risky, believing instead that the goal could be achieved through a more moderate action, and choose not to participate (Klandermans 1984).

The rational choice framework, as presented by Olson, focuses on material incentives; that participants are attracted to SMOs because of the tangible rewards to be gained. McAdam and Friedman believe selective incentives are not limited to material resources such as power or money but can include other types of incentives (1992, 164). A concrete example of a non-material, selective incentive can be found in Lorraine Bayard de Volo's study on Nicaraguan women's groups, where she established that empowerment was a long-term, non-material benefit of movement participation (Bayard de Volo 2006, 149). Further to this, other theorists have expanded the concept of incentives to include other types of incentives, many of which are of a non-material nature. 'Solidary incentives' are those that come from being part of a group and 'purposive incentives' derive from the fulfillment of contributing to what the participant deems as a good cause (Wilson 1973, 33-51).

Further to this, Klandermans believes that individuals will be drawn to a movement for one or a combination of three types of campaign orientations: value, power and participation (1993, 389). The first type of campaign emphasizes goals and ideologies. The second draws attention to the movement's efficiency and ability to reach

its goals. The third type highlights activities that participants find gratifying and worthy of their time and energy. Therefore, even if one campaign orientation is weak a potential participant may be willing to join a movement if another is strong. Ultimately, as laid out in this section, other theorists agree with Olson that the decision to mobilize is influenced by rational thought. However, they believe that Olson's conception of rationality is too narrow and should be expanded.

C. Framing

For the most part, RMT theorists consider participation as the result of favourable structural conditions, such as adequate funding and strong networks. However, as other theorists began integrating cultural components into their studies of collective action the practice of 'framing' has become an important concept in the study of social movements. Klandermans argues that favourable conditions do not just happen but must be "constructed socially." Simply put, a situation must be framed in a certain manner in order for potential participants to consider it unjust. Frames are also used to help individuals understand that they can call for change, and that the movement can bring about the change that they demand (1993, 386). For Klandermans, "persuasion is an important element in every mobilization campaign. The efficiency of a mobilization campaign in persuading the individual is a key determinant in participation" (2008, 248).

David Snow et al. (1986) also make the case for the importance of framing. They disagree with aspects of the RMT perspective, as it "assum[es] the ubiquity and constancy of mobilizing grievances." Furthermore, they contend that theories cannot take for granted that dissatisfaction with social conditions automatically result in movement

participation (465). Instead, these theorists point to frame alignment as a necessary process for movement participation. From their perspective, framing helps to achieve three things: it situates experiences within a larger framework, renders these situations meaningful, and clarifies, for potential participants, further actions to take. As Cuzán notes in his analysis of the Nicaraguan revolution, disapproval alone is inadequate for political mobilization; "discontent…needs to be harnessed and directed by organizers who have resources, if it is to serve as a motor for revolution" (Cuzán 1990, 403). Because frames also help to situate an SMO within a larger context, framing is vital to generating and maintaining support for an SMO.

Frames differ from an ideology in that "…frames are more flexible and situationally influenced constructs than formal ideological systems and are more easily and rapidly communicated to target groups, adapted to change, and extended to blend with other frames" (Tarrow 1992, 190). Therefore, as with movement recruitment in general, frame alignment is a dynamic process. As circumstance change, so too do the reasons that bring about participation. In their work on social movement organizations, Zald and Ash explain that the particular society in which an SMO operates influences the recruitment of supporters. Societal changes bring about "an ebb and flow of supporting sentiments" towards an SMO, which can increase or decrease 'mobilization potential' (1966, 330). Consequently, framing a situation in one setting or era may generate a great deal of support, while the same frame may be inappropriate or inadequate in another. Therefore, SMOs will benefit most from a favourable societal environment coupled with a strong situational frame.

Likewise, the process of 'conscious-raising' or 'concientización' is a process closely related to framing. The concept of 'concientización' was coined by Paulo Freire in his work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970)[8] and gained popularity with social change groups in Latin America. This process generally involves a discussion and analysis of norms and values, which are "…facilitated in non-hierarchical, loosely-structured, face-to-face settings that are isolated from persons in power" (Hirsch 1990, 245). Ultimately, the participants are invited to question power structures and societal institutions. For many people, such a critical analysis results in a personal ideological shift and can account for involvement with an SMO.

D. Biological availability and Exiting

While conditions may be framed by a movement help to increase participation, personal life changes can alter one's commitments. Stryker argues that commitments outside and within a movement also affect one's level of involvement (2000, 29). This is an important reason why participation in a movement is not stagnant. As an individual progresses through life, she may engage or disengage for various periods of time because of changing circumstances. For instance, a new mother may remain faithful to the movement's mission but may withdraw from participating in activities to focus on her new child. McAdam, McCarthy and Zald (1988, 709) employ the term 'biological availability' to explain this phenomenon. Those who are occupied with work or family commitments are less likely to join a movement. These life changing events provide one explanation for why some individuals within the 'mobilization potential' choose not to

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[8] Published in Portuguese in 1968.

participate actively in a movement. Zald and Ash report that those SMOs which rely primarily on purposive incentives, (those in which the participant receives fulfillment from contributing to a good cause) to attract and retain members are particularly at risk of the effects of biological availability and exiting since "…the values represented by the [S]MO's goals must be deeply held in order for the organization to command time and loyalty in the face of the competition of work and the demands of family and friends" (Zald and Ash 1966, 329).

Speaking from an economic standpoint, Susan Eckstein found in her work on Latin American social movements that "in any given social and cultural milieu, the more attractive economic alternatives are, the more likely it is that people will 'exit' rather than rebel" (Eckstein 1989, 44). She notes that when faced with unsatisfactory working conditions, labourers often choose to migrate for permanent or seasonal work rather than stay and fight for better working conditions. The concept of biological availability does not traditionally encompass such comportment. However, it is possible that this explanation be valid in the case when the labourer is looking for work to support his family. It is for this reason that those individuals who are the most destitute, and therefore potentially have the most to gain from societal changes, often do not join an SMO (Baumeister, Dale and Muravan 2000, 248).

E. Moral shock

The term 'moral shock' was first articulated by Jasper to explain why individuals with no prior history with an SMO, or ties to its members, may be moved to act (Jasper 1997, 106). It is a concept that encompasses moral judgment and is often based on a

personal experience. Individuals may lend their support to an SMO or start a new movement because of a specific event or experience. For instance, following the loss of a child a parent may join a cause which denounces the reason for the child's death or disappearance. People who are seemingly distant from a situation can also be moved to action simply by being made aware of an event or situation, as was the case for many North Americans in the 1980s upon learning of the political violence taking place in Central America. In some instances the person inspired to join an SMO may know someone who is already associated with the particular movement. In other cases the shock may be enough for the individual with no prior links to a movement to become involved. Goodwin and Jasper call this process 'self-recruitment' since the individual is actively seeking out the movement (Goodwin and Jasper 2003, 54).

The preceding five theories of recruitment differ in their analyses and theoretical perspectives. A common thread linking each is that, unlike most studies of social mobilization, the individual is placed at the centre of the investigation. Ultimately, no one reason will account for all instances of movement participation. Rather, different explanations, including the five reasons outlined in this chapter, work in complex combinations to facilitate individual participation in an SMO. Though networks, rational choice and expectations, framing, biological availability and exiting, and moral shock are not the only theories that analyze social movement participation at the micro level, they provide a foundation from which one can discuss the participation of individuals. Most notably for the present work these five theories will help answer the question: why do young Nicaraguan women join the women's and feminist movement?

II. Theorizing women's organizing

In the first part of this chapter it was recognized that there are a limited number of micro level studies of social movements. Likewise, traditional studies of social movement activity have not adopted a gender-based lens. This does not mean that studies of social mobilization have been gender neutral. On the contrary, social organizing has routinely been conceived as falling within the public sphere – a space which has traditionally been occupied by men. As for women, their place in society was confined to private spaces. Consequently, they were not considered actors in public matters. Steans cautions that the public-private divide not be "…treated as a natural function of the physical differences between men and women…" but instead be viewed as a societal construct (1998, 74). The bourgeoning of feminist theories and literature in the study of social movements has slowly lifted the shroud veiling the role of women in instances of social mobilization. When female participation is put at the nucleus of inquiry old theories and concepts must be reexamined to reflect a more accurate account of female organizing. The acceptance in many societies that "the personal is political" (Landes 1998) has liberated women from the notion that they are less political than men. As such, women's and feminist movements around the world have garnered much attention by scholars and theorists of late. These movements, like all social movements, are not stagnant structures in which members are uniform in their actions and outlooks. Participants come and go. Movement activism waxes and wanes. The approaches taken by one group of women, or one generation of women, can differ from that of the next. For these reasons, two particularly salient themes of the second part of this theoretical chapter are women's organizing and feminism, and generational studies of women activists. Beginning with a summary of

various terms, this section will conclude with an examination of the relationship between different generations of activists within women's and feminist organizations in English-speaking democracies.

1. Women's organizing and feminism

Women's organizing and feminism are central topics of this thesis. Yet, it is important to clarify that they are not mutually inclusive. The former is broader than the latter as it encompasses all types of activism in which women partake. Feminist organizing fall under the umbrella of women's organizing. More specifically, it is a form of activism that deals predominately with gender related issues. However, as outlined below, feminism is not the sole type of activism related to gender.

B. Feminine and feminist organizing

Latin American theorist Sonia Alvarez dichotomizes forms of female mobilization: feminine and feminist. The former "grows out of and accepts prevailing feminine roles and asserts rights on the basis of those roles." In comparison, the latter "seeks to transform the roles society assigns to women, challenges existing gender power arrangements, and claims women's rights to personal autonomy and equality" (Alvarez 1990, 24). In a similar vein, sociologist Maxine Molyneux speaks of "practical gender interests," which address a particular need, and "strategic gender interests," which strive to end the subordination of women (Molyneux 1985, 232-233). Broadly speaking, Molyneux's conceptualization of women's mobilization is consistent with that of Alvarez in that feminine organizing focuses its attention on the first set of interests and feminist organizing on the second.

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However, not all theorists agree with Alvarez and Molyneux. Two criticisms take issue with the limiting nature of the dichotomy of feminine and feminist. Jennifer Schrimer criticizes the theory in that it "assume[s] exclusionary interests," meaning that the theory dictates that individuals will engage in either feminine or feminist activities, but not both (Schrimer 1993, 60-61). Similarly, Amy Lind claims that such a distinction serves only to favour the discourse of middle-class women, who are more likely to join feminist groups, over working class women, who are more commonly associated with so called feminine groups (Lind 1992, 137). Even Molyneux herself cautions that analyses of female collective action cannot brush all women with the same stroke by assuming the homogeneity of their concerns (Molyneux 1985, 228-233). She maintains that the line between class issues and gender issues is often blurred, particularly for women of lower classes. Likewise, in her work on the feminist movement in Latin America, Virginia Vargas describes a movement that is faced with the dilemma of working towards gender equality while simultaneously taking into account the plurality of the female experience (Vargas 1992, 201).

In the case of Nicaragua, some researchers have suggested that many women activists have come to identify with one of the two approaches. Echoing the concerns of Schrimer and Lind, Hoyt argues that in Nicaragua the term 'feminist' has been closely related to the autonomous branch of the women's movement and, particularly since the revolutionary period, educated women. In her 1997 work on the Sandinistas, Katherine Hoyt, explains that "there is…controversy over the term 'feminist,' which the independent feminists routinely use to describe themselves, but which [FSLN] party-identified women tend to avoid because of its connotation of separatism" (1997, 68).

Further to this, she clarifies that "the more traditionally inclined women in the [FSLN] party find the discussion of the independent feminists too theoretical and too intellectualized to be of use to the great masses of poor women in Nicaragua struggling to keep their children from dying of malnutrition" (Hoyt 1997, 70).

In her work on the Nicaraguan women's and feminist movement Karen Kampwirth argues that these concerns are moot because they fail to understand the feminist/feminine divide. She maintains that distinguishing between the two does not inevitably designate individuals themselves as either feminist or feminine, but rather the public strategies they employ fall into one of the two camps. According to Kampwirth, both feminist and feminine approaches challenge power inequality, one directly and the other indirectly, and are used by women of all classes (Kampwirth 1998, 260). Furthermore, many groups work together though different networks to address a variety of issues by employing both feminine and feminist strategies. Therefore, just as Vargas speaks of "*one women's movement,* of which heterogeneity is an outstanding feature" and which is comprised of various streams (Vargas 1991, 9), I have chosen to refer to the movement in Nicaragua as the 'women's and feminist movement.' I will elaborate later on the two branches within the movement: AMNLAE and the autonomous groups.

B. Anti-feminism

Kampwirth builds upon the feminist/feminine dichotomy by introducing a third concept to the literature on women's mobilization in Nicaragua: anti-feminism. She maintains that "antifeminist strategies are employed in response to a threat to the status quo" of Nicaragua's traditionally male dominated society (1998, 260). Furthermore,

Kenneth Clatterbaugh, professor of philosophy and gender, characterizes anti-feminism as rejecting one or more general principles of feminist theory, namely 1) unequal relations between men and women are a societal construct; 2) that the relationship favours men; and 3) that action should be taken to remedy this inequality (Clatterbaugh 2007, 21). In sum, feminism views traditional gender roles as unnatural and seeks systemic change to liberate women from their subordinate position. Feminine organizing generally accepts traditional gender roles but seeks to alleviate some of the symptoms caused by gender differences, such as poverty or lack of education. Anti-feminism rejects the claims of feminists and seeks a return to "traditional family values" (Kampwirth 2008, 123).

C. Post-feminism

A fourth concept, post-feminism, largely emerged in the 1980s out of the media's questioning of the continued value of feminism in Western democratic countries. Post-feminism has become a controversial theme in many recent studies of feminism in these societies. Unlike the feminist/feminine divide, which centres on social class and type of action, this debate generally pits the younger generation against older feminists. That is to say women who came of age in the 1980s and 1990s are compared to those who began organizing in the 1960s and 1970s. The younger generation is said to be the post-feminist generation since the advances in the status of women has supposedly rendered feminist activism obsolete (Budgeon 2001, 12-13; Aronson 2003, 903). For some feminist writers, such as Susan Faludi, post-feminism is a function of anti-feminism (1992, 95). The primary worth of her criticism lies in the individualization of problems; challenges faced by young women are constructed as individual troubles rather than collective issues. As a

result, younger women have apparently become depoliticized. Other scholars, such as Wolf (1994), Harris (2008) and Taft (2011), refute the concept of post-feminism, pointing instead to a third wave of young feminists. They assess the differences between third-wave and older feminists as the reinterpretation and expansion of the concept of feminism to account for societal changes which third-wavers face, such as increasing individualization, and popular cultural representations of feminism (Harris 2008, 7-8). Rebecca Walker drove this idea home when she proudly stated in 1992: "I am not a post-feminism feminist. I am the Third Wave" (R. Walker 1992, 39-41). The concepts of post-feminism and third-wave feminism are at the heart of an important theme within recent studies of women's and feminist movements in the West: generational change among women activists.

2. Generational change and political generations

The seminal theoretical framework in the field of generational studies dates back to Mannheim's 1923 essay *The Sociological Problem of Generations* in which the author examines the political expressions of members of different generations. His thesis holds that because of the common discourse and societal conditions during youth, members of a similar age will share modes of thoughts and frames of reference (Schneider 1988, 6; Schnittker, Freese and Powell 2003, 608; Stevenson, Everingham and Robinson 2011, 131). Debates within a generation can be explained by 'generational units' – those individuals who have come to similar conclusions regarding their experiences and frames of reference. Though the views of differing generational units may diverge, they operate within the same field of understanding because historical conditions predispose particular

thoughts and beliefs to be the prevailing viewpoints of a set time period (Stevenson, Everingham and Robinson 2011, 132). Braungart and Braungart add to this work by analyzing the theory of 'political generations' or "a special age group in history that becomes aware of its uniqueness and joins together to work for social and political change" (Braungart and Braungart 1986, 207). The concept of political generations permits historians and researchers to analyze the process of social change within a society from the perspective of age. Such a viewpoint is imperative for reasons that Braungart and Braungart articulate:

> Age is one of the most basic social categories of human existence and a primary factor in all societies for assigning roles and granting prestige and power. However, age is not a unitary concept and may be used in reference to life-cycle development (young, middle-aged, or old) or in a generational sense (lineage descent or a particular age group in history). Those born around the same period in time share a similarity in both life-cycle development and historical experiences. The entrance of successive age groups into society has been a constant feature of human history, but each group has "come into existence" within a certain historical and political setting, and this sociohistorical process provides an important force for political stability and change (1986, 205-206).

As implied in the above quotation, two main perspectives have emerged in the study of generations: the life-cycle and the generational cohort. The former posits that as they age, individuals will go through a series of life stages which are associated with "certain identifiable patterns of political thought and behavior" (Braungart and Braungart 1986, 209). These patterns are generally common to all people as they pass through each phase of life. Relations between generations are said to be strained because of the divergent "needs and interests" of each cohort at any one time (Braungart and Braungart 1986, 208). The latter perspective studies the correlation between political behaviour of a

group born within a certain time period and the "…common exposure to a particular society in the context of a unique set of historical experiences" of its members (Knoke 1984, 192). A point of congruence to both approaches is the examination of how experiences in youth impact political ideas and actions (Schneider 1988, 7).

These viewpoints have been used to compare and contrast older and younger generations in terms of political behaviour. Yet, the expected results between the two perspectives diverge. For instance, in order to maintain tradition and societal norms, life-cycle theorists expect that an individual will move towards conservative values as she ages. On the other hand, proponents of the cohort approach expect that individuals will maintain their political and social leanings throughout their lives. For their part, Braungart and Braungart advocate for a synthesis of both perspectives claiming that attitudes and behaviours are the products of a unique correlation between particular historical experiences and phases of life (1986, 219).

While age alone does not delineate perceptions, beliefs, and behaviours, the concept of political generations has informed several disciplines, including feminist theories of change. Scholars of feminism including Schneider (1988), Aronson (2003), Schnittker, Freese and Powell (2003), Maddison (2004) and Stevenson, Everingham and Robinson (2011) recast the framework of political generations to include gender as an equally important factor in the conceptualization of political attitudes and comportments, but one which had been absent from previous accounts. By viewing popularly held beliefs about political generations through a gender lens, important questions are raised and assumptions challenged. Students of political change are therefore better positioned

to examine both the experiences of different generations of women within a movement and the viability of the movement itself.

Researchers of feminism in Western democratic societies draw on the cohort paradigm to identify three waves of feminism that correspond to the "political coming-of-age" of different waves of women (Schnittker, Freese and Powell 2003, 609). In broad terms, the first wave occurred in the late 19th century and early 20th century, the second wave during the 1960s and 1970s, and the third wave, as discussed previously, emerged during the 1980s and beyond. Studies show that each wave has its own characteristics, attitudes, and methods of female organizing. Because all social movements encounter "a range of internal and external pressures which affect their viability, their internal structure and processes, and their ultimate success in attaining goals" (Zald and Ash 1966, 327) many members of women's and feminist organizations are keen to examine how differences between generations impact the movement.

A. Generationalism within the women's movement

Studies of political generations often draw attention to divergent opinions between members of different demographic cohorts. The women's movement is no exception. The bulk of the work concerning generational change within women's and feminist movements is based on the context of Western capitalist democratic societies. In particular, much literature has recently been produced in Australia on this issue. Here, the 1990s brought a "brief but explosive debate" between different generations of Australian feminists (Maddison 2004, 234). This dispute was kick-started in 1993 by Anne Summers' *Letter to the Next Generation* in which she outlined how the failure of younger

women to assume the torch of activism risked reversing the gains that her generation had fought to win (Summers 1993). Embedded in the critique of the younger generation was their seeming disregard for the collective in favour of the individual, and their apparent tendency to act as victims rather than agents of change (Maddison 2004, 234; Stevenson, Everingham and Robinson 2011, 126). As a result, younger women were outraged, insulted, and disappointed that their older counterparts painted their activism in such a bad light. They felt particularly slighted since, in their experience, young women were often excluded from important discussions or only given a token role (Baumgardner and Richards 2000, 221-228; Maddison 2004, 235; Stevenson, Everingham and Robinson 2011, 126).

Stevenson, Everingham and Robinson examine these debates through the lens of generationalism, a concept which describes a strategy in which the perceived moral decline of society is seen as a result of the actions, or lack thereof, of an entire generation (Stevenson, Everingham and Robinson 2011, 127-131). According to Davis (1997) generationalism leads to an oversimplification of complex issues resulting in negative stereotyping of the younger generation. It is used frequently as a media tactic to attempt to conserve the status quo. However, laying blame on young people for problems detracts from searching for root causes of and real solutions to social problems (Stevenson, Everingham and Robinson 2011, 129).

Generationalism has been at the heart of generational debates within feminist fora. As exemplified in above, much of the discourse in recent years regarding feminist organizing in English-speaking democracies has seen young women endure criticism for

their apparent lack of action. The decline in the women's movement has been said to be a result of the decrease in movement activism on the part of the younger generation (Bulbeck and Harris 2008, 221). However, Stevenson, Everingham and Robinson insist that "generationalism is multi-directional"; older and younger members of the movement have both succumbed to laying blame and oversimplification (Stevenson, Everingham and Robinson 2011, 129). For instance, two women of the third wave, Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards, write "subconsciously or not, Second Wavers often deny that they could benefit from younger feminists' knowledge and experiences" (2000, 222). It has also been suggested that the attention given to youth apathy is meant to divert attention away from "the dwindling public sphere and disengagement of adults" (Bulbeck and Harris 2008, 232). As a result, it is not surprising that feminist debates were "framed by resentment, blame and misunderstanding" and fraught with "negative stereotyping and conflict" (Stevenson, Everingham and Robinson 2011, 130). Bulbeck and Harris even go so far as describing the fragmentation within feminism a "generational cat-fight" (Bulbeck and Harris 2008, 221).

The generational disputes between older and younger Australian feminists have for the most part subsided. In their studies on generational change within the women's movement scholars such as Bulbeck and Harris (2008) and Maddison (2004) have turned their attention away from negative debates which pit one generation against the next and which "may contribute a sense of a too-stable feminism in the past, against which present feminism can be (usually negatively) measured" (Long 2001). Rather, there has been a shift away from laying blame to inquisitiveness in the way the younger generation

identifies and interacts with the movement. Nonetheless, because it is crucial that young women take the reins of the movement, if it is to prosper, there is still a sense of urgency to best understand generational differences.

B. Cohorts and Life cycles

Braungart and Braungart's assessment that attitudes and behaviours are the products of a unique correlation between particular historical experiences and phases of life can provide a basis for understanding how young women in both Western democracies and developing countries relate to feminism and the women's movement. With this in mind, different theses have been put forth outlining why the actions of young women in contemporary times should not be held up against actions of their older counterparts. Two reasons are explained below.

Firstly, each generation must be understood in its relation to those which precede and follow. "Generations get their meaning through interaction with other generations, interactions that can be positive or negative, leading to the acceptance or rejection of the predecessors' legacies" (Schneider 1988, 7). Thus in her assessment, the younger generations' awareness of their role lies in part on the older generation's capacity to transmit information to and mobilize the subsequent generation. It necessarily follows that the values, opinions, opportunities, and challenges of young women will reflect societal changes made by their mothers and grandmothers (Budgeon 2001, 10; Schneider 1988, 13). In her study of 33 young British women, Shelley Budgeon discovered that the respondents place great value on those aspects of their lives, such as educational and

professional opportunities, that have been made possible, or wide-spread, through the struggles of previous generations of women (2001, 10).

In the same vein, social movement theory explains that movements will be greatly impacted by the environment in which they operate. Specifically, the opinion of movement participants and potential participants will be influenced by changes in the society (Zald and Ash 1966, 330). Regardless of this theoretical perspective, youth activism is often, though not always intentionally, compared to that of previous decades. Most notably, the "golden age of activism" of the 1960s and 1970s is held up in high regard (Bulbeck and Harris 2008, 232). The current conjuncture, in both Western democracies and the developing world, does not mirror that of previous decades. It should therefore be expected, if not fully accepted, that each subsequent generation of young women express their agency in a manner that is best suited for their realities.

Secondly, critiques of the younger generation stem from an undeveloped understanding of the phases of a social movement. Drawing from Alberto Melucci's theories of social movements, Maddison (2004) turns to the concept of collective identity. Rather than studying collective identity as a static structure, she argues that it should be understood as a process which is continuously evolving. The cycle of action, reflection, and contestation of movement participants results in a discourse that reflects upon the experiences of those at the grassroots. In this sense, the actions of young women are neither better nor worse than that of the older generation, but simply a response to a different phase in the movement's evolution. In her analysis of Australian contemporary women's movement, Maddison argues that despite the perceived decline of feminist

activism young women are indeed playing an essential role in movement continuity. Submerged networks, or a network of small communities, maintain social movement activity and spaces during political and social periods which are unfavourable to the demands of the women's movement. These networks are well poised to gain ground when the climate becomes more promising to change. Maddison's argument holds that attention and support must be given to those young women who are maintaining movement momentum during periods in which societal conditions are not conducive to the goals of the movement. This proposition is consistent with Schneider's view that media accounts of the contemporary women's movement have lacked critical analysis, resulting in negative attention and misinterpretation. In her view, single-issue losses, or activism played out in private domains instead of public domains, can be mistaken for the breakdown of the movement rather than natural phases of its life course (Schneider 1988, 10-11).

C. Beyond the lens of history

As studies of women's activism shift their focus away from a confrontational and accusatory approach to one that is more open and inclusive, the place that young women occupy in women's and feminist movements can be studied in a new light. Like this current thesis, many studies of young women in Western democratic societies are qualitative in nature and, therefore, not universally generalizable. Nonetheless, a few common themes have emerged. The first is how young women self-identify. Of particular interest to many researchers is how young women conceptualize the term feminism. Studies indicate that the term has fallen out of favour among younger generations. Indeed, findings of an American study, which analyzed data collected in 1996, concluded

that respondents whose coming-of-age corresponded to the second wave of feminism were much more likely to identify as feminists than those born after 1965 (Schnittker, Freese and Powell 2003, 619). For some feminists, this trend is a function of post-feminism. From their vantage point if, as post-feminism theorizes, young women judge that gender equality has been won they will no longer espouse it as a cause worth fighting for (Budgeon 2001, 13). As for younger women who do self-identify as feminists, some have expressed feelings of not being able to live up to expectations. Naomi Wolf, a prominent voice of third-wave feminism wrote:

> My friends and I are all self-defined feminists. But we know that if we were to stand up and honestly describe our lives to a room full of other feminist 'insiders'…we could count on having transgressed at least one dearly held tenet on someone's list of feminism's 'do's' and 'don'ts', and being called to account for it (Wolf 1994, 68).

A feminist identity may no longer be as germane in contemporary discussions of women's mobilization and activism as it once was. Indeed, Bulbeck and Harris propose that the debate over who is or is not a feminist, or why or why not, may perpetuate the generational conflicts that many are trying to avoid (2008, 236). One suggestion is that less attention be paid to labels and more paid to actions and beliefs. Indeed, many younger women agree with the goals of feminism yet do not identify as feminists (Rosen 2000, 274-275). Case in point is a 2002 study which reveals that, for the younger generation, supporting a feminist ideology does not necessitate identifying as a feminist (Schnittker, Freese and Powell 2003, 619). Several reasons are suggested. Firstly, feminism as a concept is diverse and complex. As a result, the decrease in feminist identification may be the result of the lack of agreement about what constitutes feminism

(Aronson 2003, 906; Schnittker, Freese and Powell 2003, 619). Secondly, the negative

social stigma associated with feminism, such as radical actions and beliefs (Bulbeck and

Harris 2008, 225) or deteriorated relations with men (Aronson 2003, 906), influence how

young women self-identify. Thirdly, the feminist movement is perceived by some

younger women as old-fashioned, resulting in a distancing of association of identity,

though not values (Bulbeck and Harris 2008, 225). Aronson sums up many of these

findings by suggesting that 'feminism' as a category may not be black or white.

Individuals may situate themselves along a feminist continuum which includes those who

identify fully, those who identify but with some parameters, and those who reject the

label but support many of the causes (Aronson 2003, 912).

A second, yet closely related, theme found in many works on female activism is

the manner in which young women manifest their political agency. There is a general

sentiment that young women in Western democratic societies are less aware and involved

in politics and civic engagement than in the past (Harris, Wyn and Younes 2010, 11-12).

As previously noted, this issue has been at the core of many generational debates.

Budgeon's study of the identities of young women in Northern England led her to

conclude:

> What can be retrieved from listening to young women is a greater understanding
> of how agency, informed by feminist ideals, operates as a form of decentralized
> resistance at the level of everyday contributing to the continuing transformation of
> social relations as well as feminism itself (2001, 26).

Like Budgeon, Bulbeck and Harris (2008, 233) and Taft (2011, 33) suggest that it is time

to redefine what constitutes political agency. Knowing that circumstances vary from one

generation to the next, these scholars have noted how young women respond to new social and economic realities. Societal conditions with which the younger generation must content include a decrease in accountability from elected officials, a neo-liberal ideology, greater emphasis on the individual, and shifting public spaces (Harris, Wyn and Younes 2010, 12; Stasko 2008, 210). In some cases, exclusion is a self-fulfilling barrier: young people simply feel rejected from conventional political systems and as a result opt to display their agency by disengaging (Harris, Wyn and Younes, 2010). In other cases, new challenges have resulted in innovative tactics and strategies. One group young of activists explains that "reinventing tactics of resistance has become a central preoccupation for the movement of movements" (Notes from Nowhere 2003, 174). For instance, many young people use new forms of communication such as zines[9] and social media to organize. In modern times, political activism is not confined to actions on the streets, but can also be carried out on the Internet, at home, and at work (Bulbeck and Harris 2008, 238). After all, the locus of change is not limited to the state. Change is also sought within societal norms, and therefore may require different tactics. In such a light, young women should not be blamed for being absent as political actors simply because barriers preventing them from realizing their full potential as political agents have not be properly identified and remedied, or because others have failed to recognized certain strategies as political.

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[9] A self-published publication circulated to small groups of people.

Conclusion

This chapter has laid out important theories and concepts in the field of social movement theory and women's and feminist organizing. Ultimately, it provides a framework for the analysis of young Nicaraguan women's participation in which two main questions will be explored: Why do young Nicaraguan women join the women's and feminist movement? How do they perceive their current place in this movement?

The first part of this chapter was devoted to social movement theories. It was explained that micro level studies investigate movement participation at the level of the individual. The five aforementioned explanations for understanding movement participation of individuals (networks, rational choice, framing, biological availability and moral shock) will be most useful in helping explain the first of the two questions posed above. The second half of this chapter opened with key concepts pertaining to female organizing: feminist and feminine strategies, anti-feminism, and post-feminism. The remainder of the discussion was based on research of young women in Western democratic societies. Attention was drawn to generationalism within women's and feminist movements. Issues of feminist identification and political agency among young people were also highlighted. The data provide a reference point from which to analyze the second question posed above. Some of the themes from this chapter will be explored further in the historical analysis of the participation of Nicaraguan women and youth in SMOs. I will also return to these theories and concepts in the final chapter when synthesizing the fieldwork findings with themes presented in the theoretical and historical chapters of this work.

Chapter 3 - A Historical Review of the Mobilization of Women and Youth in Nicaragua

The history of the Nicaraguan women's and feminist movement is one of determination, resistance, and renewal. However, it has been said that the participation of women in the political process has "…always been covered by a veil of machismo and patriarchal domination that only recognizes the role of men in the public sphere" (Cuadra Lira and Jiménez Martinez 2009, 6). The story of young Nicaraguan women in contemporary times is rooted in both of these conceptualizations of the past. As will be demonstrated in this chapter, Nicaraguan women have been compelled to mobilize in all recent historical periods. It would, however, be too simplistic to assume that women's activism has remained fixed throughout the years. A careful review of the literature reveals that patterns of female political participation varied. While movement participants were influenced by the dominant discourse of the day, each joined with her own story and interpretation of her own reality. Less examined but equally important, Nicaraguan youth have also shown great leadership and ingenuity in the face of repression and violence. Although studies of this demographic as agents of social change in Nicaragua are lacking, the following account of Nicaraguan history will demonstrate that the social mobilization of this group was the impetus that led to the climax of the Sandinista revolution. Because each generation impacts upon the next, understanding the historical trajectory of politically active women and youth, and their motives, is necessary before one can begin to evaluate the behaviours and attitudes of today's young Nicaraguan women. This

chapter thus sets out to explore Nicaraguan history from the perspective of women and young people's political activism.

I. The first wave of Nicaraguan feminism

The rise of female organizing and feminism in Nicaragua is often traced back to the revolutionary period. In reality, the first wave of Nicaraguan feminism took root at the turn of the twentieth century. The rumblings of a few women expressing their dissatisfaction with traditional gender roles occurred intermittently throughout the nineteenth century. However, it was not until Nicaragua's first girls' college was established in Granada in 1882 that feminism truly emerged. It was here, at the El Colegio de Señoritas, that a select group of young Nicaraguan women were exposed to ideas challenging cultural norms regarding women. These thoughts were imported by the school's North American[10] educators. The school was avant-garde in that it advanced educational standards for girls and produced students who wrote on such matters as the legal status of women (Saxberg 1989, 59). One of the school's first students, Josefa Toledo de Aguerri, has been identified by many, including Nicaragua's National Assembly, as the country's first feminist (Arellano, El Nuevo Diario, January 2011; Red de Mujeres del Norte; Whisnant 1995, 409). Later she also served as both a teacher and school director. She became a feminist as a result of her experience with the educational system and her role advocating for girls to have greater access to schooling. After leaving the college, Toledo de Aguerri continued her feminist advocacy in Nicaraguan society

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[10] In Nicaraguan the term "Norte Americano" generally refers to people from the United States of America, not the North American continent as a whole.

through two publications. The articles in the *Revista Feminina Ilustrada* (1918-1920) and *Mujer Nicaragüense* (1929-1930) addressed such questions as "what is feminism?" (Arellano, El Nuevo Diario, January 2011) and engaged in general discussions of feminist theory. Toledo de Aguerri remained attentive to the women's movement internationally, travelling throughout the Americas to learn about the struggle of women in other countries. Upon her return home, she reported her findings in her publications, hoping to inspire Nicaraguan women to follow in the footsteps of their counterparts in the hemisphere who were fighting for suffrage (Saxberg 1989, 60).

Toledo de Aguerri was also a prominent member of many feminine and feminist organizations raising issues rarely mentioned in the public sphere (Arellano, El Nuevo Diario, January 2011). For instance, she launched the Ladies Club of Managua "to amplify the radius of action of Nicaraguan women" (Toledo de Aguerri, 13). There is indication that at least some of the women, including Toledo de Aguerri, were moved to join these groups because they were shocked by the deplorable conditions in which the majority of the country's women and children lived. However, most members were involved merely because they felt that it was their duty as society women to carry out good deeds. Despite the efforts of Toledo de Aguerri, the women's movement during this era remained small and narrow in scope. Membership in the movement was largely limited to a few women from the upper and middle classes who rarely engaged in a critical analysis of the abject poverty which the majority of their countrywomen faced.

Perhaps Toledo de Aguerri's most notable contribution to Nicaragua's early feminist movement was her appeal in 1939, on behalf of many independent feminist

groups, and in the name of "the poor women…the middle class woman…the intellectual and the wealthy women" (quoted in González 2001, 51), for the government to extend suffrage to women. Despite earlier promises by Somoza Garcia to grant her request, and the First Lady's role as honourary president of two of the organizations which were involved in drafting the petition, Toledo de Aguerri's appeal was denied. Women were not granted the right to vote for another decade and a half. According to Nicaraguan women's historian Victoria González, it was shortly after the rejection to expand suffrage to women that the first wave of Nicaraguan feminism faded into the background as feminist discourse was hijacked and redirected by women loyal to Somoza (González 2001, 51). In his work on Nicaraguan culture, David E. Whisnant suggests that perhaps this is because, regardless of Toledo de Aguerri's tireless work, the climate was not ripe for most Nicaraguan women to support a feminist movement (Whisnant 1995, 401). The second wave of feminism would be left for women of another generation, many who did not begin organizing as feminists but rather as revolutionaries against a corrupt regime led by Anastasio Somoza Debayle.

II. Somocista women[11]

As outlined in the first chapter of this thesis, the National Liberal Party (PLN), headed by commander of the National Guard, Anastasio Somoza Garcia, came to power in 1937. Somoza Garcia's ascension to the presidency was facilitated by a series of events including the departure of the US Marines in 1933, the assassination of anti-imperialist guerrilla fighter Augusto César Sandino in 1934, and the overthrow of elected President

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[11] Somocista refers to a supporter of the Somoza regime

Juan B. Sacasa in 1936. Anastasio Somoza Garcia was the first of three men in the Somoza family to head what would become a brutal forty-two year dictatorship, the longest to date in Latin America. Once the US Marines withdrew from the country and left Somoza Garcia in charge of the National Guard, he immediately began consolidating power. Therefore, it is not surprising that his control extended to the women's movement. The women's movement that had emerged in the early part of the century, which was characterized as both 'feminine' and 'feminist,' was rarely mentioned by the new president. Even following the legislation that granted women the right to vote, no homage was made to those who pioneered the suffrage movement. Instead, Somoza Garcia continued to remind the female electorate that they were permitted to go to the polls only because his party had passed such a law on their behalf. In 1955 he created the Ala Femenina, a women's wing of the PLN. According to González, the Ala Femenina "…displaced, appropriated, and/or co-opted previously independent (often feminist) women's organizations" (González 2001, 54-55). In large part the term 'feminism' fell out of usage. When it was employed it was often used out of context (González 2001, 53).

For a variety of reasons a large number of middle and upper class women came to support the Somoza regime through the Ala Femenina. Small concessions were made on the part of the government in order to secure allegiance from the female electorate (González 2001, 55). Women who lent their support to the governing party were acting quite rationally in that they came to understand that in a regime that "…looked after the interests of the few at the expense of the many" (Saxberg 1989, 66) it was best to be included among the favoured few. González suggests that it is likely that many Somocista

women of different socio-economic classes wished to be affiliated with the ruling party so as to benefit from material incentives, which in this case was a position that would raise their standard of living (González 2001, 44-45). The percentage of women considered "economically active"[12] rose from 14 percent to 21.9 percent between 1950 and 1970 (Ruchwarger 1987, 199). While many jobs were filled by working class women, the growing middle class also benefitted from an increase of women in professional and technical positions. For other women, their involvement with the Ala Femenina paid off through political appointments. By the mid-1970s, women occupied many important positions within the PLN and the Somoza administration. In large part, these women had ties to the Ala Femenina. In an interview with Victoria González, one young woman explained why she became involved in the organization. She described how shortly after moving to the capital, she was personally invited to a meeting by the leader of the movement. As a professional woman who was new to Managua, the Ala Femenina offered her a network of friends and acquaintances, not to mention contact with high-level officials. This network proved to be useful as her contacts later helped her and her family obtain employment and other material benefits. In return, she provided much assistance to the organization and, by extension, the Liberal party (González 2001, 57-58).

III. The condition of women during Somoza's reign

The Somoza regime and the Liberal party retained a firm grip on power for over four decades. During those years, the regime benefitted from strong support of women in

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[12] These figures do not include domestic labour.

the Ala Femenina. The Somoza dynasty was also very friendly with lawmakers in Washington and enjoyed the strict loyalty of the National Guard. The country's economy endured many boom and bust cycles. However, any growth did little to help those outside of the highest stratas of society. The country was divided between the very wealthy few and the majority of Nicaraguans who faced extreme poverty and appalling social conditions. For example, in the 1950s cotton production was deemed a priority by the government. However, this decision only aided producers with close ties to the regime, and resulted in the forced displacement of a large group of peasant farmers. As cash crops for export production expanded, food production for local consumption declined. This resulted in greater strain on a food system on which an increasing population had to rely (Walker and Armony 2000, 69). By 1979 unemployment was 22 percent. Adult illiteracy was 60 percent, with even higher rates among women and rural communities. Education, which is often credited as the key to escaping the cycle of poverty, remained inaccessible to the vast majority of citizens. Only five percent of the population continued to study formally past the fifth grade. Less than one percent was able to attend university (Randall 1981, v).

The women's movement was dominated by a small class of privileged women who supported the ruling regime. They had done little to improve the lives of their female counterparts outside of the small inner circle. Barriers prevented many women from improving their lot in life or taking political action. For example, when suffrage was extended to the female population in the 1950s, the law prevented illiterate women from voting until the age of twenty-one. Conversely, literate women were able to partake in

elections at the age of eighteen (Saxberg 1989, 105). The plight of rural women was particularly difficult due to their responsibilities tending to their children. A 1975 USAID report noted that:

> Unlike her male counterpart who can and does abandon his family and seek better opportunities for himself, [a rural woman] is tied to the home, often as the sole support. It is a bitter irony that employers justify higher wages for men because they are the supporters of families (Diebold de Cruz 1975, 47).

Some rural women felt they had little choice but to move to urban areas to find work. The 1973 census revealed that in towns of 10 000 or greater, women outnumbered men by twenty percent (Saxberg 1989, 109). However, once arriving in the city many women discover that the transition to urban living did not raise their quality of life. Elite women, especially those with ties to Ala Femenina, may have found work as state employees but there were few opportunities for the majority of urban women. In 1974, 7.2 percent of female urbanites were unemployed as compared to 6.4 percent for their male counterparts (González 2001, 45). With few opportunities available to women some turned to prostitution. In many instances, women entered into prostitution as a means of supplementing their limited income from other paid employment. According to Helen Collinson, the Somoza regime was a breeding ground for prostitution for a variety reasons. In addition to having few economic activities available to women, there were no laws prohibiting the sale of sexual services. More shockingly, many brothels had close ties to the National Guard and gave discounts to its members. For the opposition, prostitution became synonymous with the Somoza regime (Collinson 1990, 69).

The dire conditions faced by the majority of Nicaraguans during this era were compounded by a devastating earthquake that struck the capital city of Managua on

December 23, 1972. The magnitude 6.2 quake resulted in thousands of deaths and injuries. It also left much of the city in ruins, resulting in widespread homelessness. As Managuans struggled to rebuild their lives, A. Somoza Debayle pocketed thousands of dollars of international aid relief intended for those in need. The earthquake of 1972 undoubtedly negatively impacted the social and economic conditions of many of the country's citizens. Maxine Molyneux describes how this turn of events acted as a type of 'moral shock' for lower class women:

> For many poor women, entry into political life began with the earthquake of 1972, when in the aftermath, the neighborhood committees were organized to care for the victims, feed the dispossessed, and tend the wounded. The anger that followed Somoza's misappropriation of the relief funds intensified as the brutal methods used to contain opposition escalated. Many of these women experienced their transition from relief workers to participants in the struggle [against the president] (1985, 228).

Indeed, the outcome of the earthquake did not only infuriate poorer Nicaraguans but also instigated a change of heart among the bourgeoisie. Once supportive of Somoza, this class was beginning to see the benefits of their loyalty slip away as the dictator consolidated the country's wealth (Kirk 1992, 62).

IV. Young people and the rise of the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional

To maintain strict control over the population, anyone suspected of criticizing the Somoza regime was subjected to terror and extreme brutality. The Masaya Volcano, outside of the capital, is said to have been a popular place for Somoza's National Guard, or 'death squad,' to drop political opponents from helicopters (Pilger 2001, 497-498).

Other prisoners experienced "…electrical shocks…repeated near-drowning, lifting or dragging by a cord tied around the genitals, imprisonment in a coffin-sized cell..." or were kept locked away in cages next to wild animals in the Somoza family garden (Booth 1982, 72). In the midst of such a society plagued by violence and fear, opposition to the regime was brewing within different sectors of society, notably among students and other youth. Many studies of the revolutionary period pay homage to the role of young people in the struggle against Somoza, but there have been few analyses that specifically focus on youth in the revolution. Nonetheless, statistics demonstrate that young people did not only participate in the uprising but that they were indeed the leaders of the movement. They became involved predominately through universities and schools, and Christian Base Communities (CEBs).

1. The student movement

The Sandinista National Liberation Front, the force behind the popular revolution, made its first sally into Nicaraguan history in 1961 (T. Walker 1986, 29). The FSLN followed a similar trajectory as Nicaragua's first feminist movement in that both trace their origins back to students. In fact, many political leaders of the revolutionary period first became activists during their university studies. Reports indicate that university students began demonstrating against the Somoza regime as early as 1939. Though they were often suppressed by the National Guard, outbursts of discontent occurred sporadically on university campuses in the subsequent decades. In the early years, the anti-Somoza student movement did not make many gains as it remained fragmented between members of different political persuasions. The student faction of

the Conservative Party had been involved in large demonstrations against the Somoza regime in the cities of Managua and León in 1948. The anti-Somoza student movement was therefore particularly affected by political agreements signed in 1948 and 1950 between Somoza Garcia and the Conservative Party. However, frustrations continued to mount. In 1956, a member of the Liberal student movement, Rigoberto López Pérez, carried out the assassination of Somoza Garcia. The regime responded by immediately cracking down on dissidents. Some members of the anti-Somoza student movement were imprisoned or fled into exile.

Inspiration to continue fighting for the demise of the regime came only three years later when Nicaraguan student leaders learned of the Cuban Revolution in January, 1959. Young Nicaraguans of different political stripes quickly joined forces in a new organization, the Nicaraguan Patriotic Youth, whose main objective was the end of the Somoza dynasty. Still, government repression continued. In July, 1959 four students were killed by the National Guard during a mass protest. This tragedy was an impetus for the anti-Somoza movement. Following the event, student leader Carlos Fonseca went to Cuba to learn more about Marxism and the revolutionary movement in that country. Convinced that the only way to overthrow the regime would be through armed struggle, Fonseca returned to his homeland. He, and others including Tomás Borge, founded the FSLN in 1961 (Foroohar 1989, 113-114).

Because of small economic gains and expanding urbanization, school enrollment exploded. Universities doubled their student population between 1960 and 1970 (Cuzán 1991, 74). Under these circumstances, post-secondary institutions became important

centres for the Sandinistas to recruit new members or supporters. However, young

people's support for the revolution was not limited to university students. Students in

high schools joined groups such as the High School Student Movement. In the final years

of the insurrection, students comprised close to one-third of the FSLN fighters (Cuzán

1991, 74) and more than 100 000 students, including some in elementary school,

supported the assault against Somoza in some capacity (Núñez Soto 1980, 148).

A. Women in the student and youth movements

At the time of the rise of the FSLN women were greatly underrepresented in

higher education, accounting for less than twenty percent of the university student

population in the 1960s (Arnove 1994, 169). This is likely one reason young men figured

more prominently in the anti-Somoza student movement. However, it is erroneous to

assume that women were completely absent from this struggle. For instance, before rising

to the top ranks of the FSLN, Doris Maria Tijerino joined the Patriotic Nicaraguan Youth

(JPN) at the age of 17. In an interview with Denis Lynn Daly Heyck, Tijerino recounts

how one book influenced her political and ideological outlook on the world. In essence,

she describes how this process of personal concientización or awareness-raising inspired

her to join the JPN, the Socialist Nicaraguan Youth and, then later, the FSLN (Heyck

1990, 58-60). The student movement counted in its membership other young women who

eventually became active in the FSLN or AMNLAE, such as Michele Najlis, Dora María

Téllez and Milú Vargas (Randall 1994). These women followed a similar path to

mobilization. All three were raised in a privileged milieu and, therefore, were not

subjected to hardships like many of their countrywomen. Yet, each was affected by

personal experiences that steered her to the movement. Diane Espinoza has a similar

story in that she also came to the FSLN at a young age through a student organization. However, her experience differs in that, unlike the other women mentioned above, Espinoza came from a working class family. After the Sandinista triumph, she joined the Sandinista Youth and eventually worked closely with the Sandinista Worker's Central (CST) through her factory work (Randall 1994, 85-97). Her story reveals that the mobilization of young people extended beyond the educated middle class.

2. The popular church and Christian Base Communities

The participation of youth and women was also closely linked to a new wave of Catholicism that was taking root across Latin America. Coincidentally, international changes within the Roman Catholic Church ultimately served as a catalyst for young Nicaraguan Catholics to organize and support the revolutionary movement. Three events in particular made way for the rise of the social movement mobilizing within sectors of the Catholic Church in Nicaragua. The Second Vatican Council, which began in 1962, had a profound impact on Nicaragua. While a host of changes were adopted within the international Catholic community as a result of Vatican II, it was the focus on the 'preferential option for the poor' that was to redefine Church dynamics throughout Latin America. Shortly after the close of Vatican II, Latin American Bishops gathered in Medellín, Colombia to analyze the changes in light of the Latin American reality. This meeting signaled "…the culmination of the process of radicalization in the Latin American Church" (Foroohar 1989, 50). It also marked the division of the Church in Nicaragua between conservatives and the grassroots movement known as the 'popular church.' Both Vatican II and Medellín called for the liberation of the poor and the

oppressed. However, members of the Catholic clergy did not agree on how best to facilitate this liberation. As was the case in much of Latin America, some members of the Nicaraguan clergy embraced the notion of dedicating their work to liberating the disadvantaged from unjust political, economic, and social conditions. More traditional members maintained that the Church could participate but was not to take the lead in this process.

The crossroads at which the international Catholic Church found itself during this transitional period was accentuated in Nicaragua where the death of the Archbishop of Managua in 1968 further opened the doors for change. His passing was welcome news for some who purported that the Catholic hierarchy in Nicaragua in the late 1960s remained "lethargic, lifeless and married to the Somoza regime" (Molina 1981, 18). In 1970, Miguel Obando y Bravo was named as the new Archbishop of Nicaragua's largest Catholic diocese. In the first decade following his appointment Obando y Bravo took a moderate stand on political issues. In a diocesan document entitled "*Should the Church Get Involved in Politics?*" he advocated for political and social change (Kirk 1992, 59), but also spoke out against the use of violence to bring about said changes (Foroohar 1989, 164). The effect of these three dynamics, the outcome of Vatican II, Medellín and the appointment of a relatively progressive Archbishop, paved the way for the rise of the popular church and Christian Base Communities (CEBs) in Nicaraguan society.

In large part, CEBs were initiated by priests and religious brothers and sisters who lived with the poor and who had witnessed firsthand the deplorable conditions in which the masses lived. CEBs were founded on the process of consciousness-raising or

concientización, which was gaining favour across Latin America as a result of Paulo

Freire's work with impoverished Brazilians. Manzar Foroohar describes the process in

the Nicaragua CEBs:

> The basic dynamic of the discussion…is the constant dialectical relation between the pastoral agent (priest, nun, or lay leader), who brings a knowledge of the Scriptures, and the community members, who bring their life experiences. The discussion results in a process of learning from one another… The people develop an ability to think and express themselves, and to find new elements in the Scriptures which relate to their life (Foroohar 1989, 68-69).

Initially, the Christian movements were of little concern to Somoza (Heyck 1990, 171).

However, the president later grew increasingly suspicious and began violent attacks

against the CEBs. These assaults prompted many young Catholics, who had not

previously done so, to lend their support to the FSLN. The intimate relationship between

the popular church and the FSLN was cemented by 1978 (T. Walker 1986, 42), resulting

in an unlikely nexus between Catholicism, socialism, and nationalism (Kirk 1992).

Young Catholics joined CEBs in great numbers. The isolated nature in which

CEBs operated makes it difficult to estimate how many young people were actually

engaged in these communities. One estimate puts the number of participants and lay

leaders around 5000 in roughly 300 groups in 1978 (Serra 1991). Whatever the exact

figure, CEBs grew to be an important part of society and key reason many young people

joined the revolutionary movement, as evidenced by many personal accounts of young

people in the revolution.[13] Monica Baltodano, a young woman of a working class family from León, explained that "there were always scores of women in the Christian movement…." According to Baltodano, women's participation in the Christian community later translated into support for the Sandinistas. She attributed this to "a high level of consciousness" gained by Christian women in the CEBs (Randall 1981, 66). She herself came to be involved with the Sandinistas after she heard a member of the Frente speak about a Marxist interpretation of Nicaraguan history (Randall 1981, 62).

The notion of 'the preferential option for the poor' did not only affect the CEBs, but also penetrated into the La Asunción, a girl's school frequented by many daughters of the petit-bourgeois. Just as the teachers at El Colegio de Señoritas had radicalized young women of a previous generation, several of the students of La Asunción became prominent leaders in the revolution and, subsequently, in the new wave of feminism. Though it was a different type of process than the CEBs, the students at the school were ultimately experiencing of form of consciousness-raising. In interviews with Margaret Randall, both Michele Najlis and Milú Vargas describe one of the religious sisters who had a passion for social justice. In the words of Najlis, the sister frequently "...talk[ed] about the poor, about the responsibility that went along with privilege" (Randall 1994, 45). Some lessons even took the girls out of the school and into poor neighbourhoods. For M. Vargas, these classes made her question the inequality that plagued her country.

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[13] Margaret Randall's works, *Sandino's Daughters* (1982. Vancouver: New Star Books) and *Sandino's Daughters Revisited* (1994. Vancouver: New Star Books) contains many accounts of women who were members of CEBs.

She joined a CEB, and sought out other young people with similar views, before finally joining the FSLN (Randall 1994, 128-129).

V. Women supporting the revolutionary movement

Women were another demographic that was vital to the uprising against Somoza. As was mentioned earlier, Nicaraguan women had been active in social movements for decades. However, since the FSLN actively promoted women's participation, their involvement soared during the national struggle to overthrow the Somoza dictatorship. Women accounted for 30 percent of the total revolutionary force during the final insurrection in 1979 (Randall 1981, iv). However, the participation of women was not limited to that of combatants. Women also lent their support by helping the revolutionaries in other ways, such as providing lodging and food. Aware that their chances for success would be greater with the support of the country's women, the Sandinistas were looking for ways in which to involve women in the struggle. In 1977, FSLN Commander Jaime Wheelock approached two women within the Sandinista network, Lea Guido and Gloria Carrion, to present them with the idea of establishing a women's group. That fall, Guido and Carrion were two of the founding members of the Association of Nicaraguan Women Confronting the Nation's Problems (AMPRONAC). The organization's goal was to promote and to support the mobilization of women around a variety of issues (Randall 1981, 2-4).

Despite attempts to engage women of all backgrounds AMPRONAC remained largely a bourgeois organization during its first year (Isbester 2001, 34). Furthermore, it was hardly a social movement, counting only twenty-five members by the end of 1977.

The theoretical concept of 'moral shock' can account for the sudden increase of upper and middle class women in the organization. The assassination of bourgeois journalist Pedro Joaquin Chamorro in January, 1978 by the National Guard signaled that even those who had traditionally been protected by their social standing were vulnerable to the whims of the Somoza regime. This event propelled many upper and middle class Nicaraguans to engage in the struggle to remove Somoza from power (Isbester 2001, 35). Participation from poor women also increased in the months leading up to the final insurrection. Julia Garcia, a young mother from a poor neighbourhood in Managua, spoke of her path to activism. She explained how a discussion with a member of the Democratic Worker Committee "…raised [her] consciousness about how important it was to organize and fight for a better life" (Randall 1981, 18). Following an invitation to an International Women's Day event organized by AMPRONAC, Garcia became highly involved in the women's movement. She admitted that her involvement took time away from her children, but that she was motivated to contribute to the movement for a chance at a better life. Garcia's involvement was also motivated by non-material incentives. She wanted to obtain valuable skills in communication and to overcome her fears (Randall 1981, 18-20).

Women of diverse socio-economic classes continued to unite under AMPRONAC, which counted over 8000 members in 1979 (Molyneux 1985, 227). Despite the collaboration of women of all classes, and the appearance of one cohesive women's movement representative of all Nicaraguan women, reasons for participation were not homogeneous. Likewise, it should not be assumed that all members supported

the ideological goals of the FSLN, which was linked to AMPRONAC. While all involved

wanted to bring an end to the dictatorship, each woman approached the struggle through

her own class lens. For instance, following the assassination of Pedro Joaquin Chamorro

six hundred women demonstrated in front of the United Nations offices in Managua.

Many of the bourgeois women were demanding justice for the murder of the journalist;

other women were also demanding justice for the continuous disappearance of their

"peasant brothers and sisters" (Randall 1981, 6).

VI. Sandinista Nicaragua

In July 1979, following months of intense combat between the Frente and the

National Guard, which resulted in the death of close to 50 000 people (T. Walker 2003,

183), Anastasio Somoza Debayle fled the country. Initially, power was to be shared

between the FSLN and anti-Somoza moderates, including Violeta Barrios de Chamorro

the widow of murdered journalist Pedro Joaquin Chamorro. However, in practical terms,

the Sandinistas governed the country. According to social movement theory, once a

movement organization gains power, theories of social mobilization are no longer

relevant and those pertaining to political parties and governance will apply (Zald and Ash

1966, 333). Within this framework, it could be misleading to continue to analyze

participation tied to the FSLN within a social movement framework. However, the years

following the revolution provide an interesting backdrop for female social mobilization

for two reasons: 1) unlike the previous regime, the government actively encouraged civic

participation, in part because it required voluntary support to carry out its programs; 2)

during the period in which the Sandinistas were in power, 1979-1990, "…the women's

movement became a broad and populous movement that was able to incorporate the popular sectors…" which laid the foundation for a diverse and autonomous women's movement (Cuadra Lira and Jiménez Martinez 2009, 6). For these reasons, participation within Sandinista organizations must be considered to contextualize female organizing in Nicaragua.

The Sandinista triumph over Somoza brought a host of changes to the condition of women, addressing both practical and strategic gender interests. For instance, a select number of female FSLN members were appointed to higher-ranking positions within the new government. Rural women benefitted from land reforms by gaining titles to land and gaining positions of leadership in new cooperatives (Molyneux 1985, 249). As well, the new government prohibited the portrayal of women as sex objects in media campaigns (Molyneux 1985, 237). The participation of women and youth remained paramount as Nicaraguans were called upon in a variety of ways to assist in the implementation of the government's new social programs. The literacy campaign was launched only two weeks after the FSLN ascended to power. It relied on some 100 000, mainly young, volunteers to teach literacy skills to people across the country (Isbester 2001, 50; Cardenal, Envío, August 2005). Similarly, in 1981 more than 70 000 young Nicaraguans volunteered to participate in health brigades with the goal of decreasing the prevalence of preventable diseases in the poor and rural majority (T.Walker 1986, 47). The participation of women was also significant, accounting for 60 percent and 70 percent of the volunteers of the two programs, respectively (Bayard de Volo 2001, 35). Based on these figures, it can be inferred that young women participated in high numbers.

With so many women and youth of all sectors of society involved in defending the revolution and new social order, various associations were formed to support these social actions. Many of these groups were tied to the FSLN, either directly or indirectly, as a secretariat of the FSLN party. By 1984 the Sandinista Youth Organization was comprised of 30 000 members (Williams 1994, 173). One of the leading women's organizations to be born out of the revolution, the Luisa Amanda Espinosa Nicaraguan Women's Association (AMNLAE), was itself a product of AMPRONAC. AMNLAE grew to become the women's secretariat of the FSLN. Reports claim that AMNLAE counted a membership of 60 000 members by 1984, and later climbed as high as 85 000 members (Williams 1994, 173; Molyneux 1985, 247). Accordingly, it held much influence with respect to women's organizing. It counted among its members women of many sectors of society. In a reversal from both the eras of AMPRONAC and Toledo de Aguerri's work, working class and peasant women were highly represented in AMNLAE.

Because of its interwoven relationship with the Frente AMNLAE dominated the discourse of the women's movement during the Sandinista rule. Throughout the years of FSLN leadership, the discourse oscillated between that of a decidedly feminist approach to a more feminine approach. Having set out in 1969 to "…abolish the odious discrimination that women have been subjected to compared with men" and to "establish economic, political and cultural equality between women and men" (Molyneux 1985, 238-239), the Sandinistas did not reach their goals. After they came to power, revolutionary leader Tomás Borge admitted that the FSLN had not "…confronted the struggle for women's liberation with the same courage and decisiveness" as other aspects

of the revolution. He admitted that consequently "…from the point of view of daily exertion, women remain fundamentally in the same conditions as in the past" (Rosset and Vandermeer 1983, 329).

There are three explanations for the gap between objectives and outcomes. The most observable impediment to the realization of the intended goals was the escalating threat from the Counter-revolutionaries (Contras) and their American funders. An important example can be found in a proposal made public on International Women's Day in 1987. In an attempt to respond to increasing pressure from women to ensure greater gender equality the FSLN and AMNLAE issued a Proclamation of Women. This statement recognized the systemic subordination of women in Nicaraguan society and pledged to rectify this situation (Babb 2001, 25; Torres, Envío, June 1991). However, in 1987, when the announcement was made, the American backed blockade and Contra raids were taking their toll on the country. Consequently, the proclamation was never put into practice. Not only was the issue of gender equality placed on the backburner in terms of policy, but the ongoing conflict was increasingly chipping away the social programs that had benefited many women, and in particular poor women, in the early years of Sandinista rule. Already by 1985, the expenses related to the war consumed over 40 percent of the national budget (T. Walker 1986, 72). Lancaster reports that this number climbed to 60 percent by 1987 (1992, 5-6). The conflict also had negative effects on women in other ways. Many women became primary caregivers to family members as their husbands, sons (and in some cases, their daughters) were drawn off to fight (Babb 2001, 25). In this sense, many mothers became politicized around the war efforts, either

by promoting the war efforts (primarily through the AMNLAE) or by protesting the draft. This effectively shifted the gender dialogue from that of strategic gender issues to that of practical gender issues. For Luz Marina Torres, former director of Managua's District 6 Women's Center, these public acts by women often reinforced old gender patterns. She wrote that these mothers "…were never dealt with as women. Their public and political identity was directly linked to the fate of their sons, and they were offered few other forms of political expression, or at least none that came with such prestige and recognition" (Torres, Envío, June 1991).

The second reason for the lagging results lay in the party's ideological approach to women's emancipation. Unlike many of the new social movements that were born across Latin America during this time, AMNLAE was in many senses rooted in Marxist ideology, which contends that gender inequality is a product of the social division of labour (Ruchwarger 1987, 187-188; Molyneux 1985, 239). To the Sandinistas, revolution and female emancipation were one in the same. In the words of revolutionary leader Tomás Borge in 1982:

> The definitive answer to the liberation of women can emerge only with the total resolution of the class contradictions, of the social diseases that originate in a society like ours—politically liberated but with the rope of economic dependence still around our neck (Rosset and Vandermeer 1983, 329).

For this reason, those features of gender issues that contributed to the overall goals of the revolution were put to the forefront of the Sandinista program, whereas those that did not were never implemented. Likewise, female participation in the revolution was encouraged but there had been little analysis of gender relations. Ultimately, it was deemed by the party that women's emancipation would necessarily follow the success of

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the revolution, which is precisely the reason women's issues fell to the wayside whenever the revolution was in jeopardy.

Another factor for the party's approach to women's emancipation was the relationship that the party had with the Catholic Church. As demonstrated, the popular church had close links to the FSLN. Not only was there much support for the FSLN at the grassroots but many priests were counted within its ranks. Because the popular church remained faithful to Rome's teachings concerning family and life, the Sandinistas were careful not to push too far for radical gender reforms (Kampwirth 2004, 45; Molyneux 1985, 244). By the same token, T. Walker explains that because the Catholic Church and its members had been significant actors in the War of Liberation "… the Sandinistas were neither inclined nor well suited to attack the Catholic traditions of their country" (T. Walker 1986, 43).

Thirdly, Molyneux explains that the FSLN recognized that women's emancipation was unpopular to many people in the country, where machista attitudes run deep (Molyneux 1985, 246). Despite the gendered discourse within the FSLN and AMNLAE, the threat of the Contra War, the party's own ideology, and the prevalence of machista attitudes among the general population hampered the advancement of women in society. After many years of supporting the revolution many female members came to understand that women's equality would not be reached by simply letting women contribute to the class based efforts of the Sandinista party. Some of these women were looking for a chance to break free of ridged party lines.

VII. Breaking with the past: A new feminist discourse

The legacy of the revolutionary period (1979-1990) for Nicaraguan women continues to be debated. On one hand, it can be said that women's issues were brought to the forefront as a result of Sandinista policies which were shaped by the homegrown socialist ideology, Sandinismo. On the other hand, gendered discourse among the party faithful remained largely feminine in nature and important proposed actions to advance the status of women were never realized. Nonetheless, the revolution launched the women's movement into a new realm of possibilities. Undoubtedly, the roots of a new wave of feminism were planted during this time. It was not until later, under a different government, that these roots began to grow and evolve into an independent movement comprised of a variety of SMOs striving for strategic and practical goals.

The defeat of the Sandinistas in the 1990 election represented a transformation for women's movement organizations for two reasons. The first was the change of government. This created an atmosphere in which women's groups who were strongly linked to the FSLN could openly express their dissatisfaction with the Sandinista party. Indeed, women who voted in the 1990 election are said to have tipped the balance in favour of Violeta Chamorro, largely because they grew tired of the war and its effects (Babb 2001, 9; Torres, Envío, June 1991). Once in power Chamorro's National Opposition Union (UNO)[14] liberalized the economy with the promise of economic growth. This program included cutting government spending, the devaluation of the

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[14] The National Opposition Union (UNO) was a coalition of 14 political parties that ran against the Sandinistas in the 1990 national elections. Their political ideologies ranged from centre-right to centre-left.

Nicaraguan Córdoba, the privatization of state-run companies, and the abolition of import tariffs (Babb 2001, 113; Bandy and Mendez 2006, 137). While Chamorro's policies initially resulted in some growth of GDP and reduced inflation, they had a negative impact on women. According to AMNLAE, by the end of 1991 nearly 16 000 women had lost their jobs. Women headed households were hit the hardest by the implementation of structural adjustment policies (Fernandez Poncela and Steiger 1996, 51). The UNO closed state owned textile factories which employed up to 70 percent women and opened the doors to a Free Trade Zone (FTZ). Although the latter provide employment for young women, working conditions in these factories are difficult. Likewise, harassment is a major issue (Mendez 2005, 38). The UNO government also broke with the revolution by strongly promoting traditional gender roles. For example, new textbooks entitled *Morals and Civics,* which displayed women and men in traditional gender roles, were issued to school children. The texts also encouraged legal marriage, though common law marriage was permitted under the Sandinista drafted 1987 constitution (Kampwirth 1996, 73).

Herein lies the second reason for the transition of the women's movement. Women's organizations mobilized to counteract the anti-feminist policies adopted by the UNO. Maxine Molyneux, speaking of the relationship between feminism and socialism, gives insight into the political environment in Nicaragua during the transitional period between the Sandinista and Chamorro administrations:

> …'women's emancipation' is associated with the traditional socialist state and its reforms from above, and with the widely rejected… 'international' ideology of Marxism, means that the new nationalist and opposition groups can disparage feminist ideas as part of their new outspokenness (Molyneux 1989, 261).

In her analysis Molyneux also concludes that two opposing developments emerged as withering socialist states began to open their borders and redefined their stance on women's issues. In some instances, policies fostered feminist mobilization, whereas in others actions were designed to encourage women to assume their traditional roles within society. Molyneux is not deterministic in her analysis, arguing that "in both respects, the outcome will depend to a large degree on what policies— political, economic and social — these states will adopt, and how far women are able and willing to mobilise and influence policy-making" (Molyneux 1989, 261).

Without overstating the achievements of feminist organizing in the years following the end of the Sandinista period it is clear that Nicaraguan women were able and willing to mobilize. Indeed, this period has been characterized as the dawn of a new stage of the women's and feminist movement for the country (Cuadra Lira and Jiménez Martinez 2009, 6). Many women who had been involved in movement organizations associated with the Sandinistas formed new, autonomous, and democratic groups. These groups provided women the opportunity to speak out against the deteriorating conditions in which women lived and worked, and to challenge traditional gender roles. Indeed, many of the prominent women's movement organizations in the early post-revolutionary years had been affiliated with the Sandinista party, just as many of the leaders of these new movements had been Sandinista. Karen Kampwirth categorizes the female leaders of these new groups as belonging to the "mid-prestige" class. In her analysis of the rise of feminism in Nicaragua, she explains that bourgeois women who maintained positions of leadership with the Sandinistas were the most likely to become feminists because they

had experienced both empowerment and sexism as a result of their status. She explains that "just as the guerrilla leaders were drawn from the ranks of would-be political elites within their societies, the later feminist leaders were drawn from the ranks of would-be political elites within the context of revolutionary politics" (Kampwirth 2004, 10). Her assessment of the genesis of the autonomous movement in Nicaragua reflects that of Virginia Vargas. Vargas argues that "…intellectual women who …had significant political experience throughout the 1970s, mainly in groups among the 'new left'" were central to the rise of the feminist movement throughout Latin America (1992, 199). In this sense, the following accounts of two women's movement organizations will serve to exemplify the schism between the Sandinistas and activists in its various women's secretariats, which marked the beginning of the autonomous branch of the movement.

1. Women in AMNLAE

In her work *Still Fighting, The Nicaraguan Women's Movement 1977-2000*, Katherine Isbester turns to social movement theory to analyze the rise and fall of AMNLAE. She explains that there are three components that must be in place for a social movement to thrive: "autonomous identity, strategic mobilization of resources, and focused goals" (2001, 187). She maintains that "due to the coincidence of interests between the revolution and women in the early years of the revolutionary government" AMNLAE was able to meet the three factors. However, "its hierarchical structure and lack of control over its… resources, its inability to create its own autonomous identity, and its lack of focus on specific gender inequalities and rights inevitably resulted in its slow decline" (2001, 191). As the post-revolution years drew on many women within the

movement became increasingly frustrated with the way in which AMNLAE

contextualized women's issues. For instance, the organization was used to promote FSLN

party goals rather than the interests of women at the grassroots. Furthermore, leaders of

AMNLAE were often engaged in a struggle with the FSLN to be able to set their own

direction and priorities for the association (Torres, Envío, June 1991). When the

Sandinistas were voted out of power many of the women who were dissatisfied with the

direction of AMNLAE felt greater freedom to create an alternative vision for the future of

the women's movement. However, there was much disagreement within the membership

of AMNLAE as to the direction and structure the organization should adopt in light of the

new political landscape. Rifts emerged between the leadership, which had been appointed

by the FSLN, and dissident women who wanted more independence. The male leadership

of the FSLN was unsupportive. When asked for help solving the infighting, they retorted

"you want autonomy, deal with it" (Randall 1994, 310).

Officially, AMNLAE declared its independence from the Sandinistas. However,

in reality it has had a difficult time shedding its association to the party. For instance, in

2008, two years after the re-election of Daniel Ortega to the presidency, the president of

AMNLAE alleged that the organization was experiencing "blackmail, threats and

manipulation" from certain Sandinista supporters (Potosme, El Nuevo Diario, 2008). It

was reported that "according to sources, [first lady] Murillo demanded that AMNLAE

follow the line of the FSLN and defend the administration of Daniel Ortega 'or turn over

its property, because AMNLAE belongs to the Sandinista Front'" (Nicaraguan Network

2008). Ostensibly, the new government was not happy with the direction that the

organization had taken, notably its stance on sexual education and therapeutic abortion, and "its position on conflicts with some non-governmental organizations and movements" (Nicaraguan Network 2008). The organization's link to the party has remained unclear. One young member of AMNLAE interviewed for this present work responded affirmatively when asked if the organization supported the government (Rosa, 25, Managua). Another member stated, "clearly the organization is Sandinista. The organization has its own status but it follows the party line." However, later she clarified that the work of the organization was not part of the government's program (Olivia, 26, Managua). This ambiguous position means that there is a distinct difference between AMNLAE and the autonomous groups, which place great importance on their non-partisan identity. Also, according to Isbester AMNLAE has remained more conservative in its outlooks and approaches than other autonomous groups (Isbester 2001, 170). Nonetheless, today AMNLAE and the autonomous groups can both be considered part of Nicaragua's women's and feminist movement.

2. Women in trade unions

As exemplified, one of the strengths of the FSLN was its ability to organize many sectors of society. For example, the women's secretariat of the Sandinista Worker's Central (CST) was similar to AMNLAE in that both were spaces for women to organize within a larger Sandinista framework. Following the election of 1990, the women's secretariat of the CST (the Secretariat) recognized the ill effects of the new government's neo-liberal policy on women and responded by introducing programs such as childcare, free clinics, and credit funds for women (Bandy and Mendez 2006, 137). However, like

members of AMNLAE, the Secretariat faced limitations to power. After a series of

confrontations between the executive council of the FSLN and the Secretariat, the

executive council refused to name the candidate elected by the members of the Secretariat

as incoming director of the women's organization (Mendez 2005, 3-4). This prompted

several organizers of the Secretariat to terminate their relationship with the Sandinista

party. In 1994 these leaders, along with nearly four hundred women, formed a self-

governing, democratic organization for and by female workers. It was named the

Working and Unemployed Women's Movement "María Elena Cuadra" (MEC) after a

former member of the movement who had been recently killed in a car accident (Mendez

2005, 4). Jennifer B. Mendez outlines how this group grew from its Sandinista origins to

become an autonomous movement that supports women's activism around labour issues,

particularly within Nicaragua's FTZ. With the goal to support women workers

throughout Nicaraguan society, MEC's approach to social justice differs from that of the

traditional Sandinista labour movement. One of their campaign slogans, "Jobs…Yes, but

with Dignity!" highlights this break in ideology between MEC and the CST (Bandy and

Mendez 2006, 138).

Recognizing the delicate relationship between movement organizations,

individual participants, business, and the state, MEC engages in less antagonist methods

to defend the rights of its members. For instance, since the election of 1990 the

Nicaraguan economy has opened to outside investment. By the end of 2001, the country

had forty-four –mainly textile— factories. In 2002, nearly forty thousand workers were

employed in this sector (Mendez 2005, 11). In such an increased globalized economy

traditional union activities such as strikes and boycotts, which are still employed by the CST, are likely to result in job losses. Ultimately, these activities could undermine the goals of female factory workers to protect their jobs while defending their rights. Alternatively, MEC condemns cases of violence in the factories, and has engaged the general public on issues related to the plight of women workers. It also collaborated with the Ministry of Labour to create a "code of ethics" which was signed by all of the FTZ owners (Bandy and Mendez 2006, 138-139). Like many other women's organizations, MEC places great importance on the empowerment of its members. For instance, the organization holds workshops designed to empower female maquila workers to negotiate working satisfactory conditions.

Because of its unique gender perspective regarding labour issues, MEC's relationship with the Sandinista workers' movement is strained and the two movements have come into direct conflict. CST leaders have openly criticized MEC and have made efforts to undermine its goals (Mendez 2002, 129). Still, MEC has proven that the women's movement organization can sustain itself outside of the Sandinista structure. For instance, it helped form the Central American Network of Women in Solidarity with Women Workers in the Maquilas (Mendez 2002, 125). MEC is not without its challenges. Because it is not a union, it has limited contact with established institutions like the International Labour Organization (Mendez 2002, 135). Yet, MEC's approach is successful at connecting the dichotomies of private and public in that it creates links between the global economy, the female worker, and her life outside of work. Because of

its holistic approach, MEC also works collaboratively with other self-governing women's groups in the region.

3. The autonomous women's and feminist movement

Though the FSLN and AMNLAE dominated the discourse concerning women's issues throughout much of the 1980s, elsewhere SMOs that did not associate with a political party were making forays into civil society. The Matagalpa Women's Collective was one of the first autonomous groups of its time when it was founded in 1986. The collective, which is still active today, was avant-garde in that it brought taboo issues, such as domestic violence and abortion, into the public sphere (Colectivo de Mujeres de Matagalpa; Isbester 2001, 87). A year later, in 1987, forty-four Nicaraguan feminists were able to take part in a Latin American gathering of feminists, called Encuentros, which was held in nearby Mexico (Randall 1994, 306). This event marked a turning point for the women's movement. Following the conference, a group of newly energized women returned home and continued to collaborate to further the cause of women. New groups began emerging throughout the country. It should be noted that despite the autonomous nature of the groups themselves some of the women who held, and continue to hold, positions of leadership had previously been Sandinista women.

One of the delegates of the conference founded the IXCHEN Center in 1989. The Center provides a range of services to women ranging from legal advice to physical and mental healthcare. However, self-directed groups such as IXCHEN did not simply address practical gender interests. They also laid the foundation for a new wave of feminism. The IXCHEN Center and the Masaya Women's Center, which was founded in

1991, were early advocates for gender equality. As such, they joined the Matagalpa Women's Collective which was bringing about awareness of feminist issues through theater and radio-programming (Kampwirth 2004, 36; Colectivo de Mujeres de Matagalpa). Other women promoted feminist analyses through print media or research on women. Two delegates who attended the Mexican conference began publishing a magazine entitled *Puntos de Encuentros* with the intent of engaging women on a range of issues (Randall 1994, 308). Today, Puntos de Encuentros is an organization which also uses radio, television, and social media to communicate its message to women across the country.

While a handful of self-governing women's organizations existed during the period in which the Sandinistas were in power they were small in their reach compared to AMNLAE. At least in one case, the organization struggled to stay in existence because it discussed topics other than those approved by the FSLN (Isbester 2001, 87). However, the independent movement grew rapidly following the 1990 election. The autonomous movement considers International Women's Day, March 8,[th] 1991 as its departure point. On this day the 'Festival of the 52 Percent Majority' was organized as an activity for those women who wished to stay away from another event sponsored by AMNLAE (Isbester 2001, 133). The festival brought together women from "different spaces, groups, collectives, associations, to set their own agenda and to proclaim [their] independence from all power structures, notably political parties" (Organizaciónes de Mujeres y Feministas 2011 -my translation). It was followed by a non-partisan, national gathering in January 1992 called 'Unity in Disunity.' Here women discussed topics ranging from the

economy to violence against women. Those in attendance also formed networks in which to deal with specific problems encountered by the female population. Women in these networks, along with others involved in over twenty feminist collectives, established The National Feminist Committee. It was one of the first efforts to develop a national feminist agenda. However, the committee only lasted a few years as members did not agree on actions. Indeed, some women were so disillusioned with their previous experience as subordinates under the FSLN or AMNLAE that they refused to take part in any kind of umbrella organization (Kampwirth 2004, 63-64). According to Cuadra Lira and Jiménez Martinez, this reaction was common during the period ranging from 1990 to 1997. Nonetheless, between 1998 and 2006, there was more collaboration between the various groups (Cuadra Lira and Jiménez Martinez 2009, 7). Today there are countless women's and feminist SMOs. Because activities and actions are often carried out through networks (Babb 2001, 38-40) the organizations and collectives have transformed into an "aggressive social movement" (Cuadra Lira and Jiménez Martinez 2009, 7).

At the present time, several national consortiums of autonomous collectives and groups exist, though none alone speak on behalf of the movement as a whole. Rather, as reported by Cuadra Lira and Jiménez Martinez, strategies carried out by various groups on different levels tend to focus on four broad concepts: engaging women on political issues; curbing high levels of violence; building the movement; and transforming the attitudes of women and society as a whole (2009, 9). However, according to Katherine Isbester, "the sheer size and diversity of the women's movement in the 1990s…makes it difficult to package it into neat and comprehensible categories" (2001, 154). Her

description also holds true for the movement during the first decade of the new century as there has been a great proliferation of 'feminist' and 'feminine' organizations. The reality expressed by Cuadra Lira and Jiménez Martinez (2009) and Isbester (2001) can be viewed through two opposing lenses. On one hand, the autonomous branch of the women's and feminist movement is fragmented and lacks a clear directive. On the other hand, it is independent, diverse, and multifaceted. One certainty is that because of its vertical structure the women's and feminist movement has permeated much of Nicaraguan civil society, joining forces with other groups with various interests such as indigenous, labour, and, civil rights. For this reason, it has evolved into one of the leading social movements in the country. For example, in 2005 Envío reported that "…members of the women's movement were the most notable protagonists among 25, 000 people who marched through the streets of Managua…" to protest a pact between the FSLN and the PLC (Grigsby, Envío, July 2005).

A. Relations with the State

The framework from which Katherine Isbester studies the Nicaraguan women's and feminist movement maintains that in order to be successful, a movement must have a focused goal (Isbester 2001, 188). This theory can account for why the rise in feminist organizing coincides with anti-feminist political discourse and policies. Since 1990, four different administrations have held power: Chamorro (UNO), Aléman (Liberal), Bolaños (Liberal), and the return of Daniel Ortega (Sandinista) in 2006. The relationship between the autonomous branch of the women's and feminist movement and the state has been contentious. This branch has encountered challenges with each government. Nonetheless, rather than retreating, the independent groups have responded to these challenges as they

have refocused their goals on the political environment at hand. For instance, in 1997 the newly elected President Alemán set the stage for strained relations with the movement when he attempted to replace the Minister of the Woman with that of a Family Ministry. Women's groups opposed this proposal, and the underlying message that it sent, and worked to have it blocked by legislators (Metoyer 2000, 123). The following year, the Women Against Violence Network, which consists of many women's and feminist SMOs, aligned itself with Zoilamérica Narváez when she publically declared that she had been repeatedly sexually abused by her step-father, FSLN leader Daniel Ortega since she was young. There was much backlash against Narváez, but she and the Network were successful in elevating the issue of violence against women into the national spotlight. A few years later, the movement did not shy away from actively denouncing a corrupt deal that ultimately led to a power sharing pact between the FSLN and the Liberals.

The animosity between the independent branch and the political leaders reached its zenith in 2007, when the FSLN and the PLC voted to remove all exceptions to a ban on abortion by making the practice of therapeutic abortion illegal. The previous law had allowed Nicaraguan women to obtain abortions for the purpose of medical reasons (Pizarro, Envío, October 2011). The criminalization of therapeutic abortion followed on the heels of an earlier case in which a 9-year-old girl sought an abortion after becoming impregnated through rape. These events further pitted the women's movement against the political parties involved and religious institutions, both Catholic and Evangelical. For Cuadra Lira and Jiménez Martinez, this period marks the transition to a new relationship with the state, one that is characterized by overt hostility (Cuadra Lira and Jiménez

Martinez 2009, 7-8). In 2008, a number of women's and feminist organizations, as well as other civil society organizations who have criticized the government, came under attack by the authorities. Offices were searched and information was seized by the government. Likewise, a smear campaign was waged against Sofía Montenegro, one of the country's leading feminist advocates, who was accused of money laundering. These reported cases of harassment did not weaken the movement. On the contrary, anti-feminist behaviours of the government only fueled the movement's determination, political assertiveness, and rise in feminist discourse (Castán, Envío, November 2008; Rogers 2008). However, mobilization has remained a challenge for the movement. Like other civil society and government actors, the movement must contend for space and influence within society. Recently, the Sandinista government has established Councils of Citizen Power (CPCs) in local municipalities across the country. They are meant to coordinate the participation of citizens in a region but are controversial in that they are tied to the government. Nonetheless, Cuadra Lira and Jiménez Martinez argue that the CPCs have replaced the clout that women's organizations once had in many communities, deepening the wedge between the autonomous branch of the movement and the government (Cuadra Lira and Jiménez Martinez 2009, 13).

VIII. What about the youth?

The literature on social mobilization in Nicaragua has yet to fill an important void. Notwithstanding the occasional reference to the participation of students and other young people in the uprising against Somoza, their contribution to social programs during the revolutionary years, and the loss of young lives in the Contra war, there has been little

attention paid to this important demographic. The scarcity of reports on the mobilization of Nicaraguan youth is surprising given that this demographic represents a potentially powerful force within the country. According to a United Nations report on Nicaragua, in the year 2010, 34.5 percent of the population was under the age of 15, and another 37.7 percent of the population was between the ages of 15 and 34. These figures remain higher than the Latin American average which is 27.7 percent and 34.2 percent respectively (CEPAL 2010, 26). Historically, this was the population that initiated and led the movement that eventually brought down the Somoza dictatorship. Yet, some accounts conclude that instances of youth participation in social movements have decreased since 1990 (Wolseth and Babb 2008, 9). For example, a 1994 study of individuals between the ages of 15 and 24, in which close to half were women, sought to understand the civic engagement of young people in light of the social transformation of the country. Despite the proliferation of the women's movement during the time of the study less than 2 percent of respondents belonged to a women's organization (Envío, November 1995).

Numerous theories have been explored to explain this apparent lack of political and social organizing. For instance, it has been hypothesized that Nicaraguan youth have become more private and focused on their families, that they are retreating to religious practice which doesn't promote political participation or that they are engaging in non-political forms of organizing such as youth gangs and middle-class clubs (Envío, November 1995; Wolseth and Babb 2008, 9). Some older Nicaraguans involved in social organizing do not blame young people for their apparent lack of political mobilization. Instead, they fault the society into which the younger generation was born and raised

(Baltodano, Envío, April 2006; Wolseth and Babb 2008, 9-10). Others contest that while few youth are represented in traditional national and local organizations, such as unions, many leaders of new movements and cultural affairs are young people (Wolseth and Babb 2008, 9) or that young people who are organized show great potential in influencing decision-making processes at a local and national level (Centro de Comunicación y Educación Popular 2009, 13). Though all of these claims concern youth as social actors, the perspective of young people is not well documented. Accounts from contemporary Nicaraguan youth are practically non-existent in English language literature or media. Yet, as was examined in chapter two of this work, the voices of young people are needed to better understand how youth perceive their role as political actors and agents of change. For this reason, the following chapter will be devoted to accounts of twenty young women involved in the women's and feminist movement.

Chapter 4 – The Perspective of Young Movement Members

Wolseth and Babb state that "the future of the democratic transition in Latin America will depend on the engagement of young women and men in calling for, securing, and preserving their citizenship rights." They add that "by focusing on young people we gain distinct and meaningful perspectives on urgent contemporary concerns in the Latin American region. We discover new insights into what is most vexing in neo-liberal economies, [and] what is most promising in current political struggles…" (2008, 11). Because of their country's unique history as a regional leader in the mobilization of youth and women, and their dual role as both victims and potential agents of change, the experience of young Nicaraguan women can provide insight into the current conjuncture of female organizing, political activism, and social movement change in a Latin American country. Furthermore, understanding how young Nicaraguan women think and respond to their surroundings can shed light on trends in social mobilization within the women's and feminist movement in the context of a non-English-speaking democracy.

As determined in previous chapters, the women's and feminist movement in Nicaragua is comprised of various social movement organizations (SMOs). The movement that emerged as a result of the Sandinista revolution can generally be divided into two branches. The first, AMNLAE and its network, remains loosely connected with the FSLN. The second, the autonomous branch, is rooted in the revolutionary movement but broke away in the early 1990s. As outlined in the previous discussion on women's and feminist organizing, it has been argued that that the autonomous branch associates

more closely with the concept of feminism while AMNLAE and its network prioritize feminine organizing (Hoyt 1997, 68). It is certain that there are marked differences between the two branches. Still, both partake in feminist and feminine forms of action. Additionally, even though many of the independent groups participate in both types of activities not all identify solely as 'feminist': some groups identify as 'feminist' organizations while other prefer to be known as a 'women's' organization (González and Kampwirth 2001, 15). Indeed, a communiqué distributed at the 20th anniversary of the autonomous movement explains that this branch consists of "women's and feminist organizations" (Organizaciones de Mujeres y Feministas 2011- my translation). For these reasons, the movement as a whole will be referred to as the women's and feminist movement. If relevant I will identify the branch of the movement that I am discussing.

I. Current context for young Nicaraguan women

Youth is synonymous with the promise for the future while concurrently representing "delinquency, gangs, suicide, drug addiction [and] irresponsibility" (Abaunza 2003, 42 - my translation). It is for the latter reason that when academic investigations do turn to Latin American young people they are often to bring attention to problems that are associated with this demographic, such as gang activity. Indeed, "street youth" are the primary focus of most studies of Latin American youth (Wolseth and Babb 2008, 7). Because very few young Nicaraguan women are members of gangs (Rodgers 2006, 285) young female voices in this country are even less present in the literature. When they are, it is often to illustrate their role as victims. Young Nicaraguan women are rarely presented as citizens with agency.

Indeed, young women in contemporary Nicaragua are both victims and potential agents of change. Economic opportunities available to young women have increased since the revolutionary years. The participation of women in the formal economy rose significantly in the decade following Chamorro's win. In 1990, women accounted for 25 percent of the "economically active population." By 2000 this number had risen to 47 percent. However, this is not all good news. The feminization of the Nicaraguan workforce coincides with the increase of Free Trade Zones (FTZ). Young women are sought out by maquilla[15] owners because they are a cheap form of labour and "supposedly 'docile.'" Indeed, women account for 80 to 90 percent of the workers in the FTZ with the majority being between the ages of 15 to 25 years (Mendez 2005, 37-38).

It is undeniable that young women in Nicaragua remain disadvantaged. According the United Nations Development Programme, young people, particularly young women, are disempowered because of attitudes shaped by patriarchy and adultism (2011, 47). Nicaraguan society still views men as the masters of political and productive arenas while women tend to private and reproductive matters (UNDP 2011, 33). Indeed, of those females between the ages of 13 and 29 years who quit their studies prematurely 26.3 percent do so to care for their families. In comparison, only 2.3 percent of young men cite the same motive (UNDP 2011, 66).

Moreover, despite efforts of the women's and feminist movement to end violence against women, women are victimized at alarming rates. A police report from the year

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[15] 'Maquillas' are also known as 'maquiladoras.' They are garment factories which are often referred to as 'sweatshops' in English.

2000 indicates that two women between the ages of 14 and 25 years were raped[16] each day while twelve more were injured in violent acts against them (Abaunza 2003, 41). Another study explains that in 2009, young women aged 13 to 25 were the victims of 50 percent of all cases of sexual abuse and 60 percent of all cases of sexual harassment (UNDP 2011, 104). Disturbingly, the most extreme case of violence, femicide[17], targets young women. From 2008 to 2010, close to half of all victims of femicide (out of a total of 247 cases over the three years) were girls and women from 11 to 30 years of age (UNDP 2011, 105). Efforts have also been made to educate young people about their sexual health. Still, rates of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) remain more than three times higher for young people aged 15 to 29 than for any other demographic, with the proportion of infected young women slightly higher than young men (UNDP 2011, 93). Birthrates have declined, yet pregnancy among young women remains common. In 2006 the average age of the mother at her first birth was 19.8 years (UNDP 2011, 91). Likewise, more than a quarter of all births across the country in 2009 were to mothers 10 to 19 years of age (UNDP 2011, 106).

At the same time, progress is being made. Girls and young women are attending school in greater numbers. Between 1997 and 2008, the percentage of girls accessing secondary education increased from 29.9 percent to 48.1 percent. In fact, female enrollment and attendance in secondary schools exceeds that of their male counterparts (Global Movement for Children 2010). Increased educational levels have positive effects

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[16] Translated from 'violada.'

[17] The act of killing women and girls.

on the individual, her family, and her community for a multitude of reasons. One of which is that literacy and education are determining factors in community involvement (UNDP 2011, 180-181). The United Nations Development Programme study examined the participation of young Nicaraguans in various organizations. It found that almost half of Nicaraguans aged 13 to 29 have participated in at least one type of collective activity (2011, 179). The study showed that the majority of active young women are involved in religious, student, or cultural groups. Almost two percent of all respondents stated their association to the women's movement (2011, 182). While it was unclear whether those respondents who indicated their participation in the latter were male or female, it is likely that the vast majority were female. All of this is a step forward for a demographic that has traditionally faced obstacles to engaging in activities outside of the home. Indeed, according to sociologist Elvira Cuadra, because of their education and leadership abilities, the "new generation of young women" is well poised to lead political change in the country (Moreno, El Nuevo Diario, November 2011).

The preceding figures give a global outlook as to the realities of young women in Nicaragua at the present time. However, statistical data cannot paint a full picture. For this reason, I now turn to the research findings to illuminate contemporary happenings as recounted by twenty young Nicaraguan women currently involved in the women's and feminist movement. Over the course of the interviews they voiced their opinions on a range of topics facing them personally, the movement, and their country. What follows is a summary of their views on feminism, and Nicaragua's women's and feminist

movement. Also to be discussed is their role as social actors, and their primary issues of concern.

2. Interviewees

Each of the respondents in this study is involved in the Nicaraguan women's and feminist movement in some capacity. Their roles range from that of activists, employees, volunteers, and bursary recipients. In two instances, the woman is employed by one organization but is an activist in a second. In other cases, respondents have gained employment with an organization in which they had previously been an activist. The opposite is also true, as some have remained involved after being on staff. In speaking with one of the senior women in the movement, she advised that no distinction be made between employees and activists since the lines are often blurred between activities that are carried out as staff and those carried out as volunteers. For this reason, unless needed for clarification purposes, the women will not be labeled according to their role within the SMO to which they belong.

In addition to the two requirements of age and participation with an SMO that identifies with the women's and feminist movement, all of the respondents have achieved secondary or post-secondary education. Furthermore, they all live, work, or study in an urban area. These commonalities are not deliberate on the part of the researcher. Rather, they are likely a result of many factors, including the greater educational opportunities for women as well as the urban locations in which the research was conducted. Nonetheless, the respondents were raised in different areas of the country, representing at least 7 of the

15 departments[18] and one of the two autonomous regions. The women also come from

diverse socio-economic and family backgrounds. For instance, Patricia (26, Managua)

was raised in a middle class family in which her parents were supportive throughout her

upbringing. On the other hand, Carmen (28, Matagalpa) characterized her family as being

dysfunctional. Several of the women reported being raised in strained, single parent

households. Due to death of their mothers or separation of their parents, some of the

women grew up in homes where the father was the primary caregiver. In other cases, the

father was absent or neglected his responsibilities. Twelve of the women identified the

political leanings of their families. Responses were mixed as some reported that their

families were pro-Sandinista and others were decidedly Liberal. Some of responses were

more nuanced, such as Talia who reported that her family is:

> …against one party, the Sandinistas, more than it supports any other party. They used to support the Sandinistas, in the 1980s, but don't anymore. Still, my family would consider themselves to be left on the political spectrum.
> -Talia, 27, Managua

The women were not questioned about personal matters, such as their sexual orientation

or health conditions. Nonetheless, Carmen (28, Matagalpa) spoke openly about her

bisexual character and Helena (22, Managua) described living with a physical disability

which confines her to a wheelchair.

The sample of research subjects does not represent certain segments of the

population, such as indigenous and rural women nor does it include those with low levels

of formal education. In that sense, these findings are biased and cannot be generalizable

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[18] Equivalent to a province or state.

to the whole of the country. However, the decision to conduct interviews as a research method was made as to give some voice to a demographic that is often ignored on the basis of age and gender. This method is also conducive to contributing to a dialogue about the identities and experiences of young women integrating into a women's and feminist movement with a long and rich history, but one that is distinct from an English-speaking democratic setting.

II. Findings

The vast information collected through the interviews is divided into three main topics of discussion: feminist identities, the women's and feminist movement, and personal outlooks and perspectives of the young respondents. The last point is further divided into two parts: the thoughts of the respondents regarding their role as social actors, and their specific concerns about Nicaraguan society. The chapter will conclude with a discussion on the future of the movement and social change.

1. Feminism

The previous discussions in chapter two, concerning feminism and women in English-speaking democratic societies, demonstrates that the term 'feminist' may be falling out of favour among younger women. At the same time young women remain committed to the values of feminism. The historical chapter underlines the important difference between 'feminism' and 'feminine' activism. For these reasons it cannot be assumed that simply because each woman interviewed in this study is active with a local or national women's or feminist organization she self-identifies as a feminist. When questioned whether she considered herself to be a feminist, seventeen out of twenty of the

interviewees responded that they did, at least to some degree. Of the three who did not, one is involved with AMNLAE, the women's organization associated with the FSLN. The other two are members of a youth organization that is closely related to the feminist movement but whose primary focus is on empowering Nicaraguan youth of both genders. One must be cautious, however, not to assume that the three women do not identify as feminists simply because the SMOs with which they are involved are among those which do not carry the word 'feminist' in their name. If this were the reason, it would be difficult to explain why two members of AMNLAE and one member of the youth movement did respond affirmatively, as did other women who are not members of "feminist" groups. The question of feminist identification among young Nicaragua women exemplifies the weakness of relying solely on statistical data. The actual responses given, by all of the women, illustrate that 'feminism' is a complex and nuanced concept.

A. Conceptualization of feminism and personal identity

With the intent of understanding the multifaceted meaning of the term, this study does not assume a standardized meaning of feminism. Instead, each respondent was asked to define for herself how she interprets the word. Clearly, the long-established goal of feminism is not lost on these young women: equal rights and opportunities between men and women were mentioned repeatedly. Gladys was one of those voices that said that feminism means "to defend the rights of women and to achieve equality between men and women" (Gladys, 28, Managua).

Yet, even in this small group of young women who are involved in the women's and feminist movement, the complex and contested understanding of the term is apparent. Two respondents explained that the term incites negative reactions from other people in their communities. Belinda, who is involved in a young feminist organization, reported that she and her peers are labeled by others as:

> Witches, 'vagas'[19], abortionists, crazy, lesbians, for everything that is bad. But we have now made it into a joke, during marches there are women who are dressed up like witches.
> –Belinda, 23, León

Later she clarified her own understanding of the word.

> Women should have the same opportunities as men. That is what feminism is, a social movement that wants equality, not female domination over men.
> -Belinda, 23, León

Josefa, who is involved in a youth movement that is closely tied to a feminist movement, also reacted to the negative stereotype of feminists. However, rather than poking fun at the matter she felt that:

> There are extreme feminists and these extreme feminists humiliate the masculine gender. I don't believe that men and women are equal for biological and physiological reasons but I do think that there can be gender equity. I think that feminists only think about the interests of women and what is suitable for women. And I don't think that this is a good way to build a better society.
> –Josefa, 21, Managua

She does not consider herself a feminist, but emphasized that she was:

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[19] The word 'vaga' is a Central American term that is not easily translated into English. For this reason the word will appear as it was used in the interviews, without translation. It refers to someone who is never home, always out and about, or to describe a person who is possibly up to no good. It has an anti-feminist connotation as it could imply that a woman is not fulfilling her role as a woman because she is not at home.

> …working to build a better society in which men and women are both recognized. We are all human and have our strengths and weaknesses.
> –Josefa, 21, Managua

Based on these different interpretations of feminism, it is perhaps not surprising that while the two women work towards a common goal, Belinda confirmed that she identifies as a feminist while Josefa does not.

Like Josefa, Patricia, who is a member of AMNLAE, and Carmen, who is a member of an autonomous SMO, deem the label too limiting. As a result, they hesitate to categorize themselves as feminists or solely as feminists.

> I don't believe that I am a feminist. I believe in equality for women, equality between men and women. I don't consider myself to be a feminist. I think that women and men should just consider themselves as human beings. [Feminism] is a little complex to define. I consider feminists to be women that are always fighting to reclaim the rights of women. But it is a little complex. I think of human rights, not just women's rights.
> -Patricia, 26, Managua

> I have been defending the rights of women for many years but I have not called myself a feminist because I was not [always] working with feminist organizations. I think that labeling ourselves as feminists limits us, since we will only defend the human rights of women. What about the sexual diversity of men, women and young people? Other vulnerable groups? Therefore, I think that [feminism] is a concept that is evolving, so yes, I feel like a feminist but I also feel like a revolutionary. I do not label myself only as a feminist but other things as well. I am not feminist in my whole person. I feel part of other ideologies that I deem marvelous and wonderful. So I consider myself to be a feminist in addition to many other things.
> -Carmen, 28, Matagalpa

Patricia and Carmen are not the only respondents that reported that, in addition to fighting for equality between men and women, they are engaged in other issues. However, unlike the responses above, which regard feminism as limiting in its approach,

other respondents viewed feminism as a platform from which to address a host of other concerns. These women identified readily with the term.

> [Feminism] is a very broad concept. I find it difficult to define. It is a new way of thinking and being. It is an alternative form of education. I think that feminism has helped me fight for the environment, fight for the respect of children. It is not just about women's issues.
> -Dora, 26, Matagalpa

> Feminism is a constant fight against all forms of discrimination, not only discrimination against women, but also sexual orientation, gender, physical appearance, disability, any type of condition.
> -Talia, 27, Managua

The interviews reveal that there is a range of ideas and conceptualizations of feminism, even among young women who are active in the women's and feminist movement. They also suggests that the word 'feminist' does not resonate more strongly among those who are active with the autonomous branch of the movement than those involved with AMNLAE. However, because of the small sample size, further research would need to be conducted to confirm or deny this. Self-identification appears to be linked to the way in which each woman defines feminism. Certain young women subscribe to the term without hesitation, while others more cautiously qualify their responses.

B. A culture plagued by machismo

For many of the respondents, speaking of feminism also means speaking of 'machismo.' Machismo is a word of Spanish and Portuguese origin that means "a strong sense of masculine pride: an exaggerated masculinity" or "an exaggerated or exhilarating sense of power or strength" (Encyclopedia Britannica). It is clear that for some of the women in this study any discussion of feminism cannot be broached without referencing

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machismo. The concept is useful for comparing and contrasting its meaning and impact in society with those of feminism. As with feminism, there is no consensus among the responses as to a clear-cut definition of the word machismo, but it is evident that these women have been affected by its prevalence throughout Nicaraguan society. Though involved in the women's and feminist movement two of the respondents explained that they do not identify fully as feminists partially because they are still influenced by a machista[20] ideology.

> I am not 100 percent feminist. Feminism is supporting women in all situations. In my family I am a little machista. I have one sister and one brother. I still give more freedom to my brother than to my sister. I also watch her more closely. I think that that is the only situation in which I am machista. I am not 100 percent machista, maybe about one percent!
> -Helena, 22, Managua

Lola is one of the respondents of the youth movement who does not identify as a feminist. The reason for her response echoes that of Helena's.

> Honestly, I don't consider myself to be a 'feminist feminist' because I still lack some knowledge and many attitudes. I still have some machista ideas. …But I do feel as if I am a young woman who is fighting for the rights of women.
> -Lola, 21, Managua

Helena's and Lola's views are noteworthy in that their answers are similar in content. However, Helena did affirm that she is a feminist while Lola did not. They also indicate that despite their own involvement in the women's and feminist movement, they have personally not been able to shed machista attitudes. Clearly, machismo remains deeply ingrained in Nicaraguan culture.

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[20] Another term for 'machismo.'

One question posed during the interviews was how machismo relates to feminism. Josefa (21, Managua) believes that both can propagate sexist ideas and behaviours, with one favouring men, the other women. Therefore, she views feminism as the opposite of machismo. Other respondents reject the notion that feminism is simply the female equivalent of machismo. Dora remembered:

> A professor at the university told me that feminism is the opposite of machismo, but I don't agree with that. No one has taught me to disrespect men. Feminism is not about being superior to anyone; it is about respecting each other's rights. I don't know why the professor said that. Feminism is a change of behaviour, a change of this kind of traditional behaviour.
> -Dora, 26, Matagalpa

Belinda also elaborated on this point, stating that:

> Machismo is male domination over women. [Feminism] is fighting for gender equality, not for female domination over men.
> -Belinda, 23, León

In these discussions, Dora and Belinda were referring to a particular meaning of machismo; that which denotes the power of masculinity. However, as with the term feminism, the meaning of machismo can be expanded. When employing a more global meaning of both words it is possible that machismo can indeed be the opposite of feminism without equating the latter with sexist behaviour. For instance, when asked what she meant by the term 'machista', Helena gave an answer that is similar to the meaning described above.

> Machista means when one always thinks that men are right. It is to do and make everything for them. It is to always look for what is best for the man, no matter if you feel bad, as long as he is okay.
> -Helena, 22, Managua

However, through a personal account she provided greater insight into how she conceptualizes the word. She used 'machismo' to depict discrimination and power imbalances, in general, and not simply male domination over women.

> I went to a party, and there was a group of girls in the entrance, I was in my wheelchair and the girls turned and pointed and laughed at me. I didn't even know them but they were pointing at me. And it seemed that they were scared or astonished as if they were thinking 'what is this woman doing here?' There is a lack of culture and education. That's 'machismo' coming from women.
> -Helena, 22, Managua

If viewed through this lens, machismo can embody discrimination and power imbalances while feminism represents the fight against such attitudes and behaviours. This dichotomy offers an explanation as to why some of the respondents view feminism as encompassing many causes. For these women, their activism as feminists extends beyond the fight for the rights of women and includes other issues, such as environmentalism and the rights of homosexuals. Hence, with machista attitudes prevalent in the country, young women may turn to feminism and the movement as a way of defending the values of inclusion and equality.

2. The women's and feminist movement

As noted previously, the women's and feminist movement that grew out of the revolutionary period can be subdivided into two main branches. Few of the women in this study acknowledged both. When questioned about the movement as a whole, the three women affiliated with AMNLAE spoke mainly of this organization and its network, unless asked specifically about the autonomous branch. Likewise, the women active in the independent groups generally referred exclusively to this branch of the movement.

Four of these women did distinguish between the two branches. Only Alva specifically

mentioned AMNLAE, stating that:

> My mother was a member of AMNLAE, but that group tends to work with the
> government which I don't like because when working in a women's group I think
> that it is important to promote the ideas of women and not the government.
> -Alva, 24, León

The other three women refrained from explicitly naming AMNLAE or other

organizations within its sphere of influence. Rather, the respondents spoke of groups

connected to the government. For these women, their disdain of the relationship between

these SMOs and the government is apparent.

For example, during the interview Elvira paused the conversation about the

women's and feminist movement to clarify that "we are speaking of independent groups.

There are also women's groups connected to the government." When asked if these

groups also have a relationship with other women's organizations within the autonomous

movement she responded that:

> It is difficult because in the other groups there is manipulation from the parties.
> This is why it is important to learn from those women's groups that have
> separated their struggle from political parties so that there is solidarity among
> women and a common identity. This is important so that that the discourse on
> women's rights is not dominated by patriarchal ideas. There are instances in
> which women's issues are raised by the state but it consists of patriarchal
> manipulation, male domination. There is no real liberty. Also, they deny
> women's groups. Women's groups within the government have no real
> independence as a women's organization. They don't really have liberty.
> -Elvira, 25, Managua

For Isabel (30, Managua), the women's and feminist movement consists solely of those

organizations within the autonomous branch. From her experience, groups linked to the

ruling party do not participate in activities, such as the International Women's Day march, or other campaigns with the independent groups. Talia (27, Managua) also recognized the difference between the autonomous groups and the SMOs with government ties. She views this division as a weakness of the movement because those women's groups which are "just an appendage of the Sandinista party" are limited in their ability to be critical. For instance, Talia explained that some organizations in the autonomous branch have difficulties accessing space in which to gather for meetings or public events. However, she maintained that this is not the case for those groups connected to the ruling party. She feels that such groups cannot speak out against the government for fear of losing these privileges.

The three women involved with AMNLAE acknowledged that there is a connection between AMNLAE and the Sandinistas. The autonomous branch as a whole was not discussed in these interviews, though two specific organizations were mentioned. Olivia (26, Managua) said that she believes that there is a relationship between AMNLAE and a national women's group that works to end violence against women. She stated, "but I am not sure of what the connection entails because I don't manage the projects." Likewise, Rosa (25, Managua) mentioned that AMNLAE collaborates with one autonomous SMO in the rural areas. With the exception these two instances, when asked about 'the movement' the three women in AMNLAE spoke of a different branch of the movement than the rest of the respondents, whose answers were framed by their knowledge of the autonomous groups. For this reason, part B of the following section

concerning the women's and feminist movement will focus exclusively on the autonomous branch.

A. Becoming members

In the conclusion of their research summary of the Nicaragua's autonomous women's and feminist movement from 1998-2008, Cuadra Lira and Jiménez Martinez write that "…the first and biggest challenge is to make sure that the movement endures and grows stronger." They suggest several ways forward, including the recognition of the multicultural and multiethnic make-up of the movement (Cuadra Lira and Jiménez Martinez 2009, 19). However, their analysis is incomplete as it neglects multigenerationalism or the importance of integrating younger women into the fold. The movement should be able to attract members with new visions and experiences in order to grow, flourish, and respond to new challenges. Undoubtedly, younger women fit the profile of ideal recruits. One question that then must be posed is why do young women join?

As indicated above, the young women in this study play a variety of roles within their respective SMOs. Some of the women acknowledged that one incentive for joining was employment or other professional opportunity. For instance, Lola's (21, Managua) initial experience with an SMO in the movement was as a practicum student. She is now an activist volunteer for the same organization. Profiting from employment and professional opportunities within SMOs could indicate that these women are not dedicated to the cause but are more interested in the material incentives. However, Alva (24, León) stated that "if you don't support the government, you don't get jobs. People in

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social movements work in social movements because they are not able to get jobs in the government." Under these circumstances, finding professional positions with SMOs may be a calculated response by women who have a desire to organize but also to gain meaningful professional experiences. This may also correspond to a trend described by Ana Carrion who, in her study of social volunteerism in Nicaragua, argues that in the past young Nicaraguans were joining together to fight in historic conflicts but now young people are uniting to gain a better economic life for themselves and their country (2005, 18).

While SMOs certainly provide professional opportunities for young women, this is certainly not the only reason that young women join the movement or a specific organization. Women cited a variety of other motives including being inspired by university courses (Alva, 24, León; Belinda, 23, León), finding a space in which to organize with other young women (Victoria, 25, Managua), personal learning and transformation (Isabelle, 30, Managua; Carmen, 28, Matagalpa; Talia, 27, Managua), the values and principles of the SMO (Josefa, 21, Managua), and the history of the SMO (Rosa, 25, Managua (AMNLAE)).

In addition to these reasons, networks are clearly important to movement recruitment. Rosa, Talia, and Gabriella stated that their involvement was initiated when a movement member personally invited them to a meeting.

> I came to AMNLAE through a friend who talked to me about this organization
> and the importance of the struggle of women. I came to work as a volunteer.
> -Rosa, 25, Managua

I got involved with [this organization] for personal reasons. When I first came to Managua I felt quite disconnected. I had been active in issues in my home community. I was invited to a workshop and felt that this was a setting in which I felt at home. I really liked it. I heard María Theresa [a feminist leader] talk and connected with a lot of what I heard.
-Talia, 27, Managua

A promoter of the movement invited me to come to a talk that she was giving. My mother gave me permission to come, so I got involved little by little. I started to learn about many things, all the violence in families that happens all around. I got involved little by little when I was invited to talks. I learned a lot.
 -Gabriella, 19, Managua

Soledad spoke of her deliberate choice to join a specific SMO when she moved from her

home community to the capital city because she was already familiar with its work and

model.

I knew of this movement when it was just starting because it was aligned with another organization in Chinandega where I was the departmental coordinator of a network. I really liked the work that they did and was impressed that they didn't only work with youth in Managua but also in the municipalities, outside the capital. I decided to support it.
-Soledad, 20, Managua

For her part, Yelba described how she came to be one of the founding members of a

recently formed young women's SMO because she had connected with other like-minded

women in another group.

A feminist group that I was part of disbanded and five people were eager to continue working and formed [this feminist organization]. We thought it was important to be organized and have a collective impact.
-Yelba, 24, Managua

Reasons for joining a movement are not always apparent, even to the movement

participants themselves. Sometimes past experiences influence one's decision years later.

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For instance, Talia (27, Managua) explained that when she was a girl she was a member of a youth group in her community. Though it was a religious group it was open and examined ideas critically. It was here that she began questioning certain notions that she had previously been taught about sexuality and her body. Carmen (28, Matagalpa), on the other hand, had also been a member of a church but had the opposite experience as she feels that "religion in our country oppresses women and teaches them that they must be good, sacrifice a lot, and act like saints and virgins." Both women explained how these experiences ultimately led them to joining the women's and feminist movement.

The motives cited by these young women are surely only a handful of the many co-dependent factors that influence their adherence to and participation in the women's and feminist movement. Nonetheless, the answers given provide insight into why young Nicaraguan women involved in the movement today decide to participate.

B. Challenges facing the movement

As seen in English-speaking democratic societies, specific generational concerns are ignored at the peril of pitting one generation against the next. Resulting disputes distract from the movement's overall mission. With this in mind, the participants of this study were questioned about the rapport between different generations of women within the Nicaraguan movement and their respective SMOs. It was made evident that this is a pressing issue for many young women, which they view as a challenge as the movement moves forward. They were also asked to name other threats facing the women's and feminist movement. In this regard, disunity and resources, and the political environment

were shared responses given by a small number of women. To maintain consistency, this section only deals with responses given by the members of the autonomous branch.

i. Relationships with older women in the movement

When social movements are viewed from a micro perspective, the relationship between individual members becomes paramount. As was reviewed in chapter two, different generations of movement members can have distinct frames of reference resulting in varied perspectives. While the labels 'first, second and third-wave feminist' have not conventionally been applied to Nicaraguan women, it is evident that within the Nicaraguan context there have been various waves of women active in feminist and feminine organizing: the emergence of feminism led by Josefa Toledo de Aguerri in the late 1880s, the Somocista women involved in feminine organizing, women in AMNLAE during the Sandinista revolution, and the autonomous groups which emerged in the early 1990s. The women interviewed in this study are part of a new generation; they are trying to fit in to a movement that came into being when they were still very young girls. As was demonstrated in the case of women's movements in English-speaking democratic societies, generational integration is one of the challenges of many social movements. While new members are vital to a movement, relationships between various generations can be complex. This present study found that the Nicaraguan context is no exception.

Six of the women interviewed, representing five SMOs, identified adultism[21] as a problem within the movement. Adultism is related to ageism but more narrowly describes

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[21] The respondents used the Spanish word 'adultismo.'

"prejudice and accompanying systematic discrimination against young people" (Gregoire and Jungers 2007, 65). Speaking about the autonomous branch on a national level, Belinda and Carmen expressed frustration with how the movement approaches the participation of the younger generation.

> The movement was formed by older women and the opinion of younger women is not taken into account. [The older women] let you voice your ideas but they don't put them into practice. They listen to you but ignore you. Adultism is prevalent. But if we want to bring changes to the social system in Nicaragua it is necessary to begin with internal changes. They need to learn to analyze what others say because a new opinion can bring forth new ideas. Older women don't consider the opinions of younger women. Our group [of young people] just has to accept what already is. Of course we must mention that older feminists have done great work and that they are recognized internationally, and we are thankful for this. But at the same time they must learn to give opportunities to the younger women.
>
> There was an international feminist meeting. [Our group] received an invitation for ten spaces. However, one of the older representatives spoke with the organizers of the meeting and in the end we only were allowed two spots. We were very upset about this because we thought that we would be able to participate in the meeting. The younger women complained about this and we were told that it was because we are a small group. But that is a lie; we are a large group of young women and men. It doesn't seem just, and this is just one example among many. It is clear that older feminists work well but they exercise a lot of authoritarianism.
> -Belinda, 23, León

> There is also an element of adultism within organizations, including feminist organizations. There is a clash between the ideas of the youth and adults. It seems to me that most of the important decisions are taken by the adults. Young people are active in the marches, rallies. But they are not very active in activities of content.
> –Carmen, 28, Matagalpa

While dissatisfaction with the current power dynamics was evident, Belinda and Carmen also gave credit to the older generation for being trailblazers during difficult periods in their country's history.

> But we young women continue on with the support of the older women, because they started the movement, they have been in a struggles greater than the one in which we find ourselves. Because they started during times that were more trying. Now feminism is more prepared, not like before. Before society viewed feminism even worse than it does now. So their respect and participation will never be taken away. We complement each other, the older women and the young women.
> -Belinda, 23, León
>
> I believe that the leaders of this movement have prepared a path through their fight. This makes our path more…I don't want to say easy but there is a path that has been cut. Through their fight, they have permitted us to speak about issues. The revolutionary period, during the Somoza dictatorship, was a lot more difficult. This was a time of war, it is clear that it was different than it is today. The challenges now are different but they are also difficult.
> –Carmen, 28, Matagalpa

Dora also agrees that adultism is present in the movement. In part, she faults the older women for preventing the younger generation from participating as equals.

> There is a separation. Young women feel that the older women don't give them space. And it is true. For example, at this festival [celebrating the 20th anniversary of the autonomous movement] there were four panels. Only in one panel were there two young women. In the others there were only older women who are more recognized. I think that there should have been young people in each panel. This would also help build the confidence of the youth, if the older women were to help us grow.
> - Dora, 26, Matagalpa

However, she does not lay blame solely on the senior women within the movement for the lack of active participation of young people. She is equally critical of her own generation for allowing the unequal relationship between generations to develop.

> [Younger women] say that older women are not letting them access this space. But, I also think that it is question of wanting to open this space. I could access

this space if I wanted to. But young Nicaraguan women depend on the older women. As if the older women are right because they are older. Older women think that they are the only ones who are right. We need to challenge them and to reclaim feminist public spaces.
- Dora, 26, Matagalpa

Talia agrees with Dora's assessment that young women must be more assertive in securing their place within the movement.

In some organizations there are difficulties for young women and older women to work together because of adultism. There is a general idea that the older women are the 'real feminists' because they are the ones who fought in the revolution, they are the ones who have gained the right to be called feminists. On the other hand, I think that there are some young women who are not as militant and want to achieve things just because they are young. They think that they should have space just because they are young and if they don't get it they blame older women for being adultist. They don't realize that they have to work hard, and be active. Older women take more risks. María Theresa [a former FSLN fighter] stormed the palace when she was twenty years old, but some younger women today of the same age don't want to go to a march against violence. So older women don't view them as feminists. If they don't make their ideas known, then they aren't feminists.
-Talia, 27, Managua

Therefore, to conclude that adultism dominates the relationship between women of different ages would not fully illustrate the complexities within the movement. Nuances within intergenerational relationships were evident in many of the responses. At times, the interviewees' answers seemed incongruous. Alva's response, which follows, serves to highlight the complicated nature of the relationship between women of different generations.

Since the autonomous movement began, small organizations of women have started to pop up. Sometimes within the movement adultism is prevalent. [The older women] don't listen to ideas of other people. I think that this creates a disparity, because if you want to have more members then you need to allow fresh ideas. And sometimes the more senior women are like buried or trapped in

previous generations. They don't accept ideas beyond their own, therefore
adultism prevails. Because they have more experience, they have passed
through worst things than we have, then sometimes they don't give us the space
to express ourselves. I am not saying that there is no space, there is space for us
to express ourselves, but sometimes it is like, they want to stand out, they want
to stop you, but not that much, just a little.
–Alva, 24, León

Six of the women spoke of adultism as being present in the autonomous

movement as a whole. However, this attitude did not prevent the women from being

active in specific SMOs. A common qualifier was that the critique of adultism was

directed at the larger movement or other SMOs, and not at the SMO in which the

respondent was active. Likewise, many of the women who did not name adultism as a

problem within the movement spoke specifically about one SMO and not the movement

in its entirety. Their responses focused on the positive relationships between different

generations of women. For instance, Elvira and Gabriella described their experiences in

their respective SMOs.

Here there are workshops for young women and older women, which are
separate though sometimes they are together. Because it is necessary to respect
the space of others. Young people have preoccupations that are different from
older women because older women have already passed on to other situations.
And adolescents have different concerns and therefore raise different issues.
And sometimes the two groups come together so that young people will come to
know the opinions of the adults and vice versa.
-Elvira, 25, Managua

I feel satisfied by how I am treated in this organization. The older women
respect the younger women. Our opinions are valued. And we respect them.
-Gabriella, 19, Managua

Yelba also disagreed that adultism exists within the movement. However, she spoke

about the movement on the broad level:

Women's spaces are inclusive. The proof of this is that our feminist collective [which is comprised of young women] is part of a larger feminist movement, as are other groups of young women.
-Yelba, 24, Managua

Adultism may indeed be present in the movement. However, these preceding comments demonstrate that the intergenerational relationships within each group, and the movement as a whole, are varied and context specific. Some young women face few problems participating in the movement, while others feel that adultist attitudes prevent them from becoming fully integrated into the movement as actors of change. In some of these cases, however, young women blame their own generation for not being more persevering in becoming active participants. At the same time, young women in the movement have great respect for the work that has been carried out by their older counterparts. There are also indications that attempts are being made by the movement, and individual SMOs, to adapt to become more inclusive of all generations. Certainly, fostering positive intergenerational relationships will be paramount as the movement looks to its future.

ii. Unity and Resources

A second challenge confronting the movement, as identified by a select number of interviewees, was the issue of unity and resources. March 8th 2011 marked the 20th anniversary of the genesis of the autonomous women's movement in Nicaragua. This occasion was celebrated at the International Women's Day march in Managua and the Festival of the Autonomous Movement in Matagalpa. The theme of these celebrations

was "Todas Juntas, Todas Libres" which is loosely translates to "women and girls are all

united, all free."

> When asked what she thought of this theme, Belinda answered,

> It is very nice, personally I like it. But we [various organizations] are in different situations, as a friend of mine said, if we are all working for the same thing why don't we unite? We all march, but not all groups have financing. There are some groups that have few resources. We are invited to Managua for the March 8th rally, why doesn't it take place in other departments? What can't it rotate to other cities? We are a national movement not just in Managua. Free yes, but not united.
> -Belinda, 23, León

Her response signals two related challenges that are common to many social movements:

the unity between and the resources available to different groups within the movement.

Elvira (25, Managua), Isabel (30, Managua) and Talia (27, Managua) also

indicated the desire for more collaboration between SMOs. However, calls for increased

coordination and unity between SMOs are complicated by the movement's history. As

explained in the historical summary, many women's organizations with revolutionary

roots were subjected to a top down approach dictated by the Sandinistas. As Isbester

notes, twenty years ago the newly autonomous movement "…reorganized itself

horizontally through collectives, neighborhood groups, NGOs, and health and law

clinics…They then merged into horizontal networks to better achieve their goals" (2001,

19-20). Two decades later, a non-hierarchical approach to the movement is still valued by

some members of the younger generation. For Nora (24, Managua) feminism can only

occur when "leadership is horizontal, not vertical."

Carmen (28, Matagalpa), Dora (26, Matagalpa), and Isabel (30, Managua) also indicated that horizontal organizational methods and leadership are important traits that attracted them to their respective organizations. Dora gave an account of how horizontal networks are organized in her community.

> The thing about Matagalpa is that different women's organizations have developed, but within the women's movement there is a network. A woman can participate in a network as an individual, but organizations can also participate as an organization. For instance, here in Matagalpa there are different networks of women's organizations. One network includes all of the organized groups in this part of the country. There is a great closeness between the movements here in Matagalpa. Of course, as with anything, [there are conflicts] but the important part is that we know how to handle them. And it is more a question of diversity and learning to accept the differences that we have. As well, we fight for the same objectives, the same goal. And we collaborate on the things that benefit all of us.
> -Dora, 26, Matagalpa

While a horizontal approach prevents the movement from becoming dominated by any one ideology, it can present difficulties beyond the simple lack of coordination. One premise of resource mobilization theory is that money is a vital resource for the growth and maintenance of social movements. To this effect, Talia, Victoria, and Yelba identified funding as an ongoing issue with which the movement is confronted. Together, their answers paint a picture of the challenges faced by the movement.

> Organizations compete for financial resources and have to prove that they are better than the next.
> - Talia, 27, Managua

> For the most part, the movement can only function with donations. Sometimes this limits the work that the organization can do, because in the end it only gets the money if it satisfies the objectives of the donor. Organizations know this, but since they need the money they adapt their projects to suit the donor.
> -Yelba, 24, Managua

> One of the difficulties [with the movement] is that it is built upon support from foreign cooperation, which has created a movement which is dependent.
> -Victoria, 25, Managua

The three women describe a dilemma that leading Nicaraguan feminist, Sofía Montenegro, wrote about in a 2002 article. At this time, she expressed concern that the women's and feminist movement was becoming less political as SMOs transformed into non-governmental organizations (NGOs) whose "existence is tied to financing from international cooperation" and subsequently whose programs are defined by their donors (Montenegro, Envío, May 2002).

It could certainly be argued that the horizontal approach in which SMOs work towards a common goal but without accountability to one another results in disunity, competition, and a loss of decision-making power. However, given the hostile environment between the government and the movement, described in chapter three and in subsequent sections of this chapter, there may be little choice for the movement, at this time, but to continue working through networks and to rely on sources of funding outside of its own political system. Recognizing these challenges, the women of this study are poised to find ways for the movement to collaborate more closely while retaining its horizontal approach.

iii. Politics

The political system was a third issue identified as a barrier to the movement. Since 1992 the very nature of the autonomous branch dictates that it is non-partisan. Isbester argues that the separation of the autonomous movement from the FSLN, and all other political parties, is one factor that has contributed to the successes of the self-

governing organizations. Though relations with successive governments have largely

been characterized by hostility and animosity, she argues that a non-partisan voice and

new policies implemented by various governments have enabled the autonomous

branch to concentrate its efforts on specific targets (Isbester 2001, 18-19). However,

since Isbester formulated her argument Cuadra Lira and Jiménez Martinez have

explained that the relationship between President Ortega's government and the

autonomous branch has "deteriorated rapidly" (2009, 12). As a result, several of the

women in this study did not share Isbester's analysis. Conversely, they view the

Nicaraguan political system, and particularly the Sandinista government, as an

impediment to the movement achieving its goals.

> For example, Dora stated:

> Since the return of the FLSN there has been a rupture within the movement. The
> government has been strategic to divide the women's movement because in
> Nicaragua the movement was very influential. The only way to obtain power
> was to convince women that they had an attachment with the Sandinista party.
> So right now the movement has been reduced. There is horrible political
> persecution against the movement. We were accused of money laundering. The
> police came and took away our computers.
>
> According to society, the government is supposed to be a party that stands for
> women but in reality, for the women's movement, it hasn't. And this is because
> the movement is very critical of the government's policies. And this is why the
> movement has lost national prestige. Women have lost confidence in the
> movement. We have a challenge of convincing women to organize and to keep
> the government in its place. But I believe that it will be difficult because there is
> more fear than before. Yes, more fear than before.
> -Dora, 26, Matagalpa

Lola expressed a similar viewpoint about the SMO with which she is involved.

I think that [our SMO] has problems because it doesn't follow the same ideology as the government. It is persecuted against and the government who wants more power is waging a campaign against us.
-Lola, 21, Managua

Likewise, Belinda (23, León) explained how there are problems for students who receive government-issued scholarships. In her assessment, if those students join a group that is perceived as being opposed to the government, such as an autonomous women's or feminist organization, they risk losing their financial aid. Though Isbester's analysis may be valid from a broad, theoretical perspective, from the vantage point of these women who work at a local level the hostility between the government and the autonomous branch seems detrimental to the work that they are trying to accomplish. This issue will be explored further in the next section when the role of the respondents as political actors will be examined.

3. Personal outlooks and experiences

The preceding section summarizes some of the observations that the young interviewees have made of the women's and feminist movement. Additionally, three issues that the women identified as challenges faced by the autonomous movement were highlighted: adultism, unity and resources, and relations with the state. These experiences in the movement affect their personal outlooks and behaviours. Thus, the third part of this chapter will turn to an examination of the young women's perceptions of their role as social actors, in addition to other issues they judge important.

A. *Social actors*

Social movement theory demonstrates that mobilizing to bring about social change is part of a society's political culture. In this sense, the young women in this study are expressing their political agency at each march, rally, and meeting they attend. However, when the women were questioned about their own participation in the political process their responses exhibited a range of notions about political involvement. Some of the respondents reject the notion that they are political actors. Others feel that social movement participation is an integral part of the political process. For instance, Gabriella is involved in an SMO that organizes and fights for the rights of women employed in the FTZ. Despite this, when asked about her political involvement, she stated that:

> Politics is very complicated so I don't like to follow it.
> -Gabriella, 19, Managua

On the other hand, when questioned if they considered their involvement in an SMO to be political in nature Yelba (24, Managua) answered "Yes, definitely" as did Nora (24, Managua) who said "yes, it is political!"

Carmen and Talia's testimonies demonstrate that, for these two women, political actions are personal since they are not merely about partisan politics. Cultural norms that prop up certain power structures are also the target of their activism.

> For me politics is not just something outside. My political militancy started as something very personal. My first political experience was when I rebelled against things that my mother taught me. For me, my body is my first political space, one that I have power over. I do not plan on marrying, for me this is about political militancy.
> -Talia, 27, Managua

When I was in secondary school, for some reason I was always elected as president of the section. This is when I began to question orders and authority because I believe that our culture in Nicaragua teaches us be afraid of authority figures, like our fathers. In school, with the teachers, it is also relationship of unequal power.
-Carmen, 28, Matagalpa

However, the voices of Talia, Carmen, Yelba, and Nora are atypical. For the majority of the respondents involved in the autonomous movement any mention of politics or political processes conjures up the notion of partisan politics. The respondents were quick to dissociate both themselves and their respective SMOs from this conception of politics. My conversation with Marta exemplifies this tendency.

Interviewer: What was your first political experience, not with a political party but in society in general?
Marta: When I voted for the first time.

Interviewer: Do you have any other political experiences?
Marta: No, I am not involved in these activities. I am not a member of any political party. I don't participate in any activities or marches in support of the left or the right.

Interviewer: But you have participated in marches with [the SMO with which you are involved]?
Yes.

That is not political?
No.

Why not?
Because the group doesn't have any political leanings, neither to the right nor to the left.

But it supports bills put before parliament?
Yes, of course.

And that is not political?
Well yes, you are right. It is political but it benefits women. It is not to support a political party but to support the social development of women. For instance, therapeutic abortion was banned. The *SMO* participated to oppose this law but did not use this as an opportunity to align itself with the left or the right. The *SMO* tries to help women but does not try to benefit from a political situation.

She also went on to explain her own political views.

Politically, I am not a person that…they say that no one is apolitical, who doesn't have political tendencies. But in reality I don't conform to the present political situation in Nicaragua. I don't identify with either the right or with the left. I am the type of person who is looking for equality of rights, who looks for the end of negative things like abuse. All of the negative things that we encounter. So at this time in my life I don't have any political leanings, though I do support human rights and equality.
-Marta, 26, Managua

Marta's response serves to highlight two trends in the responses given by women in the autonomous branch. This first is the strong adversity to formal partisan politics. The second is their support of 'políticas públicas' or public policies. The latter concept is broader than partisan politics in that it includes a wide range of actors such as social movements and civil society organizations (Pichardo, La Prensa, 2012). Like Marta, when Helena was asked if her work with an SMO was political, she quickly distanced herself from any such notion.

No, it is not. It is an organization where it doesn't matter your political party. We don't talk about politics.
-Helena, 22, Managua

Nevertheless, she later explained how the group supports legislation which affects women, such as bills against violence and support for those affected by HIV.

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The tendency for respondents to distant themselves from partisan politics was not observed in the three women involved with AMNLAE. Each of these respondents identified as a Sandinista supporter. The divergence in responses between the two branches of the movement suggests that the dissociation between political involvement and support for public policies is a reflection of Nicaragua's political history in which the women's movement was subordinate to male dominated, partisan decision makers. Indeed, one of the goals of the 20th anniversary celebrations of the autonomous movement was to "…proclaim [its] independence from all power structures, particularly partisan structures" (Organizaciones de Mujeres y Feministas 2011 - my translation).

Further to this, several of the respondents involved in the autonomous branch of the movement went a step further from simply distancing themselves from partisan politics. They expressed much contempt for the current political system and those in power.

> Politically, I feel like a prisoner of authoritative, dictatorial leaders in all political parties: Liberal, Sandinista, Conservative. They don't allow any room for young leaders. They are all very hierarchical in how they make decisions. I feel like a prisoner in a political system in which I can't breathe.
> -Carmen, 28, Matagalpa

> The political system is just a cycle of benefits for those within. Those on the outside are excluded. We observe manipulation. It is a game where everyone is looking for benefits, only looking out for themselves. Whoever has more power wins. Elections follow the same cycle. If you didn't win the last election you can't win the next. It is a cycle that repeats itself. And it is always the same person. There is no representation from other people. There is no diversity. From my experience, here in Nicaragua power is always held by the same family or by the same person.
> -Marta, 26, Managua

> I don't know how long you have been here but the political situation in the country is a little complicated. It is like the next dictator is in power.
> -Belinda, 23, León

Whereas young Nicaraguans have been accused of being "politically apathetic and disengaged from active political struggle as compared with youth in the 1970s and 1980s" (Wolseth and Babb 2008, 9), the three preceding quotations could signal that the young women in the movement wish to free their country of a political reality that, in their regard, has once again become dominated by authoritarianism. A 2006 Envío article explains that:

> [The] rejection of politics [of young people] could also be interpreted as the beginning of a positive break with our country's cultural past. This apathy could be…a show of dissatisfaction with a society that we should rightly be extremely dissatisfied with. In fact, it would be tragic if our youth were anxious to register with the current political parties and follow their current leaders (Baltodano, Envío, April 2006).

Recognizing that the refusal of traditional political processes does not inherently lead to apathy, some SMOs are attempting to reclaim the notion of political participation for the younger generation. This was described by Lola, who is involved in a youth movement.

> Nicaragua's political history is very corrupt and young people don't really like it because they are all older men who don't relate to the youth. They are not really interested in political parties, but yes they [the youth] are interested in public policies. They are concerned about violence in their community, that schools are inadequate. Political parties aren't of interest to [our organization]. What is important is that young people understand that politics is not just about political parties but is also about public policies, that politics is about the way that they live and not solely about a party.
> -Lola, 21, Managua

It is fairly conclusive that the responses concerning political engagement indicate that, among young women involved in the autonomous movement, there is a general

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disdain of the political process as it is played out in Nicaragua. Based on their answers it may appear that some of the women are apolitical. As with the term 'feminist' several of the women did not identify as 'political.' Yet, they went on to describe their work supporting proposed laws or raising awareness about gender issues both as a member of a women's or feminist SMO or in another capacity. Whether they recognize it or not, these women are without a doubt contributing to the political fabric of Nicaraguan society and will help shape the future of social movements in that country.

i. Barriers to social movement participation

Wolseth and Babb note that though Latin American youth as a whole do not engage in traditional politics they are at the forefront of new social movements (2008, 10). Certainly, the twenty young women who participated in this study are part of the wave of youth to which Wolseth and Babb refer. For Gabriella, there is little standing in the way of young Nicaraguan women who wish to partake in this wave of social mobilization.

> There are no barriers preventing young women from participating in social movements. If we as women go ahead then there is nothing that we can't accomplish
> -Gabriella, 19, Managua

Conversely, other respondents pointed to societal barriers restricting young women their age from mobilizing in the women's and feminist movement. In addition to the obstacles within the movement itself, such as adultism, the interviewees indicated that social mobilization in a women's or feminist group is still on the fringe of society. Women of their generation face pressure from political forces, society at large, religious organizations, and

their families. Elvira and Victoria summarized how these external influences may prevent

young women from joining collective actions demanding the rights of women.

> Many women are manipulated by their families when the family has an allegiance to a certain political party. And also, in society there is a fear of women's organizations. Pressure from society prevents young women from getting involved. People say that a person will change [if she joins a movement], well yes she will change! She will discover that we live in a system that is violent, that ignores our rights, our opinions, our feelings. So there are many messages from society that stop women from organizing, because this is how we can achieve success. Also, in many families women can't make their own decisions. This prevents them from joining. Also, religion can be a barrier because there are messages that say that it is bad or a sin to join an organization because of its ideas.
> -Elvira, 25, Managua

> The patriarchal culture, exerted by our parents, our spouses or our beliefs, takes away the autonomy to mobilize.
> -Victoria, 25, Managua

Other women elaborated on the point, made by Elvira and Victoria, that one's family

situation dictates what a young woman can and cannot do.

> Parents question their daughters when they go to political rally or a feminist formation but not when they go to a party. 'Go! It's all good!' They want their daughters to find a man but not get educated. To me this doesn't make any sense.
> -Dora, 26, Matagalpa

> I'll talk about the experiences that I have seen here. Most of the women here are between 17 and 27. What happens? Some already have a partner and some already have kids. Some of them want to be involved but are told by their partners that they must stay home and look after the house or the kids. Or they can't get involved because they have kids. Why? Because they aren't taught to take control of their sexuality. This is a limitation because they have to care for their kids. Many girls between 15 and 18 are sexually active and end up pregnant. This is a great limitation.
> -Lola, 21, Managua

Josefa also agrees that family is a great factor in determining whether a young woman will become involved. In her opinion, conservative attitudes, which are likely to discourage movement participation, are more common in rural areas of the country than in the capital, where attitudes have shifted.

> I am very lucky because my family supports me in everything and I am contributing to a very good organization. However, there are some families that limit the participation of women and young people because if a woman wants to join a volunteer organization they think she is a 'vaga.' Many families have this kind of old-fashioned thinking. Also, if she is married it is difficult to organize because she doesn't have time as she is cooking, washing, ironing, caring for the kids. And in this aspect yes there are many barriers. I think that this occurs more in rural areas because it is a machista culture. But here in Managua I think that we have broken with these traditions. And this is precisely why our organization is working in the rural areas.
> -Josefa, 21, Managua

However, even in an urban university setting recruitment is an uphill battle. Alva and Belinda are both members of a young feminist group on a university campus in Nicaragua's second largest city. They each voiced concerns about difficulties convincing other women to join this group.

> Yes, there are impediments, but not like before. Now we have more power, more leadership. However, there are women who don't have time to participate or the patriarchal system prevents them from participating, [there are] some professors who don't support them, who say that participating in groups is a waste of time. As well, here in Nicaragua if a woman is involved in a social movement people judge her as a lesbian, and as if she isn't respecting her responsibilities at home.
> -Alva, 24, León

> The university is affiliated with the government. They see [our feminist group on campus] as being part of the opposition. However, we are not affiliated with a political party. Individually some of the members are but not as a group. This causes problems for students who have a scholarship from the government, if they join a group that is viewed as being opposed to the government then they risk losing their scholarship.
> -Belinda, 23, León

Though the twenty women in this study have managed to organize, clearly there are barriers which are deeply entrenched in Nicaraguan society. Nonetheless, Soledad believes that "the only barrier [for the participation of young women] is that girls get scared" (Soledad, 20, Managua). Nora is of a similar opinion, stating that "there are barriers that [young women] put on [themselves]" (Nora, 24, Managua).

B. Issues of concern

The women were also asked about issues that are of concern to them. Given that thirty years have passed since the revolution and twenty since the birth of the autonomous movement, one might expect that young women activists today would view their struggle in a different light than that of previous generations. The young women's responses are, nonetheless, mixed in their assessment of historical and current contexts. According to Talia, today's environment may be different than that of years past, but the underlying struggles are simply repeating themselves. She blamed "a super traditional church and an authoritarian government" for the lack of progress. She elaborated:

> We have not advanced that much. And we are repeating the same patterns, the same attitudes as women from the past. I'm saying this in very general terms. I say it from what I see from common women, not feminist women, but everyday women from university, co-workers, and classmates. We are facing many problems which are a result of all that we have been taught. It has been hard to get rid of these attitudes. We are repeating the violent relationships. We have a lot of problems that we don't even talk about, that we see them as normal.
> Talia, 27, Managua

Victoria echoed these concerns by stating:

> I think we are still the same as in the past. Because the socio-political context in Nicaragua remains the same as 30 years ago, we are gradually approaching a pre-revolutionary system of government, authoritarian and dictatorial, and the challenge remains to dismantle it and democratize society, family, schools, our

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lives, and so forth. We have managed to gain several rights but we are also
having a lot of fundamental setbacks.
-Victoria, 25, Managua

While also conceding that many of the problems from the early years of the movement

still exist, Nora was more hopeful in her assessment of the current situation.

There have been some changes. The challenges that women had before are a little
different than what we face today but in some ways they are also the same. We
are still fighting so that women have space in the political realm, for equality.
These are very much the same challenges that we have today, that young women
are active in public spaces, that young women have the right to make their own
decisions, that they have the right to equality. What has changed is the focus on
how to achieve these things.
-Nora, 24, Managua

For her part, Patricia of AMNLAE focused on positive similarities and differences
between generations.

I believe that one similarity between my generation and the previous generation is
that we are aware of what we are fighting for. We know how to work hard to
achieve it. And one difference is that to me there is more freedom from taboos
and certain complexities. So for me that is a big difference that allows me to keep
going and to go beyond from where [other generations] wouldn't go because they
had certain limitations.
-Patricia, 25, Managua

No matter the outlook of the situation in which they find themselves, as

previously noted, many of the women gave credit to the older generation for breaking

ground and for establishing the movement; essentially building a platform from which

this current generation can fight. This view was expressed by Yelba.

Adult women had other struggles that they had to do deal with in a different
context. These women fought for the right to vote, thanks to them we young
women can vote and we recognize their experiences and achievements. Adult
women were also seen as crazy and lesbians because they mentioned the word
feminist. Currently prejudices still exist but young women have a reference point

and have a solid women's movement, providing us with contacts and exchanges, learning, etc.
-Yelba, 24, Managua

Yelba's sentiments were repeated throughout the interviews. Recognition was repeatedly given to the previous generations for the battles that they had fought and won. Still, the respondents were in strong agreement that there was much still to achieve. Some of the young women even suggested that evolving attitudes and expectations, due to the advances that had been made for Nicaraguan women, result in more work.

The challenges and demands of women of today and yesterday are the same and today we have more demands and more work. Every day women want more and more. Much has been accomplished but there is much left to do. We demand a lot because we are not conformists we do not want to listen to old attitudes of our families that tell us that if we go out we are bad women. Of course there are still women with the old attitudes, but we have gained a lot, but we still have a lot of demands. We want more, we want riches, not economic riches but a rich life.
-Soledad, 20, Managua

Soledad's sentiment supports arguments made by Budgeon (2001) and Schneider (1988), that as the women's movement is successful and grows, young women will come to accept certain opinions and attitudes as the norm. Consequently, they will continue to push the bar by placing new demands and increasing expectations on their own lives, and by extension their society.

With that in mind, the interviewees were questioned about issues that are most troubling to them as young women in Nicaraguan society. While responses varied three themes emerged most strongly: educational and professional opportunities for young women, violence against women, and sexual and reproductive issues. The following section will explore these three topics as described by the interviewees.

i. Educational and professional opportunities

As was demonstrated in chapter two, the values, opinions, and challenges of young women will reflect societal changes made by their mothers and grandmothers. In the case of Nicaragua, young women have benefitted from educational and professional opportunities which have been made available to them because of the struggles of previous generations. It is likely that this is one reason that educational and professional issues are of primary importance to many of the interviewees. For example, Isabella described her own ambitions.

> From a young age I saw my grandmother and the other women in my life, I didn't want to be like them—to sit around the house and wait, tending to the children and taking care of the men. I wanted to study, work. I remember that they would always try to get me to learn to make tortillas. And I refused, because I said that I was going to study and buy tortillas not make them.
> -Isabel, 30, Managua

New possibilities, however, present new challenges. Dora noted that in comparison with past generations:

> There has been a change in challenges faced by young women, because now there are women who are multifaceted. They have many roles. There are professional women, who are either single or married, who are also involved in community projects or personal projects. There are, therefore, more demands regarding the identity of women because of their different roles, but this is a space that they have encountered because [women] are fighting.
> -Dora, 26, Matagalpa

Certainly, there are more schooling and career opportunities for this generation than for young Nicaraguan women of previous eras. Still, respondents indicated that barriers remain for women to getting a good education, and professional and meaningful employment. Some of the reasons given were not specific to gender, such as the high cost

of tuition (Carmen, 28, Matagalpa), adultism on the part of employers (Josefa, 21,

Managua), or the need to be a member of a political party or have certain connections to

access opportunities (Carmen, 28, Matagalpa; Isabel, 30, Managua). As a university

student, Marta was clearly frustrated with her future prospects.

> For a woman in Nicaragua to have a good future she must either come from a
> good family, marry a man with power, or sell drugs. If not you don't have power
> and cannot develop. It is like a trampoline. You can jump up if you come from a
> good family, marry a man with power, or sell drugs. If you are from a middle
> class family, if you study then nothing. An average girl like me doesn't have
> much hope for a good future.
> -Marta, 26, Managua

> Other barriers cited are specific to women, such as sexism.

> Women are said to have the right to education and the right to become
> professionals. However, in many instances the preference to study is still given
> to young men. Women are discriminated against; they are not seen as
> intellectual or capable beings. This is why it is necessary to fight, to recognize
> that, yes, we have the ability. So that women can obtain important positions,
> positions in management.
> -Elvira, 25, Managua

Echoing this sentiment Josefa stated that,

> Challenges and demands are different [today than in the past] because of the
> current context. Unlike previous generations of women who stayed at home,
> women today have professional jobs. Therefore, many of their challenges stem
> from the working world, having to compete with men for jobs. Male engineers
> have more opportunities than women engineers because they are men. There are
> more opportunities for women to study but they still live in a machista society
> so the career opportunities are limited.
> - Josefa, 21, Managua

Respondents also recounted that young women cannot fully integrate into the

educational system or the workforce because of their society's anti-feminist values.

Specifically, they mentioned that women are viewed solely as sexual objects. Josefa and

Elvira both expressed frustration that, in their experiences, a woman's appearance takes

precedence over her intellectual and professional abilities.

> For instance, in my field of communication you must be thin and pretty. This is a
> limitation because it is no longer about the capability of the women but rather her
> physical appearance. Employers value physical beauty over intelligence, which is
> a challenge for young women.
> -Josefa, 21, Managua

> Yes, we are in a country which values women more for their physical appearance
> instead of their intellect, their professional capabilities. It is a part of a system that
> values the body, where women are seen as a sexual object.
> -Elvira, 25, Managua

Moreover, Elvira and Isabel explain that in the workforce and educational settings few

concessions are made for the natural biological function that young women play in

childbearing and childrearing. According to their accounts, women who perform these

roles may encounter marginalization.

> For instance, when a woman goes out when she is pregnant she is denied jobs.
> Or if she has children it closes many doors.
> -Elvira, 25, Managua

> There is also discrimination in secondary schools and universities against
> women who are pregnant or single mothers. They are called many things, like
> 'vaga.' Usually these women quit school or goes to night school.
> -Isabel, 30, Managua

Based on these remarks, it appears that Maxine Molyneux's 1985 statement about

gender relations in Nicaragua still holds true. Regardless of efforts to change societal

attitudes and structures "there has been no substantial redefinition of the relations

between the sexes." In 1985, Molyneux argued that this was because, like in other

socialist states, women's emancipation remained subordinate to economic transformation (1985). Today though many young women enjoy greater access to educational opportunities, the country has been unable to shed many anti-feminist values. Ultimately, these attitudes negatively impact young women's accessibility to, and experiences in, the educational system and job market.

In such an environment, it is hardly surprising that, as discussed earlier in this chapter, some young women are turning to women's organizations to find meaningful employment. When asked why she got involved in the women's and feminist movement, Victoria (25, Managua) responded "…in one SMO, because of the need to have a job, in another [because of] the need to be organized." Likewise, Helena (22, Managua), who is from a comfortable middle class background, attributes her physical disability as the reason she was denied work at a local bank for a position related to her field of study. She explained that she was able to secure employment in the administrative department of a feminist SMO because of the organization's policy against all forms of discrimination.

ii. Violence against women

Two other closely related topics brought up regularly by the respondents are the ongoing violence against women, and sexual and reproductive issues. That these two issues are of concern to the women is not surprising for two reasons. Firstly, as the following accounts demonstrate, these themes garner much attention from women's and feminist SMOs, both within the autonomous branch and AMNLAE.

> Everywhere in the country women are working on the issue of violence against women which is one of the most serious problems in the country. The movement also succeeds in raising issues in the rural regions that people don't like to talk

about. For instance in some places women are talking about therapeutic abortion, violence against women, issues that no other group is talking about.
-Talia, 27, Managua

[The main objectives of this group are to] defend and promote the sexual and reproductive rights of young people in Nicaragua.
-Yelba, 20, Managua

There are workshops and legal offices that help women, particular with the issue of family violence. There are programs geared to young people that teach them about sexual and reproductive health issues, notably about STIs, HIV-AIDS, and different contraceptives.
-Olivia, 26, Managua (AMNLAE)

Secondly, these matters affect young women at higher rates than other segments of society. For instance, as outlined at the beginning of this chapter, young Nicaraguan women face high rates of STIs and are likely to become pregnant in their teenage years. Also, statistics demonstrate that violence toward women, including femicide, is prevalent in Nicaragua. This trend worries Carmen.

Socially, as a woman, the issue of violence is important to me. How women are prisoners of the power of our fathers, of our partners. They are vulnerable. This is one of my major preoccupations. High levels of violence, in Matagalpa, throughout Nicaragua. This is an enormous challenge.
-Carmen, 28, Matagalpa

Yelba also expressed distress with certain social norms, stating:

I believe that these issues are the basis of oppression, rejection, and suffering of women in which can result in the worst and ultimate expression of violence, which is the loss of life.
-Yelba, 24, Managua

It was clear from the women that SMOs are carrying out much awareness and action to stop violence, which is a result of machista and anti-feminist attitudes. For some

of the respondents, the work done by women's and feminist SMOs has been vital to their

own understanding of the importance of ending these intolerable acts.

> On a personal level, I have learned a lot at this organization, like to be critically aware of gender issues. I have been sensitized to the issue of violence, to contribute to the sensitization of others on this topic, including journalists. Also, to make women in the community aware of the reality in which they live, the issue of violence.
> -Elvira, 25, Managua

> I started with AMNLAE five years ago. I came to AMNLAE through a friend who talked to me about this organization and the importance of the struggle of women. And every day I learn, I hear the stories from women who have been abused, women that are fighting for their rights.
> -Rosa, 25, Managua

Gabriella indicated that by learning about violence she has been motivated to

become more involved in the movement. She has also been empowered to help women

close to her who have been abused.

> I started to learn about many things, all the violence in families that happens all around. I got involved little by little when I was invited to talks. I learned a lot. I am motivated to end the cycle of violence. I am motivated to changes people's minds and to end the cycle of violence. There is a lot of violence against young women. There are young women about 15 years old, who have boyfriends, who suffer from violence. I have two friends who confided in me that they were hit by their boyfriends. I brought them here to get help.
> -Gabriella, 19, Managua

Likewise, through her involvement with an SMO that supports female workers, Fatima

concluded that violence against women cannot be detached from economic issues.

> If a woman has economic independence and is not dependent on her spouse it will be easier [to end violence] because the cycle of violence often occurs with women who are economically dependent on their husbands.
> -Fatima, 28, Managua

iii. Sexual and reproductive issues

The issues of sexuality and reproductive health are closely linked to violence

against women and girls because violent acts can be of a sexual nature. Dora and Fatima

explain:

> Before, young girls aged nine or ten were being sexually abused. Now it is infants
> of nine or ten months!
> –Dora, 26, Matagalpa

> Some women don't realize that they can be raped by their husbands. They don't
> recognize that when they say 'no' and he continues, that is sexual assault. Mothers
> still tell their daughters, 'look he is your husband. Be patient.'
> -Fatima, 28, Managua

With regards to sexuality and reproductive health, the young respondents in this study

discussed a range of topics such as HIV-AIDS, sexual health education, sexual assault,

birth control, and contraception. The most commonly issue brought forth was that of

therapeutic abortion. Of the twenty respondents, half discussed this matter. Nora was one

such voice.

> An important issue for me is the right to therapeutic abortions, a right that women
> once had but no more.
> -Nora, 24, Managua

However, unlike the issue of violence, none of the interviewees from AMNLAE

spoke of abortion specifically. The absence of this issue in these interviews may be

attributed to the position of the Sandinista government on this matter. Abortion, and in

particular therapeutic abortion, is a point of contention between the autonomous groups

and the government since the Nicaraguan parliament criminalized therapeutic abortions

in 2007.

While it was beyond the scope of this study to understand each woman's personal

position on abortion, the majority of the ten respondents distinguished between

therapeutic abortion and elective abortion. These comments connote that, for these

interviewees, there is a distinction between the two.

> This is the fight that the women's movement has, to reverse the decision on
> therapeutic abortion, not abortion but therapeutic abortion.
> -Fatima, 28, Managua

> We work on raising awareness about appealing the law criminalizing therapeutic
> abortions. The women here talk with other women about the important of a
> therapeutic abortion, and educate them as to what it is, because some people think
> that it means any type of abortion. Some think that women who want a therapeutic
> abortion are bad, bad mothers who don't want their kids. They teach the women
> that a therapeutic abortion could benefit them or other women in their families.
> -Isabel, 30, Managua

The ten women who advocate for the right to therapeutic abortions represent nine

separate groups within the autonomous movement. This speaks to the fact that many of

the self-governing SMOs have paid much attention to the issue since the right to

therapeutic abortions was revoked in 2007.

> The principal fight right now is to reverse the criminalization of therapeutic
> abortion which I believe violates the rights of women and is a step backwards for
> the laws in Nicaragua. That is primarily what our group is supporting these days
> because it is an organization made up of women, and young people.
> -Isabel, 30, Managua

> The group is working a lot on the issue of therapeutic abortion because it was just
> recently criminalized.
> -Belinda, 23, León

The responses reflect findings by Cuadra Lira and Jiménez Martinez (2009) who

argue that reversing the legislation passed in 2007 is a focused goal, or point of

collaboration, for the autonomous branch of the movement. The interviews also suggest that the message has resonated with the young members of these groups.

The three issues that are top of mind for these women, educational and professional opportunities, violence against women, and sexuality and reproductive issues are not topics that are unique to young women today. For example, women have been struggling for increased educational access for girls since long before the revolutionary period. Nevertheless, as in the past, young voices are significant in any discussions of these three matters because young women represent the very demographic that is most affected by these issues but also that is frequently silenced in the public sphere because of age and gender (El Nuevo Dario, 2006).

4. Looking forward

In the concluding statement in her book *Still Fighting: the Nicaraguan Women's Movement 1977-2000,* Katherine Isbester writes "fortunately, Nicaraguan women have always fought and fought well for themselves, their children, and society. And they continue to fight" (2001, 217). The struggle may have started in previous decades, but the testimonies of the twenty women in this study confirm that younger women are joining their older counterparts to defend their rights as women and citizens of their country. The interviews expose many difficulties for the women's and feminist movement, and for young women themselves. Still, despite being grounded in the reality of their situation, many of the women in this study transmitted confidence and optimism when asked about

the role of the movement in society, its future prospects, and the role of women in

Nicaragua.

For Talia and Carmen, the women's and feminist movement has contributed

positively to their own lives and personal self-worth.

> My main motivation [to be part of the movement] is myself. I have experienced
> oppression in my own life. I joined the movement to discover opportunities that
> will help me in my own life. But I am also motivated because I know that because
> of my own experiences I can help others think differently.
> -Talia, 27, Managua

> I was also a victim of violence with my ex-spouse. Feminism empowered me to
> find strength within myself. I could become independent. If I wanted to change
> the world, I needed to start with myself. One day I decided that I was not going to
> play the role of victim, I was going to take control of my relationships, my
> personal economic situation, my professional life.
> -Carmen, 28, Matagalpa

When questioned if they believe that participating in a social movement could

foster positive changes in Nicaraguan society, Soledad and Patricia, who are members of

the autonomous movement and AMNLAE respectively, responded affirmatively.

> Of course! If not, I would be at home right now cooking, listening to music and
> talking to my mother! I am here because I believe that this work can bear much
> fruit! And I believe that social movements right now are essential for Nicaragua
> particularly because of the situation right now: political problems, social
> problems, the economy is suffering.
> -Soledad, 20, Managua

> Yes, because if we as women, we as human beings, don't achieve, in an active
> way, in a conscious way, to open our own space, to realize our own dreams,
> nothing would happen for women. Therefore, for me it is fundamental to
> participate in these spaces because we have the opportunity to work, to fight, to
> change. We are not going to change the situation from one day to the next but,

little by little, successes will come. It is very important to participate, a hundred percent.
-Patricia, 26, Managua

Conversely, Marta was pessimistic about the role of the women's and feminist movement, explaining that "we don't have a strong influence. No one asks us what we want" (Marta, 26, Managua). However, other voices resonated with the responses of Soledad and Patricia in that they were more confident in the prospect of change. Two such voices noted that societal transformation would occur if two conditions are met: women continue to fight and have adequate support.

> I think that if we continue this fight my country can change. I know that it can change because the participation of us young women and the adult women. If we never give up, if we keep fighting, keep vocal, the circumstances in our country can change. Yes, the country can change. If there is growing awareness among ourselves, then the country will change. And with personal change, little by little the politics will change. We will begin to look at policies and ask how they will affect us.
> -Nora, 24, Managua

> If all of the young women and the adults support us, and if we give advice to those people who are going down the wrong path, and if they realize that, yes it can change. If we have the support of the right people.
> -Gabriella, 19, Managua

Helena, Talia and Alva, are encouraged that change is already happening. In particular, steps have been taken to include men in the fight.

> There has been change. Mobilizing can lead to change. There is still machismo. But now there are organizations that work to teach men that men and women are equal. There are more men that understand the situation; that think that I am equal to them, that think the same as me. They help the country to change. Now there are men who participate [in workshops].
> -Helena, 22 Managua

> A strength of some of the groups is that they work with men, and young men. This is fundamental because unless the vision of men change it would be difficult

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for women to change because women live in partnership with men, in work, in family. It is easier to work with young men because they are more critical of the situation.
-Talia, 27, Managua

Yes, there are men that serve us as support and who really identify with feminism. They have a sense of openness; they believe that women are not only meant to stay at home but that we also have presence in public spaces and in the private. But it has been quite a long process to achieve this change of attitude.
-Alva, 24, Managua

It was also made apparent that younger women are not sitting on the sidelines

waiting for the older generations to deliver results.

Young women are making a difference within the system, the system that has been subjugated to us for some time already. I think that there are more young women who are more conscience that we need to be active ourselves to fight for inclusive spaces, to make our own path to fight the gender gap that exists in our country that exists in organizations, in movements, in our society. There are many [young women] who are fighting.
-Patricia, 26, Managua (AMNLAE)

Well, we young women live in a sexist society. But all is not lost, more and more young women are joining organizations that defend the rights of women, and that's a good sign. A sign of change.
-Yelba, 24, Managua

Yelba elaborated that her feminist activism is not limited to meetings and marches; she is

expressing her political agency in her everyday life.

[I am being an activist] when I get mad at the taxi driver because he calls me 'sweetie', when I go out with friends and the waiter gives the bill to my male friend and assumes that the man always pays even though I asked my friend to go and I requested the bill, which I can pay, when I don't listen to sexist programs.
-Yelba, 24, Managua

Indeed, young women are demonstrating that they are agents of change by reconceptualizing the women's and feminist movement. In some cases, young women have formed new SMOs which are associated with the autonomous movement but were founded by and/or consist primarily of members of the younger generation. Victoria, who belongs to one such organization, explains that the groups' main objectives are to:

> Strengthen the leadership of young women, both in their private and public lives. Create opportunities for young women to reflect and search for ways to promote, exercise and defend the rights of young women. Generate critical reflection on sexist and adultist systems affecting young women.
> -Victoria, 25, Managua

Likewise, Soledad, Josefa and Lola are members of an SMO which fights for the rights of youth. This group has worked closely with a feminist SMO to create policies and educate its members about the rights and roles of women. Consequently, in addition to young women, young men also represented the organization at the March 8th International Women's Day march in Managua. This latter case is unorthodox within the autonomous movement, because unlike many SMOs which are adapting to include more youth, this organization was formed to defend the rights of youth but has since enlarged its framework to incorporate the issue of gender into its agenda.

Conclusion

While the results of this study represent the views of only a small sample size, they do demonstrate that there are young Nicaraguan women who have picked up the torch of their predecessors. Along with the more senior women in the movement, these young Nicaraguans are mobilizing to fight against a patriarchal system. The voices of the

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twenty women in this study reinforce the notion that young Nicaraguan women are indeed both victims of the society in which they live but also important actors who have great potential to be influential; opportunities are available but barriers still prevent young women from realizing their full potential as agents of change. The responses given suggest that female and youth activism is not dead in Nicaragua. Still, the meaning of social movement participation is open to interpretation as young women define for themselves the meaning of feminism, machismo, and political participation. In regards to the women's and feminist movement, the young interviewees are able to articulate challenges that the movement must address as it moves forward, namely adultism, unity and access to resources, and the current political landscape. However, their commitment to the movement is a positive indication that the women's and feminist movement will be able to transform and adapt to respond to needs and realities of this new generation.

Chapter 5 – Conclusion

The interviews summarized in the previous chapter were guided by the questions: why do young Nicaraguan women join the women's and feminist movement, and how do they perceive their role within the current conjuncture of female organizing and feminism? Because of restrictions in the research, namely the limited sample size, the findings can neither be applied to all young women in the country, nor to all young women within the women's and feminist movement. Nonetheless, this study brings to light certain thoughts and concerns of a select number of young members of the women's and feminist movement in present day Nicaragua; a demographic that has largely remained in the shadow of the movement's founding members. By drawing on the history of women and youth organizing in Nicaragua, and by employing a framework of social movement theory and generational issues in movements in English-speaking democracies, some preliminary themes to the above questions can be drawn from the data.

I. Micro Level Theories and Recruitment

Recruitment and sustained participation of members are vital to the continuity and growth of a movement. Therefore, studies examining why individuals become involved in social movements are as equally important in the understanding of SMOs as studies at societal and organizational levels. Five micro level theories for adherence to a movement were discussed in chapter two: networks and identity, rational choices and incentives, framing, biological availability, and moral shock. While the women in this study may

have joined the women's and feminist movement for any number of reasons, the five above-mentioned factors were included in their accounts.

The respondents named certain explanations for movement participation that parallel those expressed by previous generations of women. For instance, in the case of biological availability, Lola (21, Managua) and Josefa (21, Managua) indicated that, as in the past, some women are not able or permitted to join because of their responsibilities at home. Lola believes that "this is a great limitation" for the advancement of the movement. Also, networks remain an effective recruitment strategy as they were when many young people and women were invited to join the Ala Femenina and the Sandinista movement. Even in the modern communications era, Talia (27, Managua) and Gabriella (19, Managua) each noted that her journey to activism was instigated when a movement member personally invited her to a meeting. Furthermore, having a personal connection to an SMO carries weight when choosing whether to join. Just as many women historically came to AMNLAE because of its connection to the FSLN, Soledad (20, Managua) described how she came to know the work of the current organization to which she belongs during her participation in another SMO.

The young women also confirmed that identity gained from associating with a network can help or hinder recruitment efforts. Several interviewees expressed great pride in identifying with the women's and feminist movement. Yet, respondents also pointed out that some of their peers may not join because they wish not associate with a movement whose members are viewed by some segments of society as "witches, 'vagas', abortionists, crazy, lesbians, for everything that is bad" (Belinda, 23, León). Likewise, if

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family and friends do not support the cause, many young women will be less likely to join.

Another reason for recruitment and participation is rooted in rational choice theory. This theory examines incentives as a reason for joining a movement. Three types are proposed: material, solidary (being part of a group), and purposive (contributing to a good cause). During the interviews it became apparent that each of these incentives is applicable to the women in this study. Talia (27, Managua) and Victoria (25, Managua) mentioned the solidary incentive of organizing with other like-minded women as a contributing factor to their involvement. Josefa (21, Managua) and Rosa (25, Managua) each named a purposive incentive, namely contributing to an SMO with worthy principles. One incentive common to many of the interviewees is material in nature: the employment and professional opportunities that the movement has to offer, including practicums, bursaries, or paid employment. As was described in chapter three, during Somoza's rule, many women joined the Ala Femenina for similar reasons. However, educational and professional opportunities were not cited as motives by the women who joined the women's and feminist movement during the 1980s and 1990s.

The phenomenon of organizing for professional incentives could be a sign of the degeneracy of the movement, as it likely was during the Somoza era. However, there are two reasons to suggest that this is not the current case. Firstly, unlike the Ala Femenina which was supportive of the ruling power at the time, notwithstanding the three members of AMNLAE, the young women in this study are decidedly opposed to the present government. The current administration is indeed an adversary of the autonomous branch

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of the women's and feminist movement. Therefore, it is certain that women today are not supporting autonomous groups as a means to profit from political patronage, as was suggested occurred during Somoza's rule. Rather, according to the accounts given, the opposite may be true. Young women may be forced to find educational and professional positions within the movement precisely because, like the autonomous branch, they reject the current political climate. The interviews reveal that it is difficult for women to access educational and professional opportunities in an anti-feminist society. Positions that are available to women may not be accessible for those women opposed to the ruling party. Therefore, it is possible that women who define themselves as activists or feminists look for opportunities within the movement because, in the current societal conjecture, positions are limited elsewhere. Alva (24, León) was adamant that this is the case.

Secondly, some groups within the movement have professional development programs for young women as part of their mandates. For example, since 1989 the Association Miriam has offered bursaries to assist a select number of young women access post-secondary studies. The recipients are expected to attend regular meetings which aim to "…contribute to their personal and professional development" (Asociación Miriam 2005 - my translation). The two reasons cited here offer an explanation as to why some of the women in this study indicated that they became involved in the movement through educational and professional possibilities. According to McAdam, McCarthy and Zald (1988, 708-709), it is likely that many of these women will remain active with women's and feminist SMOs long after their program or position has ended since they will want to utilize their skills and retain their identity as movement members.

In other regards, the environment in which the present generation of young women came to the movement differs greatly from that of the past. Historically, two important motives for the recruitment of participants to the revolutionary movement, and by extension to the women's and feminist movement, were framing and moral shock. Nicaraguan society has experienced many changes since this period, including an armed insurrection, civil conflict, and the transformation of the political system from a dictatorship to a fragile constitutional democracy. The "ebb and flow of sentiments" as explained by Zald and Ash (1966, 330) sees that the climate of yesteryears has come to pass. As exemplified below, because of shifts in society the practice of framing is being carried out in venues different than during the pre-revolutionary period. Also, as of late, societal level moral shocks do not appear as significant in persuading contemporary young women to mobilize within the women's and feminist movement.

Social movement theory explains that SMOs will benefit from a favourable social environment complemented by a strong situational framework. It was seen in chapter three that framing, particularly through the practice of 'awareness-raising,' played an important role in the recruitment of Nicaraguans to the FSLN. In large part, this is because specific conditions within the Catholic Church at the time gave rise to CEBs. These groups actively encouraged the population to view their personal circumstances through a lens that questioned power and social norms. For example, many women interviewed by Margaret Randall for her works on women in the revolution talked about the positive impact religious education and the work of the CEBs had in their paths to activism. The religious movements of that era made these women more aware of

inequalities in their society. Ultimately, the women were taught that they had the power to act (Randall 1981 & 1994). In comparison, only two women in this study, Talia (27, Managua) and Carmen (28, Matagalpa), spoke of religious teachings as a factor in their decision to join the women's and feminist movement. Talia's experience was positive in that the particular religious group with which she was involved encouraged critical reflection of society. For Carmen, she became a member of the women's and feminist movement because she rejected what she was taught by religion.

Clearly, the senior leaders of the women's and feminist movement still draw on their experiences in CEBs and other spaces where awareness-raising was practiced, as it remains an important activity for many groups within the movement. For instance, Gabriella (19, Managua) was made aware of the issue of violence against women through a series of workshops hosted an SMO. She came to see that violence is common in Nicaraguan society, but is not acceptable. As a consequence, she now speaks to other young women in her community, encouraging them to take action to end violence. However, awareness-raising, or framing, is not as far-reaching as it once was. Trends within the Catholic Church have changed. For a host of reasons, including internal cleavages and the rise of Evangelical Christianity, the popular church is not as pervasive as it had been during the pre-revolutionary era (Sabia 1997, 215-217). Rather than benefitting from CEBs, and the proliferation of "the preferential option for the poor," individual SMOs are left to facilitate for themselves the understanding of how personal experiences are the product of unjust circumstances.

Also, the phenomenon of moral shock was largely absent in the discussions with this cohort of women. For this new generation, any event causing a moral shock leading to movement participation seems to take place on an individual, case-by-case basis. The discrimination that Helena (22, Managua) faced because of her disability, and the violence experienced by Carmen (28, Matagalpa) at the hands of a former partner were significant factors in their decisions to join the movement. Nevertheless, discussions with the interviewees suggest that instances of moral shock today are not as prevalent in leading to collective organizing as they were during the pre-revolutionary years when they occurred on a societal level. For instance, as exemplified in chapter three, the death of Pedro Joaquin Chamorro in 1978 at the hands of the National Guard prompted many middle and upper class women to join the revolution. While it is possible that some of the young women joined the movement because of their outrage of the ban on therapeutic abortion, none specifically mentioned it as a primary motive for participation.

II. Women's Organizing

Young Nicaraguan women in this study have adopted the movement's goals and narratives as their own. But this does not mean that they accept status quo. As outlined in chapter two, young women in English-speaking democracies argue that they, members of the 'third wave,' have redefined the concept of feminism to account for changes in their societies. The responses of the young women in this study suggest that this is likely also the case for the new wave of young women involved in the Nicaraguan women's and feminist movement. Many of the voices in this study echo what Schnittker, Freese and Powell found in their research of young women in English-speaking countries, that

"…recent decades have witnessed a proliferation of 'feminisms,' each promoting a different conception of what feminism is" (2003, 610).

Even among young Nicaraguan women involved in the women's and feminist movement the term 'feminism' is nuanced. Though it is undeniably about gender issues, for some respondents it is also about power arrangements, or "… a constant fight against all forms of discrimination," (Talia, 27, Managua) which extends beyond that of gender issues. For other respondents, 'feminism' as a label is a negative connotation from which they would rather distance themselves. Certainly, young Nicaraguan women parallel their counterparts elsewhere who have demonstrated that one does not have to identify as a feminist to support a feminist ideology. That being the case, the suggestion by Katherine Hoyt (1997, 70) that in the Nicaraguan post-revolutionary landscape the terms 'feminist' and 'feminine' each relate to a specific socio-economic class may not hold true for this younger demographic who is not preoccupied by labels. Instead, the young women interviewed give the impression that they are more concerned with actions and behaviours.

It is clear that the perception that the young women in this study have of the women's and feminist movement in their country differs from that of their counterparts in English-speaking countries, where the debate over post-feminism questions the relevancy of the movement. In these societies, where previous generations of women have made significant advances, women's and feminist movements may seem unnecessary. In contrast, the Nicaraguan respondents clearly establish a common goal of the movement: combating machista attitudes and behaviours which are prevalent in Nicaraguan culture.

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More specifically, there are four aspects of their society which they seek to change: an end to sexism and violence against women, as well as an expansion and strengthening of educational and professional opportunities for women, and sexual and reproductive rights.

The majority of the women in the autonomous branch of the movement also consider the political system, and those in power, as detrimental to the movement's goals. It is perhaps not surprising that on a personal level most of these respondents distanced themselves from formal political institutions, particularly partisan politics, or spoke out against the current system and leaders. In doing so, they are not unlike their English-speaking counterparts who also reject their traditional political systems and turn to other ways of expressing political agency (Bulbeck and Harris 2008, 327-238). For Yelba (24, Managua), Nora (24, Managua), Carmen (28, Matagalpa), and Talia (27, Managua) their activism within the movement is a political expression. However, this sentiment was not the norm. Many of the respondents reacted negatively when it was suggested that their involvement was political in nature. These women do not want to be linked to partisan politics, which they view with great skepticism. Older feminists, like Sofía Montenegro, are trying to debunk the attitude that activism is not political. In 2002 she wrote:

> It is on this last point that we have a fundamental problem: a gradual de-politicizing of the civil society organizations in which we have gotten used to saying, 'No, I don't want to get involved in that because it's political.' Cutting loose from the parties, which is necessary, has become confused with cutting loose from politics. I can be a citizen without a party, but not without political positions: on authoritarianism, on corruption, on institutionality, on the rule of law and other political issues (Montenegro, Envío, May 2002).

Without a doubt, every respondent in this study holds a viewpoint on the issues named by Montenegro. Whether she recognizes it or not, by mobilizing around issues affecting her and her community, each is demonstrating that she is indeed a political actor.

Ultimately, young women's resistance to machismo and the fragile Nicaraguan political system strengthens their commitment to the egalitarian aspects of feminism. In doing so, it makes them more clearly aware that feminism is not about replacing one form of domination with another, but rather fighting for a democratic and inclusive society. In this sense, such a conceptualization of feminism is closely related to that which was promoted by the Sandinistas during the revolution; that the women's struggle is linked to other issues of social justice. However, for this new generation, unlike for the male leaders of the revolution, young women in contemporary times do not see injustices as merely a social division of labour that will be corrected by economic means alone. Moreover, for the younger generation, women's issues are not secondary to other problems facing society but are of equal importance. Soledad (20, Managua) explained that "feminism is a way of saying 'here are my rights that I can exercise as a woman while respecting the rights of others.'"

The responses of the young Nicaraguan women are significant for the viability of the movement for three reasons. The interviewees 1) suggest that it is not relevant to speak of post-feminism in their context because anti-feminist ideas are still widespread in Nicaraguan society; 2) clearly identify focused goals for the movement, something that Isbester (2001, 187) outlines as a condition for the success of the movement; and 3) pinpoint targets for the locus of desired change, including personal attitudes and

behaviours, and national legislation. In short, the young members confirm that the women's and feminist movement is still relevant for their generation and society. Even in a political climate which has been "…characterized by significant restrictions on the exercise of fundamental rights for all citizens of the country…particularly for the women's movement," (Cuadra Lira and Jiménez Martinez 2009, 19) young Nicaraguan women are learning from, contributing to, and founding new SMOs, within the movement.

1. Generational Legacies

As members of the next wave of female activists in their county, the young participants of this study inherit the legacy left by previous generations of women activists and feminists. They have joined a strong movement. Still, the young women identify a new internal challenge: adultism. The term adultism, which I have not found used in neither historical accounts of young Nicaraguan women, nor of young English-speaking activists, was expressed repeatedly by this younger generation of Nicaraguan women. Many of the respondents spoke of their experiences confronting adultism, and expressed some frustration integrating into a movement that is managed by older women. Like the English-speaking third-waver, Naomi Wolf (Wolf 1994, 68), Talia (27, Managua) implied that young Nicaraguan women have a hard time living up to a feminist identity because the older women in the Nicaraguan movement are considered the "real feminists."

It is curious, however, that despite the use of the term adultism the responses given by the young women in this study suggest that generational debates, which recently

shaped feminist discourse in some English-speaking countries, have for the most part not

been repeated in the Nicaraguan context. Differences of opinion do exist between the

various generations of women. Yet, aside from a few comments questioning the lack of

participation from the younger generation, these divisions have largely not been played

out in the public realm and do not appear acute. Despite any feelings of discontent, many

of the respondents are cautious not to be overly critical of the women who founded the

movement. As a whole they expressed gratitude for the accomplishments and

contributions of the more senior women.

> According to Schneider…
>
> Within a social movement, awareness of historical significance in second and later generations is, at least, partially a function of the earlier generation's ability to reach and mobilize the later ones …(1988, 7)

It is difficult to reduce participation to one cause or motive as it is often a result of

complex and interconnected forces. Even so, an important reason young Nicaraguan

women are drawn to the women's and feminist movement is certainly because the older

generation has effectively transmitted their legacy to the next. According to the young

women's accounts, as a whole, the older generation passes on the movement's history,

spells out its goals, and, in spite of instances of adultism, empowers young women to take

action. As noted by Carmen (28, Matagalpa), a path has been set. Consequently, the

younger women in this study feel as if change is possible.

Certain aspects of Nicaraguan society have changed since the revolutionary

period when the women's and feminist movement was born. There have been many

successes but also many challenges as the movement transformed from its origins as an adjunct of the FSLN through successive governments. Still, the women's and feminist groups have adapted and proliferated to address outstanding and contemporary issues. By doing so, they render their goals relevant for members of the younger generation. Rational choice theorists postulate that individuals will choose not to participate in a movement if they consider the costs greater than the prospective outcome. The dedication and optimism expressed by the women in this study signify that, to them, the benefits of potential achievements are worth the fight.

III. A movement in decline or in transition?

Speaking of their research of young women in Australia and North America, Bulbeck and Harris caution that a change in political tactics by youth and young adults should not be interpreted as disengagement or apathy. Furthermore, they maintain that young women's political involvement should no longer "…be read against the yardstick of 1970s' definition of politics" (2008, 237). In the same vein, Zald and Ash note that over time social movements are affected by a various "internal and external pressures" (1966, 327). For these reasons, it is unfair to measure the present-day activism of young Nicaraguan women against that of young people in the past. Even so, some senior activists in Nicaraguan civil society, such as Sofía Montenegro (Montenegro, Envío, May 2002) remain concerned that youth apathy is resulting in shrinking numbers of young people active in social movements. It is not possible to know from this study if the number of mobilized young women is actually less than in the past. Nonetheless, the

following three situational differences may account for the seeming gap between the influx of young Nicaraguan women in the movement in historical and current contexts.

Firstly, as discussed earlier in this section, the awareness-raising campaigns by CEBs, which lent a strong situational framework to social injustices, are no longer widespread (Sabia 1997). The decline of CEBs may negatively impact the recruitment of young women to the movement because, as Tarrow (1998, 49) notes, churches have traditionally been important communities through which to reach new members. The women's and feminist movement in Nicaragua may not be able to rely on an important social actor in the country, the Church, to help raise awareness and to draw women into the movement.

Secondly, as outlined in chapter two, Zald and Ash (1966, 330) theorize that the support base of a movement may be affected by a major event or change in society. Likewise, Tarrow (1998, 4-7) postulates that new waves of activism are most likely to occur when there is a significant change or constraint. Clearly, this was the case during the revolutionary and post-revolutionary periods when many women and young people were mobilizing en masse following events such as the 1972 earthquake, the assassination of the journalist Chamorro, the 1978-1979 War of Liberation, the Contra War, and the defeat of the Sandinistas in 1990. Since the early 1990s, notwithstanding changes in government, the country has been relatively politically and economically stable. The outcome has been a decrease in societal level moral shocks.

Thirdly, though relations between the movement and various governments since 1990 have never been ideal, according to recent accounts "…the political system is closed to the influence of any social actor, but particularly the women's movement" (Cuadra Lira and Jiménez Martinez 2009, 9). It could be argued that this is a great constraint and should result in an increase number of movement adherents. However, because of the bandwagon effect (Hirsch 1990, 245) individuals may not join the movement simply because they feel that there are not enough participants, or that conditions are not right, for change to be possible. Because these three structural conditions have changed, it cannot be expected that large segments of the population, including young women, will mobilize in great numbers.

Two other dissimilarities between the past and the present circumstances can explain any ostensible lack of leadership from today's young women. One can be found in the works of Kampwirth, who argues that many of the new feminist leaders of the 1990s became so only after they had previously gained significant experience within the Sandinista movement (Kampwirth 2004, 10). As a whole, young women in modern times are only now honing their leadership skills in a social movement milieu. A second explanation is that young women are not in a position in which they need to launch a new movement. Rather, they are entering an established movement that already has strong leaders. Consequently, the formation of young women is affected both negatively and positively; the young movement members have many mentors from whom to learn, yet because of the leadership of the older members young women cannot, or need not, assume leading roles within the movement.

Despite the preceding five reasons that could account for a decline in movement participation and growth, the young women in this study are not sitting idle. They are political actors with important opinions, valuable skills, and unique experiences. Drawing from the work of Schneider (1988) who emphasizes learning from the legacy of others, and Maddison (2004) who stresses the importance in maintaining movement goals in spite of unfavourable political climates, perhaps the most important role at this time for young women in the movement is two-fold. One is to continue learning from the more senior women in the movement while building upon their own skills as leaders and agents of change. A second undertaking for young women activists is to use their unique perspectives to actively maintain dynamism within the movement and in the public realm until a new era, one that is more open and favourable to civil society, arrives. In doing so, the young women are following in the footsteps of the first feminist in their country, Toledo de Aguerri, who kept gender issues in the public domain during a period when society was still largely closed to her ideas. Likewise, these young activists are playing a vital part in ensuring the longevity of the movement, a key feature of any movement (Cohen 1985, 673).

Conclusion

If the Nicaraguan women's and feminist movement is to continue to remain a powerful force, both within the country and throughout the region, it will require new members and leaders who will continue to champion its causes. Undoubtedly, young women are a vital part of the continuity of the movement. On a practical level, the responses given by the interviewees in this study could be of potential interest to

recruiters who wish to develop strategies to draw other young women into the movement. More broadly, by employing a generational lens, this work furthers previous examinations of the women's and feminist movement in Nicaragua. This study also lends itself as a framework for subsequent research of young members of women and feminist movements. Future analyses may continue to explore the role that young Nicaraguan women play as political actors both within and outside of the women's and feminist movement. Such investigations would contribute to the understanding of the nexus between this understudied demographic, Nicaraguan society, and social mobilization.

Appendix 1 - Interview Dates and Locations

Pseudonym	Age	Date of Interview	Location of Interview
Alva	24	March 10, 2011	León
Belinda	23	March 10, 2011	León
Carmen	28	March 13, 2011	Matagalpa
Dora	26	March 14, 2011	Matagalpa
Elvira	25	March 15, 2011	Managua
Fatima	28	March 15, 2011	Managua
Gabriella	19	March 15, 2011	Managua
Helena	22	March 16, 2011	Managua
Isabel	30	March 17, 2011	Managua
Josefa	21	March 18, 2011	Managua
Lola	21	March 21, 2011	Managua
Marta	26	March 21, 2011	Managua
Nora	24	March 22, 2011	Managua
Olivia	26	March 22, 2011	Managua
Patricia	26	March 22, 2011	Managua
Rosa	25	March 22, 2011	Managua
Soledad	20	March 23, 2011	Managua
Talia	27	March 29, 2011	Managua
Victoria	25	April 6, 2011	Electronic
Yelba	24	April 8, 2011	Electronic

Appendix 2 – Groups, Associations, and Collectives represented

Asociación de Mujeres Nicaragüenses Luisa Amanda Espinoza (AMNLAE)

Asociación Feminista Yaocihuatl

Colectivo Feminista Panteras Rosas

Corriente Feminista

Fundación Puntos de Encuentro

Grupo Feminista de León

Grupo Vanancia

Colectivo de Mujeres Itza

Movimiento de Mujeres Trabajadoras y Desempleadas "María Elena Cuadra"

Movimiento Autónomo de Mujeres de Nicaragua

Movimineto Juvenil Nicaragüita

Asociación Miriam

Puntos de Encuentros

Red de Mujeres de Matagalpa

Appendix 3- Guiding Interview Questions

- Please describe your upbringing.
- How old are you?
- What was your first political experience?
- To which social movement organization do you belong?
- What is your role in this organization?
- How long have you been with this organization?
- Do you believe that your participation in this organization is part of a political process?
- What factors or experiences motivated you to become involved with this organization?
- Why did you join this organization rather than another social movement organization?
- Please describe your experience with this organization.
- Please describe the relationship between the older women and younger women in this organization and the movement as a whole.
- What do you hope to gain from your participation with this organization?
- What are the main goals or objectives of this organization?
- What have been some of the successes of the women's and feminist movement?
- What social, economic and political issues are important to you?
- What motivates you to mobilize around these issues?
- In your opinion, do the challenges and demands of young women today differ from the challenges and demands of previous generations of Nicaraguan women? Why do you feel this way?
- In your opinion, are there barriers for young women to participating in social movement organizations? If so, what are they? If no, why not?
- In your opinion, why do some women your age not get involved in social movements?
- Looking back on the history of your country, women have done many things for causes in which they believe. How does your organization fit into this story?
- In your opinion, how does the situation for young women differ from the past? How is it the similar?
- What does the word feminist mean to you?
- Do you consider yourself to be a feminist?
- Are you a member of a political party?
- Do you support a political party?

Appendix 4- Consent Form

Ficha de Consentimiento

Proyecto de Investigación

Una investigación sobre la participación de las mujeres jóvenes nicaragüenses

Investigadora: Roberta Gramlich

Estudiante del departamento de Política

Universidad de Manitoba (Canadá)

Esta ficha de consentimiento debe ofrecerle una idea básica acerca de lo que trata la investigación y su participación en ella. Si desea más información siéntase libre de preguntarme. Tómese su tiempo para leer ésto cuidadosamente.

Como estudiante en la Universidad de Manitoba en Winnipeg, Canadá, estoy llevando a cabo una investigación sobre la participación de las mujeres jóvenes nicaragüenses. La entrevista será de 45 a 60 minutos y se centrará en la participación en movimientos sociales.

Es un estudio independiente, no estoy afiliada a ningún grupo o partido político. Este estudio me ayudará a mejorar mis habilidades como investigadora y mi entendimiento de las mujeres jóvenes en Nicaragua. También espero que este estudio sea útil a personas y organizaciones que participan en movimientos sociales y que buscan saber más sobre las mujeres jóvenes hoy en día.

Detalles sobre el proceso:

- Se puede retirar del estudio en cualquier momento sin consecuencia alguna.
- Toda la información será guardada en un lugar seguro y privado, sólo yo tendré acceso a ella.
- Las entrevistas serán gravadas para que pueda escucharlas una vez que regrese a Canadá.
- Si un traductor fuera necesario, él o ella mantendrá toda la información confidencial.
- Si desea, puedo cambiar su nombre en la investigación.
- Si desea, puedo enviarle un resumen (en español) de mi investigación.

Esta investigación ha sido aprobada por el comité de la investigación de ética de la facultad mancomunada de la Universidad de Manitoba

Si tiene dudas sobre la ética de este proyecto, puede contactarme o a la Secretaría de Ética (de mi Universidad) a xxxx o al correo electrónico xxxx.

Su firma en este formulario indica que usted ha comprendido toda la información sobre su participación en este proyecto de investigación y que ha consentido en participar. Una copia de este consentimiento la ha sido entregada.

Si quisiera más detalles sobre este estudio, por favor siéntase libre de contactarme.

Roberta Gramlich

Correo electrónico: xxxx

Teléfono: xxxx

Su ayuda en este estudio es bastante apreciada.

Le concedo autorización a la investigadora para utilizar mi nombre es este estudio. ___

Deseo que mi verdadero nombre no sea utilizado en este estudio. ___

_____

Nombre de la entrevistada

_____

Firma

_____

Fecha

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