

WOMEN AND POWER STRUCTURES IN CUBA AND NICARAGUA

by

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presented to the University of Manitoba
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in
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KELLY SAXBERG

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

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ABSTRACT

The Cuban and Nicaraguan revolutions have sparked much debate over the changing role of women within societies which attempt a radical transformation of political, economic and social structures. Have women's lives been transformed for the better or worse? Although several comparisons of women's status under regimes committed to a socialist model of emancipation have been written, no attempt has been made to contrast the case of Cuban and Nicaraguan women since the turn of the century. Much of the literature on women in these two countries has focused on the post-revolutionary period and the Cuban and Nicaraguan government's attempts to address the inequality of the sexes. This thesis strives to rectify two gaps in the literature, first, by describing women's access to the power structures of pre-revolutionary Cuba and Nicaragua, and secondly, to analyze Cuban and Nicaraguan attempts to promote the emancipation of women within the context of increasing militarization in a post-revolutionary setting.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

When I visited Nicaragua in 1984, I was struck by the visibility of women in positions of authority. A newly literate middle-aged woman authorized my visa; women bank tellers cashed my travellers cheques; female customs officials and border guards ushered me through a recently destroyed border crossing. Later I saw women wearing t-shirts proclaiming they had signed up for service in the patriotic militia and heard earnest teenagers discussing the merits of socialism. There were contradictions as well: a little girl who did not go to school because her mother could not afford paper and pencils, another child selling birth control pills out of a basket in the market, a homeless old woman begging in the street while a luxurious hotel was being built to accommodate wealthy travellers. I would like to dedicate this thesis to the women of Nicaragua who inspired me to know more of their struggle for peace and justice.

I would also like to thank my thesis advisor, Professor Timothy E. Anna for his interest in my topic and for his patience throughout its preparation. The completion of my work was made possible by the financial support I received from the University Women's Club of Winnipeg and the Adalsteinn Kristjansson travelling scholarship. I would especially like to thank Ronald Harpelle, who offered his advice and encouragement throughout every stage of the thesis. Finally I would like to thank Gabriel Saxberg Harpelle for sleeping peacefully in his baby carrier while his mom worked on the computer.

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Introduction

During periods of extreme crisis throughout history, Latin American women have taken part in armed insurrection against repressive governments and oppressive living conditions, however scholars have pointed out women's "propensity to withdraw" from active political intervention when the crisis has been resolved.¹ Yet with the emergence of socialist regimes, some believe that women's participation in popular insurrections fundamentally alters social relations between men and women. Norma Stoltz Chinchilla contends that "where the taking of state power has been preceded by a long, protracted 'people's war,' the transformation of social relations (especially those between men and women) has advanced the farthest."²

Many feminists look to the Cuban and Nicaraguan revolutions as examples of radical attempts to alter unequal social relations between men and women. They are not convinced yet that the socialist models articulated by the current leadership of the two countries will achieve equality between the sexes, therefore the progress made over

¹ Elsa Chaney, Supermadre Women in Politics in Latin America (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 1979)

² Norma Stoltz Chinchilla, "Mobilizing Women: Revolution Within the Revolution" Revolution in Central America. Edited by Stanford Central America Action Network (Boulder: Westview Press, 1983) p.153

the past 29 years in Cuba and the past 9 years in Nicaragua have received intense scrutiny. Most agree, however, that significant advances have been made in terms of women's health, legal status, educational levels, and access to employment. Furthermore, they acknowledge that both countries are committed, at least in theory, to the socialization of the domestic sphere in order that women can enter fully into productive labour and the political process. Domestic responsibilities, or reproductive labour, which maintains the labour force's ability to participate in productive labour must be either shared equally between men and women or be provided by the state if women are to be freed from a double shift. Male prejudice has proven intransigent, hence the transformation of social relations is dependent upon the ability of a society to overcome material barriers in the provision of such things as childcare, communal kitchens, laundry services and the like.

Historically women have been excluded from power structures; their exclusion has maintained male dominance in social, political, and economic relations. It follows then that greater access to power structures would challenge that dominance and would ensure women's ability to shape equitable human relations. To establish whether or not women's participation in revolutionary struggle initiates a shift in the balance of power between women and men one must first establish that women in pre-revolutionary Cuba and Nicaragua were alienated from power structures.

Latin American history offers abundant resources with which to analyze the changing roles of women in societies which have undergone radical social transformations, yet the history of women during periods of political and economic upheaval in both countries remains fragmentary. In addition, most of the literature on women in Cuba and Nicaragua is limited by the convention of discussing history in terms of pre-revolutionary or post-revolutionary periods. Rarely is there an attempt to document and analyze a historical period that is not broken up by the arbitrary date of the collapse of a regime. Moreover, ideological disparities cloud our knowledge of women's evolving incorporation into power structures. The multitude of analytical viewpoints can be classified into four theoretical positions: Pro-capitalist, mainstream Feminist, Marxist, and Socialist-Feminist historians.

Mainstream historians and pro-capitalist observers usually ignore women. When they do pause to wonder about women's part in history they often treat women as a special interest group in the same way they would perhaps discuss trade unions or ethnic minorities. Occasionally, one is able to glean some information from a discussion of social conditions of a given period or passing references to women of note, but seldom is there ever an attempt to integrate an analysis of women's contributions to the development of a society's economy or political system into the larger

analysis. Unfortunately, many books rarely provide information that goes beyond a discussion of a few famous heroines or prominent women of the elite classes.

Nevertheless, a few historians within the pro-capitalist category have plunged into the relatively new field of women's history. One striking example of the continuation of male-biased history which purports to tell the female side of the story, is Manuel Rubio Sánchez's Status de la mujer en centroamerica 1503-1821.³ The author carefully names the various first ladies of each province or state, and traces the evolving ethnicity of Central America using the racist theories of Pedro Yurrita y Maury. He focuses on cases of incest, adultery, or murder which involve women and discusses the problems of marriage outside of the racial confines dictated by the colonial authorities. Considering his book was published in 1976 it is discouraging to find a passage which reads: "data concerning other crimes committed by women, except those inherent to the sex, have not, at least for the moment, yet been found"⁴

Other historians are slightly more sophisticated in their discussion of women. Occasionally, they offer a few generalizations as to the position of women within a particular society at a certain period. For example, Hugh

³ Manuel Rubio Sánchez, Status de la mujer en centroamerica 1503-1821 (Guatemala: Editorial "José de Pineda Ibarra", 1976)

⁴ Rubio Sánchez, p.223

Thomas, who is recognized as an authority on Cuban history, managed to include a few paragraphs in his seminal work, Cuba The Pursuit of Freedom, to describe urban women in Cuba in 1909. He tells us, without evidence or even an example, that their status had been improved by Cuba's close relations with the United States. He then goes on to describe Cuban women's use of marriage as an escape, their tendency to overuse cosmetics, and their partiality for European fashions. In essence he paints a picture of empty lives--a portrait that simply reinforces ethnocentric and stereotypical descriptions of Latin American women.⁵

Discussions of the changing role of women in revolutionary societies are similarly limited. For example, Lowry Nelson provides a good example of scholarly abilities blinded by sexism and ideological bias. Using increasing divorce rates as evidence, Lowry labels Fidel Castro's promotion of women's emancipation as a source of family dissolution. He claims that "the emancipation of Cuban women from the home and some of the responsibilities of child-rearing has been accompanied by a dis-emancipation of men" who, he argues, "no longer enjoy the degree of freedom of choice they possessed before the revolution."⁶ Others, like Cuban ex-patriot Jorge Domínguez, dismiss altogether

⁵ Hugh Thomas, Cuba: The Pursuit of Freedom (New York Harper and Row, 1971) p.498

⁶ Lowry Nelson, Cuba--The Measure of a Revolution (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1972) p.153

the notion that socialism can lead to women's emancipation, arguing, for example, that any increases in numbers of women represented at high levels of political office is a reflection of "symbolic politics" aimed at increasing the legitimacy of the Cuban regime.⁷ Some scholars, like Carmelo Mesa-Lago, take a more balanced approach and use statistics to evaluate the theoretical commitments of socialist governments but while much of the data Mesa-Lago presents is useful, his interpretation of that information has proven shortsighted and occasionally manipulative.⁸

Like the pro-capitalist school of history, mainstream-feminist historians focus narrowly on the advances made by women from the upper and middle classes. They assume that the traditions of liberal democracy hold the greatest potential for progress and they ignore evidence that suggests that women from the impoverished majority are effectively alienated from spheres of influence by their position within the class structure of capitalist society. Generally, they judge a country's progress toward female equality by its legal and political reforms, the level of female participation in the labour force, their

⁷ Jorge Domínguez, "Revolutionary Politics: The New Demands for Orderliness" Cuba Internal and International Affairs (London: Sage Publications, 1982) p.32-33

⁸ See Lourdes Casal's criticism of leading scholars such as Carmelo Mesa-Lago and Jorge Domínguez in her article "Revolution and Conciencia: Women in Cuba," Women, War and Revolution. Editors Carol R. Berkin and Clara M. Lovett (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, 1980).

representation as elected officials, and their ability to form independent organizations and pressure groups concerned with "women's issues".

Because mainstream feminists assume that certain interests exist which are common to all women, regardless of class or ethnicity, they often make generalizations which do not hold true for the majority of women.⁹ For example, Susan Kaufman Purcell argues that women in pre-revolutionary Cuba had achieved one of the highest levels of equality in Latin America because of the existence of a plantation system instead of the more traditional and patriarchal hacienda system. Moreover, she contends that female literacy rates were high, access to the political system had been granted, the Catholic church had lost its authority, the close relationship between Cuba and the United States provided a positive example of women's potential.¹⁰ Like many historians, Kaufman Purcell fails to take into account the severe alienation of poor women within capitalist Cuba and instead focuses only on the advances made by women who were in a strong economic position.

⁹ An excellent example of such an approach can be found in Anna Macías, Against All Odds - The Feminist Movement in Mexico to 1940 (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1986)

¹⁰ Susan Kaufman Purcell, "Modernizing Women for a Modern Society: The Cuban Case" in Female and Male in Latin America, Edited by Ann Pescatello. (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1973) p.260.

Mainstream Feminist writers in Nicaragua writing in the first half of the twentieth century, similarly, confined their focus to women of the wealthier classes. For example, Josefa Toledo de Aguerri's descriptions of Nicaraguan women's advances over the 19th and 20th centuries consistently ignores the continuous marginalization of poor women. Similarly, writers such as Lucrecia Noguera Carazo, are able to ignore the existence of the thousands of illiterate and powerless Nicaraguan women who populated the countryside and the urban slums to speak in glowing terms of the advances made by a few women.¹¹ Even worse, the historian Justina Huerdo de Espinosa, in a lengthy treatise on the history of women, did not even consider any of her compatriots to merit discussion. The only mention made of Nicaraguan women was in the dedication of the book.¹²

In contrast to mainstream Feminists, who patently ignore class differences, Marxist historians (I am using the term broadly, in order to avoid having to outline the numerous ideological positions which characterize the left) see class and class struggle as a reliable starting point from which to judge the dynamics of a society under question. They accept Freidrich Engels's position that:

¹¹ Lucrecia Noguera Carazo, Evolucion cultural y politica de la mujer Nicaraguense (pamphlet 1975)

¹² Justina Huerdo de Espinosa, La Mujer Antigua y La Mujer Moderna (Managua: Editorial La Nueva Prensa, 1946)

the first class antagonism which appears in history coincides with the development of the antagonism between man and woman in monogamian marriage, and the first class oppression with that of the female sex by the male.¹³

Furthermore, they believe that the social relations created with the emergence of private property, and the economic dominance of men will be transformed through class struggle. Once equality before the law is achieved, the family is no longer the chief economic unit of society, and women are incorporated into public industry, male predominance will "vanish".¹⁴ Therefore, Marxist scholars tend to avoid gender issues in the discussion of women's progress toward emancipation and instead focus on the dynamic of class struggle.

Nevertheless, within the Marxist school of thought, several important case studies of Cuban and Nicaraguan women have emerged. Best known, perhaps, are Margaret Randall's four books Cuban Women Now, Women in Cuba: Twenty Years Later, Inside the Nicaraguan Revolution and Sandino's Daughters. Unfortunately, her discussion of the Cuban and Nicaraguan situation, while remarkable for its vivid portrayal of the life women experience as "guerrilleras" in armed struggle or as "camaradas" under socialist leadership in post-revolutionary society, is not based on a systematic or critical evaluation.

¹³ Freidrich Engels. "The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State" in The Marx Engels Reader Edited by Robert C. Tucker (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1978) p.739

¹⁴ Engels, p.744, 750

Numerous historians work within Randall's school of thought, yet few offer anything more than uncritical taxonomies of the programs and legal reforms which aim to fulfill Cuba's or Nicaragua's articulated commitment to female emancipation within the context of a classless society.¹⁵ In particular, many books published by Cuban historians are blatantly propagandistic and offer a view of revolutionary society that is just as surreal as that of their mainstream counterparts.

Fortunately, there are several other works within the Marxist category that go beyond the personalized and popular history offered by Randall and her colleagues to outline changes in material conditions and socio-economic relations in order to explain the context in which revolution has occurred, and how it has affected various sectors within society. For example, George Black in Triumph of the People, documents the role of women in various movements and spontaneous uprisings and integrates his findings into a broader analysis of the process of the unification of anti-Somoza opposition forces under the Sandinista platform.¹⁶ Unfortunately, Black's contribution, like those of many of his colleagues, is constrained to a few pages of brief discussion

¹⁵ For a good example of this see: Isabel Largaia and John Dumoulin, "Women's Equality and the Cuban Revolution." June Nash and Helen Safa and contributors, Women and Change in Latin America (Massachusetts: Bergin & Garvey Publishers, 1986)

¹⁶ George Black, Triumph of the People (London: Zed Press, 1981)

simply because the nature of class struggle remains the primary focus of such analysis.

Socialist-Feminists focus specifically on women's history using interpretive concepts which describe class and gender as the fundamental social dynamic by which women are maintained in an inferior position.¹⁷

The Socialist-Feminist school of thought has provided the largest body of literature concerning women and social transformation in the developing world.¹⁸ For example, Elizabeth Maier has written an admirable history of women and revolutionary struggle in Nicaragua. She combines a critical analysis of women's place within economic, political and social structure with oral history to produce a fascinating study of peasant and working class women's participation in rebel movements from the 1920s to 1979. Her methodology would prove useful in future attempts to assess the degree to which women's radicalization has enabled them to alter social relations between men and women on a perma-

¹⁷ Samples of the latter can be found in: Christiane Dupré, Et al. "Nicaragua: Un féminisme différent" Luttes Urbaines (Vol.3, No.4, 1982)

¹⁸ For example, see: Beth Stephens, "Women and Nicaragua" Monthly Review (Vol.40, No.4, 1988); Norma Stoltz Chinchilla, "Women in Revolutionary Movements - The Case of Nicaragua;" Elizabeth Maier, Nicaragua, la mujer en la revolución. (México: Ediciones de Cultura Popular, 1980); Maxine Molyneux, "Mobilization without Emancipation? Women's Interests, the State and Revolution in Nicaragua" Feminist Studies. (Volume 11, No. 2, 1985); Nicola Murray, "Socialism and feminism: Women and the Cuban Revolution." Feminist Review. (Part 1, Vol.2 ; Part 2, Vol.3, 1979)

nent basis.

Other Feminist-Socialists have had the opportunity to evaluate the rate at which Cuban and Nicaraguan women have been able to improve their status within a socialist agenda. They have been quick to criticize the current regimes' inability to radically alter the sex division of labour within the economic sphere and within the family, furthermore, they view the continuation of sex discrimination at the economic and cultural level to be the source of poor advances at the political level.

For example, a symbolic image common to post-revolutionary Cuba and Nicaragua is a woman with a baby in one arm and a rifle in the other. To Cubans and Nicaraguans it represents the dual role women play as mothers and revolutionaries. Since images of the revolutionary father do not exist, Socialist-Feminists find the concept ironic because it reveals the persistence of the belief that women should remain the primary caregivers to children despite the rhetoric of egalitarian socialism. Feminists have been quick to criticize the way in which the burden of child care responsibilities reinforces the sex division of labour. However the radical change represented by women's participation in armed struggle and their significant (if somewhat limited) incorporation into revolutionary power-structures - the party, the military, mass organizations, and the bureaucracy - has not received the same critical attention.

Moreover, most discussions tend to evaluate Cuba or Nicaragua's progress toward equality of the sexes within a historical vacuum. For instance, the significance of women's participation in power-structures in the regimes which proceeded revolutionary government is rarely evaluated, nor is their participation in the popular insurrections which brought down the military dictatorships. They rarely offer an equally focused discussion of the barriers put in place by the social relations that evolved during the decades before the revolution. Another shortcoming of such research is the failure to put into perspective the advances made in pre-revolutionary societies. The omission or denial of pre-revolutionary gains by women, no matter the relative significance, tends to attribute a greater amount of progress to post-revolutionary governments than may actually be the case. In addition, many Socialist-Feminist writers pay scant attention to the state of women's integration within power-structures because the lack of advancement is described as merely a result of the sex division of labour; others are simply apologetic of governments in post-revolutionary societies.¹⁹

¹⁹ Samples of the latter can be found in: Christiane Dupré, Et al. "Nicaragua: Un féminisme différent" Luttes Urbaines (Vol.3, No.4, 1982); Marjorie King, "Cuba's Attack on Women's Second Shift, 1974-76" Women in Latin America (Riverside, California: Latin American Perspectives, 1979); Margaret Randall, "We need a Government of Men and Women...!" Notes on the Second National Congress of the Federación de Mujeres Cubanos, November 25-29, 1974." Women in Latin America (Riverside, California: Latin American Perspectives, 1979); Carol Robb and Alice Hageman, "Let Them be Examples..." Cuba Review (Vol.4

Nevertheless, the Socialist-Feminist school of thought offers several interpretive tools with which to evaluate socialism's potential to further the emancipation of women. In addition to their contributions to theories of the interaction of class, gender and ethnicity, they have made effective use of a comparative methodology to further the debate. Their justification for a comparative study is the consistency with which the "woman question" is approached in both theoretical and practical policy considerations in countries that have undergone similar political changes but that have vastly different social realities. Attempts to describe the important historic parallels between the USSR, China, Cuba, and Mozambique, for example, are of some merit but risk being exposed as broad generalizations that lose their significance on closer examination.²⁰ Nevertheless, the methodology employed has proven fruitful in studies of women in countries with a similar culture and history.²¹

No.2, 1974).

²⁰ See: Elizabeth J. Croll "Women in Rural Production and Reproduction in the Soviet Union, China, Cuba, and Tanzania: Socialist Development Experiences," Signs. (Winter 1981); Maxine Molyneux, "Socialist Societies Old and New: Progress toward Women's Emancipation?" Monthly Review (July-August, 1982); Molyneux, "Family reform in Socialist States: The Hidden Agenda" Feminist Review (Vol. 21, 1985).

²¹ See Elsa Chaney, Supermadre Women in Politics in Latin America (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 1979); Carmen Diana Deere, "Rural Women and Agrarian Reform in Peru, Chile, and Cuba," Women and Change in Latin America Helen Safa and June Nash, Editors. (Massachusetts: Bergin and Garvey Publishers Ltd. 1986)

Consequently, a comparison of women in Cuba and Nicaragua affords an opportunity to observe two countries that share similar class structures, cultural values, political organization, economic development, and foreign relations. The comparative methodology "allows us to consider historical phenomena within a broader context than the one from which they emerge."²²

In order to evaluate the significance of the changes made with respect to women's status within power structures, Chapters I and II will proceed chronologically from the end of the 19th century to describe Cuban and Nicaraguan women's position within the political sphere during the pre-revolutionary period. A brief discussion of the social and economic position of women will be included for this period. Chapter III will evaluate women's incorporation into the political and military struggles against the Batista dictatorship in Cuba and the Somoza dynasty in Nicaragua. The final two chapters will describe how women's roles within power structures have changed since Fidel Castro's 26 of July Movement and the Frente Sandinista established political control respectively in Cuba and Nicaragua.

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Magnus Morner, Julia Fawaz de Vinüela, John D. French, "Comparative Approaches to Latin American History" Latin American Research Review (Vol. 17, No. 3, 1982).

Since Cuba and Nicaragua are the most highly militarized societies in Latin America in terms of per capita expenditures and size of military forces, it is especially important to examine the impact female participation in military activities has had on the nature of women's struggle for emancipation. In addition, the level of women's incorporation into the Communist Party in Cuba and the FSLN in Nicaragua will be compared, as well as women's integration within mass organizations and government bureaucracies. It must be added that the power and influence of the political institutions mentioned above, especially that of the military and mass organizations such as the Federation of Cuban Women and the Association of Nicaraguan Women--Luisa Amanda Espinosa will be subject to careful scrutiny since they are the means of political and ultimately social advancement in such highly centralized countries. Finally, the socio-economic forces which are thought to inhibit women's emancipation will be re-examined in light of changes which have occurred within Cuban and Nicaraguan power structures.

Chapter I

CUBA: FROM MARIANA GRAJALES TO MARTA BATISTA

Citizens: the woman, in the dark and quiet corner of her home, has been waiting, patient and resigned, for this noble hour in which a just revolution would break her yoke and untie her wings.

Ana Betancourt to the independence leaders at the assembly of Guaimaro in 1867.¹

Women surface on the pages of Cuban history during periods of political or economic crisis, then seem to disappear from view except where there are discussions of legal reforms. It is possible to piece together a composite sketch of women's history because, since the first war for independence, the island's history has been fraught with turmoil. Although few books that discuss the politics of pre-revolutionary Cuba address the particular role of women, oblique references to activists, female organizations and feminist parties are scattered throughout. The general impression in the standard historical tracts is that women were irrelevant to the political process. However a careful review of the literature reveals that much evidence exists which contradicts the apparent invisibility of one half of the popula-

¹ Carol Robb and Alice Hageman, "let them Be Examples" Cuba Review (Vol.4 No.2 1974) p.19

tion. Occasional hints do surface to indicate a significant role played by women in the nineteenth and twentieth century development of the Cuban state. Whether they were the wives and daughters of the ruling Spanish colonials or creole women from "la burguesía azucarera," meztiza or mulata campesinas, or direct descendants of African slaves, women had important roles within the various social classes and ethnic groups.

The earliest discussion of the role Cuban women played within the power struggles of the nineteenth century are accounts of female heroism during the first war for independence which lasted from 1868 to 1878. The heroic deeds of a few wives of generals, who were brought in to the fray to courageously defend their husbands' cause, were well documented. Female participation extended across most barriers of class and ethnicity. In particular, black women fought against the tyranny of colonialism and slavery. They followed their men to war to provide the support services so vital to the organization of any army.² The wives of the Ejército Mambí (the colloquial name assigned to the supporters of Cuban independence) took to battle in order to feed, clothe, and heal their men. In some instances, they even took up arms. The support of the women had an indirect influence on the ultimate outcome of the war, yet more

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Hugh Thomas, Cuba The Pursuit of Freedom (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1971) p.255

importantly, they proved an integral part of the emerging mythology which shaped the way in which Cuban women would react during periods of crisis. The precedents set by women such as Mariana Grajales, the proud mother who encouraged her sons to fight for the liberationist cause (one of whom was the famed general Antonio Maceo), provided an important rallying cry for future generations.

Before independence, the majority of the Cuban population was alienated from sources of power and prestige in a harsh colonial society which imposed strict class divisions that were based on ethnicity and economics. Slavery was an institution that shaped social relations long after its meandering abolition began in 1880 and it was slavery that consistently helped defeat the independence movement. The specter of neighboring Haiti's slave revolts helped maintain support for Spanish authority especially among the wealthy landowners from the more developed western half of the island. When civil war erupted in the eastern province of Oriente, the lack of support for the liberation struggle in the west spelled defeat for the rebel cause. In addition, divisions among the poorly equipped black and white rebels contributed to the failure of the liberation movement.³

The members of the creole population who had participated in the uprising suffered an enormous political and economic setback when they were forced to forfeit their land and

³ Thomas, p.264-270

industry to "loyal Spaniards"⁴ More important, however, was the dramatic increase in foreign investment by the United States in response to the economic vacuum left by the exiled members of the creole bourgeoisie and the floundering colonial nationalists. Many Spaniards could not afford to expand their landholdings during the general economic crisis that followed the war, thus United States citizens were able to acquire vast land, sugar and mining interests. Because of the impressive United States contingent representing a seemingly inexorable economic force, an annexationist movement prospered along with renewed sentiment against the confines of Spanish rule.

Cubans had lost a brutal war against Spain but the independence movement had not received a fatal blow. The daughters and wives of the tiny creole middle-class followed their male relatives into exile where they formed "patriotic clubs" to provide the financial assistance necessary to launch another assault on the decaying colonial power. Seventeen years later, a new group was prepared to launch a renewed attack on colonial authority. As before, men and women rallied behind the leadership of the liberationists, the difference this time was that Cubans were presented with a vision of the future framed poetically by a charismatic leader--José Martí.

⁴ Luis Aguilar, Cuba 1933 Prologue to Revolution (Ithaca NY: Correll University Press, 1972) p.9.

According to Sheldon Liss, José Martí "viewed women as the intellectual equals of men and hoped to see them become better companions, rather than playthings, by being raised to the educational level of men."⁵ The biography of Mar/ia Josefa Granados, in particular, reveals how an individual woman's political activism was deeply influenced by Martí's progressive vision.⁶ Granados was not alone. Thousands of women, inside and outside of Cuba, took up the cause with vigour. Women like María Cabrales, Bernarda Toro Pelegrín, and Dominga Moncada, who were veterans of the ten years war and were affiliated with the leadership of the newly formed Cuban Revolutionary Party, helped supply the financial and organizational support necessary to equip an expeditionary force led by Martí. In addition, the large immigrant community in the United States, Puerto Rico, Jamaica, and Mexico mobilized many exiled Cuban women. For example, women like Inocencia Martínez Santaella dedicated themselves to propaganda in favor of the liberationists. Periodicals were published, money was raised and children were indoctrinated. Through their struggle for independence, women slipped easily into new and challenging roles.

⁵ Sheldon B. Liss, Roots of Revolution (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987) p.48.

⁶ Ana Nuñez Machín, La otra María o La niña de Artemisa (Havana: Instituto Cubano del Libro, 1975)

Martí's attempt to launch a rapid and successful bid for Cuban independence faltered as the United States confiscated two boats and most of the arms collected for the expedition. Nonetheless, a small expeditionary force initiated a successful guerrilla war against the Spanish in April, 1895. Martí was immediately killed in battle but his capable generals, Máximo Gómez and Antonio Maceo, continued the struggle by enlisting the support of the impoverished Cuban peasantry against the hated colonial forces.

Women augmented the efforts of the men battling in the field. Many black and mestiza campesinas and creole ladies readily became "las laborantes," sympathizers and collaborators for the rebel forces. Others, like Luz Noriega, Paulina Ruiz de González and Catalina Valdés pleaded to be allowed to join the troops on the battle front. The leaders of the liberationist army accepted the women into their ranks. Almost twenty women made captain while many others were content to fall in as common soldiers. One particularly provocative example of female patriotism was Adela Azucay, who actually left her husband, who had enlisted in the Spanish army, to take up a rifle under General Antonio Maceo. Another example of female heroics was Mercedes Sirvén Pérez who was honoured with the rank of comandante for her effective leadership on the battlefield.⁷ Although a few exceptional women were put in leadership positions, the vast

⁷ Armando O. Caballero, La Mujer en el 95 (Havana: Editorial Gente Nueva, 1982)

majority of women saw active service on the battle front as nurses, messengers, cooks, and sanitation officers.

Women not only played an important role in the rebel forces, they also had a significant impact on world opinion. Female reporters for the revolutionary papers that circulated among exile communities abroad wrote glowing descriptions of the liberation army's rapid victories and dramatic accounts of the civilian population's terrible suffering as the result of Spanish orders to reconcentrate all rural inhabitants.⁸ Their descriptions of the glorious struggle of the Cuban patriots were later contradicted by the mocking reports offered by journalists from the United States sent to the island to cover the successes of the United States marines in 1898.

Nevertheless, the success of Maceo's liberation army was such that, three years after the Cuban rebels had initiated the civil war, the colonial government offered political autonomy to the Cuban rebels. They promptly spurned the offer in favour of a prolongation of the war and ultimate victory. However the fate of Cuba did not rest entirely in the hands of Martí's followers. The United States had its own designs and its own vision of a free Cuba. The quest for national independence posed a serious threat to the economic interests of the United States; once the autonomy plan had

⁸ Berta Aroncena, "Mujeres en el Periodismo Cubano" Album del Cincuentenario de la Asociación de Reporters de La Habana (Havana: Asociación de Reporters, 1953) p.114

failed, President McKinley decided to intervene in April 1898.⁹

The opportunity for Martí's vision of a Cuban republic, free from foreign economic and political control, faded with United States involvement in the war. The hopes and dreams of the Cuban Revolutionary Party were defeated along with the Spanish three months after the Americans joined forces with the rebel army. The ragged troops who had provided crucial back-up and strategy for the superior military might of the United States Marines were prevented from entering the cities they had helped liberate. Food aid, so badly needed for the starving troops and civilian concentration camp survivors was commandeered by an American military bureaucracy that chose to ignore the plight of the war's victims. The Cuban rebels were further insulted when United States commanders allowed colonial officials to maintain their positions within the new republic, despite their complicity in the deaths of thousands of civilians during the war. One source estimated that by the end of the war the population on the island had declined by 12 per cent.¹⁰

Cuban humiliation at the hands of the Americans was not forgotten. Even though General Leonard Wood and his men saw to it that the economic infrastructure of the island was

⁹ L.S. Stavrianos, Global Rift (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1981) p.379

¹⁰ Aguilar, p.13

developed and sanitation and education improved, Cubans chafed under a U.S occupation that curtailed their participation in the country's political, economic and social development. There was little room for Cuban men in the new power structures; there was no room for blacks or women. The women who had fought so valiantly beside their men were forced to retire to family life and political isolation. Racial and sex discrimination, social relations that had been challenged during the struggle, became the norm once again.

Cuba's latent independence and the slow evolution of its nationhood led to the creation of one of the most mutated political systems in Latin America. The United States forces occupied Cuban territory until Tomás Estrada Palma was inaugurated as president of the Cuban Republic in 1902. The United States did not, however, relinquish control over the tiny island. It first imposed the Platt amendment, a document that provided legal justification for United States intervention in Cuban politics and its economy on any occasion deemed appropriate by the government in Washington. In addition, it ensured an extra territorial naval base for its burgeoning imperialist designs on the Caribbean basin.

The United States had every intention of maintaining its new found status as a neo-colonial power in order to protect rapidly expanding economic interests on the island and in

the region. By 1902, for example, United States business interests completely dominated the mining and cigar manufacturing industries.¹¹ More importantly, they were once again rapidly buying up land at bargain prices from Cubans and Spaniards who found themselves in severe financial difficulties after the war. It was estimated that by 1906, "60 per cent of all rural property in Cuba was owned by foreign companies, with another 15 per cent controlled by resident Spaniards."¹² Foreign control over 75 per cent of Cuba's agricultural wealth was not the independence envisioned by Martí and his followers.

Under the cautious observance of the ambassador of the United States, the Cuban political environment which evolved was both corrupt and violent. Louis Pérez describes the way in which a political class emerged in Cuba as a result of a lack of opportunity for the growth of a national bourgeoisie. Instead, political appointments and elected positions, regardless of whether they were fraudulent or not, became the life blood of the creole elite that had been unable to secure their political or economic position after independence. The vicious fighting between Liberal and Conservative parties was not the result of principled opposition over the direction of the state; it represented instead fierce competition for economic and social status among one sector of

¹¹ Stavrianos, p.382.

¹² Louis A. Pérez, Cuba under the Platt Amendment, 1902-1934 (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1986) p.72

the population. When it became clear that Estrada Palma's government was unwilling to part with the spoils of office after its mandate had ended, the Liberal faction of the "political class" took up arms. The United States made efficient use of the Platt Amendment to take control of the situation and a new cycle in the struggle for social mobility commenced, only this time it was refereed more closely by the United States government.

The Platt Amendment did not, however, extinguish the collective memory of Martí's vision of an independent and just society. New political movements emerged to challenge the status quo put in place by North American occupation. Among them was an embryonic labour movement which spawned political organizations. The Worker's Party, formed in 1904, set out a program that promised equality for all citizens of the republic, equal wages for workers of either sex, prohibition of work for women in unhygienic conditions and in areas contrary to custom, and finally, the promulgation of laws that would facilitate and lend guarantees to working mothers.¹³ Unfortunately the divided nature of the urban working class prevented organizations such as the Worker's Party from becoming little more than a political fragment easily suffocated by the dominant political class. The working class was divided by harsh competition and the vagaries of ethnicity.

¹³ "Programa del Partido de Trabajadores" from La Voz Obrera (Oct. 1, 1905) in Hortensia Picardo, Documentos para la historia de Cuba (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1976) p.266-268.

Cubans were forced to compete against an ever-expanding number of European, Asian, and Caribbean immigrant labourers favoured by companies controlled by foreign nationals.

In rural areas men and women fared much worse than their urban counterparts. Cuba's economy had evolved into a monocultural economy that was largely controlled by foreign interests. The short harvest season for sugar, by far the most important crop in an agriculturally based society, meant that almost one third of the labour force was unemployed and idle for eight months of the year. Many people migrated to the cities during the down period where women usually found employment with greater success.¹⁴ Nevertheless, in Havana Cuban women were edged out of the market for domestics by thousands of male Spanish migrants.¹⁵ Those women who remained in the rural setting had very little chance of finding even menial labour during periods of massive unemployment.

A self-sufficient peasantry was rapidly transformed into a landless rural proletariat that was forced to sell its labour at low rates to the foreign companies that monopolized the Cuban agricultural sector. Although the rural population was not organized politically to defend its interests, it was not passive. One example of rural unrest came

¹⁴ Wyatt MacGaffrey, et al. Cuba (New Haven: HRAF Press, 1962) p.54

¹⁵ Pérez, p.79

in 1914 when 4,000 peasants protested to Poaracoa authorities about the land they had lost to the sugar companies.¹⁶ The demonstration was a clear expression of their discontent over the direction of the state's economic development, but land tenure was only one of the many problems facing the majority of Cubans.

While rural and urban women, in general, were alienated from sources of employment, black Cubans suffered even more within the competitive and discriminatory labour market. Although there is no evidence to suggest direct female involvement, the large black sector of the population did attempt to erase the social, economic and political disparities that stemmed from endemic racism, through the creation of the Partido Independiente de Color. The effort ultimately failed because it could not withstand government repression. By 1910 the party had been outlawed and its newspapers banned but the struggle by black Cubans continued to threaten the social order imposed by dominant class interests. Finally, in 1912, after a brief period of armed resistance, approximately 3,000 afro-cubans were massacred by government forces.¹⁷ Although no reference exists to illustrate the role of women in the struggles for economic and social justice shortly after independence, it is doubtful that their

¹⁶ Louis A. Pérez Jr., Intervention, Revolution and Politics in Cuba, 1913-1921 (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1978) p.73

¹⁷ Pérez, p.150-151

level of participation would have decreased significantly from that of the war of independence.

Regardless of the lack of specific references to black and poor women's involvement in the political turmoil of the first decade of the twentieth century, it is clear that middle-class and petit-bourgeois women were considering their role within the emerging power structures. For example, in a speech that was later published, Francisco Carrera y Justiz counselled graduating teachers of the Havana Normal School to take their rightful positions within civil government by demanding political equality.¹⁸ Carrera was a socialist and his rhetoric echoed that of the British and American suffragettes of the nineteenth-century. Obviously, some women in Cuba were exposed to the radical ideas propounded by external feminist movements. Developments in the United States and Europe influenced the way in which educated and economically stable women viewed themselves. Indeed, it is possible to speculate that women in Cuba would have looked with much curiosity at the strong feminist movement which emerged in Yucatan during the Mexican revolution.¹⁹ The women's conferences held in Yucatan revealed the vast political differences which eventually weakened and split many Feminist movements in Latin America, but in Cuba women pressed ahead with

¹⁸ Francisco Carrera y Justiz, La ciencia civica en su relacion con la mujer y con la democracia (Havana: Obispo 133 y 135, 1905)

¹⁹ Anna Macías, Against all Odds--The Feminist Movement in Mexico to 1940 (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1986)

the creation of organizations of their own knowing that they would not be immune to the same problems which plagued their sister organizations across the Gulf of Mexico.

By 1913, Cuban politics had reached a new apex of government immorality and one response to the blatantly corrupt political elite led by Mario Garcia Menocal was the Partido Nacional Feminista. In 1914, the party claimed to have 10,000 members. Janet Saltzman Chavez and Anthony Dworkin label the party as "ameliorative." The organization was like many other reformist groups that challenged "only a limited range of institutions and tended not to question the basic societal definitions of appropriate gender roles."²⁰ Indeed, the party platform was aimed at improving women's access to education and enhancing political rights within the system. Nevertheless, the impressive organization of these women must have made some impact since by 1915 many daily periodicals carried a women's page that went beyond fashion and gossip.²¹ In 1917, a new law was passed to improve women's legal ability to control their own economic resources. Whereas under the Spanish civil code, the husband was the sole administrator of his wife's money and property, the new law allowed women complete control over all financial transactions concerning their own property and indepen-

²⁰ Janet Saltzman Chavez and Anthony Gary Dworkin, Female Revolt (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Allenheld, 1986) p.2

²¹ León Primelles, Crónica Cubana, 1915-1918 (Havana: Editorial Lex, 1955) p.51-52.

dent commerce.²² The reform was especially significant for women of the upper and middle classes.

In 1918, the Feminist Party, aware of the recent advances made by women elsewhere in the world, addressed the House of Representatives on the necessity of the female vote.²³ At the same time, women's organizations such as the Feminine Club of Cuba published their own journals and held public meetings to discuss women's rights.²⁴ Even male oriented periodicals debated political equality, higher education, and legal rights for women.²⁵ The institution of marriage and divorce laws, in particular, drew careful scrutiny; however, it took four years of fierce debate and religious protest before a liberal divorce law was passed in 1918. Finally, married couples were able to dissolve their union on varied grounds such as mutual consent, separation of two years, failure to provide economic support, or verbal or physical abuse. Previously, a woman could only sue for divorce if her husband's adultery was causing public scandal. A man was able to divorce his wife simply by proving her adultery. Moreover, a woman risked losing custody of her children if she remarried.²⁶

²² Jesus Figueras y Gonz/alez, Posición jurídica de la mujer (Havana: Obispo 521, 1945) p.97-99.

²³ Primelles, p.464.

²⁴ Primelles, p.248

²⁵ Aroncena, p.115

²⁶ Pichardo, p. 411

On the surface it would seem that women, in general, had taken the first step into the public arena through their demands for the vote and improved access to employment and education. Nevertheless, the vast majority of women had only one objective and that was daily survival for their family and themselves. For most poor women, the changes in women's legal position within the society were irrelevant. Most working class or peasant women had common-law relationships with their spouses. They had few opportunities to amass any significant property over which they could exercise their right freely to enter commerce. Any wages gained were vulnerable to their husband's demands and no domestic or factory worker would have the wherewithal to prosecute a partner who spent her earnings on drink or gambling.

People were hungry and the vote meant little to the poor women of a country plagued by government corruption and nepotism. Again infighting within the political class had led to a Liberal insurgency after the United States backed government of Mario Garcia Menocal fraudulently reversed the election outcome of 1916. The Liberals were not the only people outraged at the Conservative government. The men and women of the dislocated rural populace reverted to acts of what Eric Hobsbawm defines as "social banditry" to display their frustration over lost land and political impotence.²⁷ Cattle were rustled, buildings destroyed, and storehouses

²⁷ Eric J. Hobsbawm, Bandits (London: The Trinity Press, 1969)

robbed. As was later proven in the urban areas, social protest was not a male prerogative. Rural women reacted to protect a disappearing way of life. In the end, the United States responded to Menocal's plea for intervention by dispersing thousands of marines throughout the eastern half of the island to practice military maneuvers and at the same time to intimidate striking rural workers.

As labour unrest in rural areas faced increasingly effective repression, public protest in the cities took the form of general strikes. The poor responded to rising prices, food shortages and growing unemployment with organized demonstrations. To add to the crisis, the election of November, 1920 failed to provide a peaceful government transition, with all sides charging electoral fraud. Political bankruptcy was compounded by economic bankruptcy. With the drastic decline in sugar prices on the world market the financial sector fell victim to the over-investment stimulated by the rapid increases in the value of sugar that had occurred during World War I. Once again, the United States government rushed to protect its interests by invoking clauses contained in the Platt amendment. While the courts resolved the electoral crisis by proclaiming Alfredo Zayas president of the Cuban republic, the "special representative of the president" of the United States, General Enoch H. Crowder, was providing the American manipulation necessary to stabilize

the economy.²⁸

An empty treasury left Zayas's government vulnerable to the political restructuring demanded by Crowder. An "honest" cabinet had to be chosen and the ties of corruption, that for so many years had provided the necessary cement for political alliances, had to be severed. But the "moral" government directed by the United States lasted only as long as the Cubans found themselves in economic straits. When an upturn in the economy occurred in 1923, the Cuban political elite reverted to the old systems of patronage and graft with a vengeance. It was the renewed corruption that allowed popular unrest to translate itself into an effective political force through labour activism.

In urban areas, especially in Havana, poor women were forced to find work and they were particularly vulnerable to the repressive measures used by employers and government to ensure cheap and pliable labour. Most working women found their labour to be grossly undervalued, both monetarily and socially. There was little prestige to be found working as a domestic, elementary school teacher or textile or tobacco worker. Worse yet, thousands of women were forced into prostitution to support themselves and their families during desperate times. By far, the most common employment women found was as domestics, a job that was poorly paid, often degrading, and isolating. A class consciousness and soli-

²⁸ Pérez, Cuba under the Platt Amendment, p.190-195.

parity among domestic labourers, 90 per cent of whom were women, was weakened by the tendency of the workers to absorb the values inculcated by their employers. Ironically, most of the women who made up the Feminist movement and women's associations depended on their maid's dedicated service and long hours to provide them with the time necessary to attend meetings and political functions.

Despite the enormous odds against female workers' ability to organize and thus gain a voice within male dominated power structures, some women did manage to band together. For example, the small percentage of women who were employed in industries where male labour was organized, realized their own collective actions would be necessary to ensure a living wage. In the tobacco industry, in the early 1920s, women were hired when the unionization of male workers threatened the cigar manufacturers' ability to rely on cheap sources of labour.²⁹ Initially, women held marginal positions in the cigar manufacturing industry but they were integrated into the higher skilled areas as the men began to organize. Unions gradually responded to management's strategy by incorporating women into their struggles to gain better wages and working conditions for everyone on the shop floor. To its credit, the Second National Labour Congress of 1920 listed among its resolutions the pledge to fight for equal

²⁹ Jean Stubbs, Tobacco on the Periphery (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985) p.133.

pay for men and women.³⁰ In subsequent years, women began to play more than a token role in the labour movement and by the labour congress of 1925, six of the delegates who participated were women representing female unions in the tobacco industry. Women's influence within the labour movement ultimately affected the political climate of the time. According to Lourdes Casal, "much of the advanced legislation concerning women passed in the pre-1959 period can be traced to the action of the Cuban labor movement and to the important female component within the unions."³¹

Similarly, radical and reformist parties alike had clauses in their constitutions that proposed improved political status for women. The Partido Socialista Radical, for example, promised better working conditions and equality for women.³² The reformist sector, represented in 1923 by the Junta Cubana de Renovación, spoke out on behalf of women's rights and included Feminist groups among its supporters.³³ Moreover, the "prestigious and powerful" Veteran's Association demanded political rights for women and in return gained political support from the Federación de Asocia-

³⁰ Pérez, Cuba under the Platt Amendment, p.239

³¹ Lourdes Casal, "Revolution and Conciencia: Women in Cuba" in Women, War and Revolution Editors Carol R. Berkin and Clara M.Lovett (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, 1980) p.186.

³² Pérez, Cuba under the Platt Amendment, p.239

³³ Pérez, Cuba under the Platt Amendment, p.235

ciones Femeninas.³⁴ Even the dictator who followed the Zayas regime, Gerardo Machado, included among his campaign promises the pledge to improve the moral character of the nation by improving women's status and ridding the nation of the terrible stain of prostitution through reform programs and improved government control. At a time when all political organizations were scrambling for support, the ability to capture the political allegiance of one half of the population tempted many male-dominated organizations to look beyond the ideology of machismo.

Women were forced to wait for concrete improvements. Soon after coming to power in 1925, Machado redirected Cuba away from the reformist course that had seemed so inevitable. Through unprecedented repression and carefully tended relations with the United States, the new regime stymied popular frustration with government corruption. One quarter of the national income was siphoned from tax payers to meet the army's budget.³⁵ Political opponents were assassinated or at the very least jailed; reformist or radical parties were outlawed and labour unrest violently put down with mass arrests, torture, and murder. All political rules were broken and the House of Representatives spent most of its time passing bills which provided politicians and their allies with legal immunity from prosecution on criminal charges

³⁴ Pérez, Cuba Under the Platt Amendment, p.242

³⁵ Thomas, p.583.

laid while in office. Even the constitution was subject to blatant manipulation. Ironically, Machado's attempt to extend his term in office through constitutional change also included a clause that would allow women the constitutional right to vote. However the gesture was designed to help mask a more devious ambition through the presence of progressive change.

Numerous groups emerged to challenge the Machado government and the imperialist forces that backed it. Middle class professional men organized a secret society that used terrorism to achieve its aims. A group that simply called itself the ABC soon became an important player among those who were dedicated to the destruction of the Machado regime. Although some historians claim they were a fascist organization, the ABC's platform included the necessary reformist elements to achieve a measure of popular support. Their rhetoric was pragmatic and opportunistic. They offered women the vote, although there is no indication of female membership at any level of the organization. Moreover, they were resigned to eventual intervention by the United States and simply looked forward to replacing Machado rather than restructuring social and economic relations.³⁶

In contrast, left-wing groups emerging in the late 1920s strongly condemned Washington's manipulation of Cuban politics. Their nationalist sentiments were more popular with

³⁶ Thomas, p.594

the working class and their policies were blatantly radical. They not only promised women the vote, they actually attempted to recruit women into their fold. The Communist Party of Cuba, founded in 1925, and quickly outlawed, soon came to play a leadership role in the labour movement. From the beginning the Communists pledged to create a women's sector.

Similarly, students and labour dominated in the rapid organization of forces that had hitherto been without a voice on the political stage. Inspired by the Argentinean University Reform Movement, Cuban students founded organizations such as the Federación Estudiantil Universitaria, the Directorio Estudiantil, and Joven Cuba. All three groups counted several female members among their leadership.³⁷ Other organizations, such as the Anticlerical League which promoted atheism and a scientific and materialist view of the world, also managed to stimulate female participation.

By far the most significant mobilization of women during the Machado years was the formation of the National Federation of Women's Organizations in 1925. Thousands of women had voted to consolidate at least eleven women's organizations in order to continue the struggle for improved education and political rights.³⁸ A considerable segment of the

³⁷ José A. Tabares del Real, La revolución del 30: sus últimos dos años (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1971) p.70-71, 110.

³⁸ Sara Sefchovich, "América Latina: la mujer en lucha" FEM

female middle class population was represented by the 9000 odd members of the new federation. However feminist groups did seek further expansion through links with women of the urban working class. In particular, they focused their propaganda on the largest and most militant female sectors of the tobacco industry.³⁹

In the end, attempts to unify women of all classes under one banner failed because political differences stemming from the contradictions of class proved too vast. Splits among the moderate and radical sectors of National Federation of Women's Associations appeared during the struggle against Machado. Certainly women who actively protested against United States domination must have been critical of the many professional and educated Cuban women who were willing to participate in the Inter-American Commission of Women, a sub-organization of the Pan American Union.⁴⁰ Radicals viewed the organization as one more tool of imperialist manipulation since its focus, like that of its parent organization, was dominated by a United States perspective. While female members of the economic elite were participating in the rather staid and unconstructive meetings of the Commission, others co-operated even more directly with North

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³⁹ Stubbs, 141.

⁴⁰ Inter-American Commission of Women, Historical View on the Recognition of the Rights of American Women (Washington D.C.: Pan American Union, 1965) p.4,5.

American interests. One group, "Women in Opposition" was formed to participate in Ambassador Sumner Welles's attempt to diffuse the revolutionary situation.

Despite the acquiescence of the bourgeoisie, most women were busy marching in front of the presidential palace to protest the harsh government and its imperialist allies.⁴¹ While the former groups were met with polite interest, the latter were met with the usual police violence that accompanied street democracy. While street demonstrations drew the wrath of the National Police Force, other actions resulted in even harsher treatment. The violent actions and sabotage against the government by female members of terrorist organizations such as Joven Cuba made all women potential targets for arrest, torture and even death.⁴² Popular reaction to the despised dictatorship culminated in 1933 with general strikes that paralyzed the cities and foiled Ambassador Welles's attempts to mediate a political settlement that would ensure another pro-United States government. When Machado finally fled in August 1933, the people exploded with excitement after years of frustration. Thousands died in the violence that ensued. In the cities, police and pro-Machado politicians were lynched, houses were ransacked, and factories and plantations taken over. In the rural areas some soviets were established in labour controlled planta-

⁴¹ Tabares del Real, p.124

⁴² Tabares del Real, p.124.

tions and "in some centrales the cooks, laundresses, nurses, and house servants declared a strike and called for higher wages."⁴³

The scramble to fill the political vacuum left by Machado took place within Cuba's military barracks. On 8 September 1933, junior officers, led by Fulgencio Batista, successfully took control of the armed forces through a bloodless coup. Forty-eight hours later, the leadership of the military joined forces with students and labour. Through the coordinated action of the student movement, labour, and the military, the regime created by the United States quickly disintegrated. It was replaced with a student-led government, supported by a reorganized army headed by Batista. For one hundred days, the students, intellectuals and professionals represented by the Directorio Estudiantil, and led by professor Ramón Grau San Martín, churned out radical decrees which were to affect the political climate of Cuba for the years to come.

One of the most important laws initiated by the student government to affect women was the granting of female suffrage in 1934. Cuba was the fifth Latin American nation to grant women the vote. Obviously, feminist causes and the issue of universal suffrage had become clear objectives of the reformist movement. The mutual support among radical

⁴³ Commission on Cuban Affairs "Report of the Commission on Cuban Affairs," Problems of New Cuba (New York: Foreign Policy Association, Inc. 1935) p.184

and reformist parties during the struggle to oust Machado had earned women considerable influence within the newly evolving political structure. Jane Jaquette's assertion that the *cuadillismo* inherent in Latin American politics may have paved the way for women to prove themselves as a legitimate interest group seems to have been borne out in the case of Cuba.⁴⁴ Indeed, the commissioners representing the various interest groups which dominated the municipal politics of Havana from 1931-1933 included one representative for "feminismo".⁴⁵ In addition, the National Confederation of Labour (CNOC) had a Secretary for women workers. Nevertheless, some sectors remained critical of the advances made. For example, the CNOC's program in 1935 stated:

Women it is demanded, must be given a larger place in labor organization and elected to important offices. Despite the fact that women's unions among the tobacco strippers and the needle workers have played an active and effective part in strikes, labor in general, the Confederation alleges, has accorded women only a subordinate status. The Cigar-Makers Union, a "reformist" organization, is cited as permitting the organization of Women Tobacco strippers only on condition that they accept a male advisor.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Jane Jaquette, "Female Political Participation in Latin America" Sex and Class in Latin America Editors June Nash and Helen Icken Safa (Massachusetts: JF Bergin Pub. Inc. 1980) p.227

⁴⁵ Mario Riera Hernández, Cuba Republicana 1899-1958 (Miami: Editorial AIP, 1974) p.174

⁴⁶ Commission of Cuban Affairs, p.195

Unfortunately the advances made by women under the progressive government led by Grau were short-lived. Increased pressure from the United States and the shifting allegiance of the Cuban military led to the dissolution of the student led government. The consolidation of Batista's control did not result in the immediate quashing of the progressive constitutional, economic and political changes introduced by the 100 day government. For example, in January 1934 the first minimum wage law was enacted, in May a treaty abrogating the Platt Amendment was signed, and the University, surviving the heavy price exacted by several months of extreme violence and repression, regained its autonomy from the government ministries of the Interior and Education.

Even more uncharacteristic of the priorities of the new strong man was his reinforcement of the advances women had made concerning electoral rights. Batista made his own announcement of female enfranchisement on 12 June 1935.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, Batista's commitment to meaningful change was merely superficial. Women in the more radical sectors lost their newly acquired position within the political mainstream. Even conservative groups, such as the "Women in Opposition" disappeared due to their lack of popular support among women.

⁴⁷ Thomas, p.700

The women's movement that had thrived in the twenties disintegrated in the thirties when the vote had been achieved. The radicalization of large sectors of urban women during the struggle against Machado was not sufficient to maintain a dynamic women's movement. In general, a few women were integrated into the male dominated political institutions which were to survive the student government. Others continued as minority members of the more radical groups that were still not willing to give Batista's army a free reign over the newly installed government. For example, women were well integrated under the female leadership of the Sección Femenina of Joven Cuba. The same organization had an auxiliary force of urban and rural guerrillas trained for combat and medical duty.⁴⁸

On the labour front, organized women took active part in violent strikes. During the medical strike of 1934, female members of the nurses union experienced first hand Batista's brutal response to labour unrest.⁴⁹ Government reaction to striking workers culminated with the suspension of constitutional guarantees in 1935. The army swiftly moved to crush general strikes and rebellion; by 1936 Batista was ready to allow a controlled set of elections in which only the old established parties of the pre-Grau era were allowed to participate. Radicals were excluded but middle-class women had

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Tabares del Real, p.279.

⁴⁹ Tabares del Real, p.296.

their first opportunity to participate in general elections. They were well prepared. Some women had already made inroads into influential political positions by 1934. For example, Maria Gómez Carbonell and Candita Gómez Calás served as ministers without portfolio for the provisional government of José Barnet Vinajeras.⁵⁰

When the elections finally took place, the first showing of female candidates for the House of Representatives was impressive. In all, seven women were elected. However their success was a victory only for middle class women in Cuba. In a country where less than .8 per cent of the female population received a university education, and only 1.6 per cent received some secondary education, women who were elected to office were already members of a tiny elite.⁵¹ Most of the elected women were professionals--doctors, lawyers, professors, teachers or scholars. Their interests were not necessarily those of the vast majority of impoverished women. They passed laws that were neither radical nor particularly feminist in scope. The first law presented by a woman, Consuelo Vásquez Bello, dealt with the important issue of land reform. However, later bills dealt with minor issues such as nurses salaries, job security in the civil service, or the defense of the widows of public functionar-

⁵⁰ Riera Hernandez, p.24

⁵¹ Susan Kaufman Purcell, "Modernizing Women for a Modern Society: The Cuban Case" Female and Male in Latin America Editor Ann Pescatello. (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1973) p.260-261.

ies.⁵² Several of the women fulfilled their posts with energy and intelligence; but their participation in government did little to increase women's interest or success in the political sphere. In addition, some women, like Alfredo Zayas's daughter, María Teresa Zayas, obviously received their positions as the result of unabashed nepotism and played little more than a decorative role in political institutions characterized by their corruption.⁵³

The government of Miguel Mariano Gómez was the first government to benefit from female participation. Unfortunately for the women involved, the president was impeached shortly after being elected and was replaced by the more easily manipulated Laredo Bru. Gómez had made the mistake of challenging Batista's plan to introduce a new tax that would finance the expanding rural school program run by the military. Batista's pet project brought him a measure of popular support and substantial financial rewards; the military schools, orphanages and hospitals were not to be tampered with nor would Batista permit any challenge to the privileged position of the military. From the moment Bru took office Batista's control over the government became even more apparent.⁵⁴

⁵² Maria Collado y Romero, "La mujer Cubana en el Parlamento" Album del Cincuentenario de la Asociación de Reporters de La Habana (Havana: Asociación de Reporters de Havana, 1953) p.124

⁵³ Collado y Romero, p.123-125.

⁵⁴ Thomas, p.702-705

The society ladies who participated in charity events and the Cuban Red Cross had an equivalent impact on the nation's politics. Women such as the General's wife, Marta Batista, provided the moral facade needed for some measure of legitimacy. Cuban political culture was characterized by the belief that once in office, male and female politicians alike could use their influence and access to government funds to maintain their positions. The growth of a parasitic government bureaucracy made Cubans cynical about their power to influence the state through democratic institutions. James Petras characterizes the politics of the time as "largely a struggle for patronage and graft, a means of social mobility and personal enrichment, both for the conservative and reformist parties."⁵⁵ Few women achieved positions of high rank. One exception was Dr. Alicia Hernández de la Barca, who became the subsecretary of education in the government led by Dr. Ramón Grau San Martín.⁵⁶ When the government finally dissolved, Hernández helped found the Revolutionary Party of Cuba (auténtico) in exile. Despite the impressive careers of a handful of women, Table 1 in the appendices reveals a marked decline in the success of female politicians after the 1936 elections. From 1940 onward, no more than 4 women were elected to the House of Representatives at any one time. In fact, there were some

⁵⁵ James Petras, Politics and Social Structure in Latin America (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1970) p.109.

⁵⁶ Collado y Romero, p.125

provinces which never elected a woman to office.⁵⁷

The assertion that "social movements are unlikely to survive if political systems easily accede to some number of the movements' demands," perhaps explains women's retreat from politics in the 1940s.⁵⁸ In 1939, the army organized the Civic-Military school system in an effort to eradicate high levels of rural illiteracy and seemingly to provide increased employment, and military supervision in the countryside.⁵⁹ A traditional area of female employment, teaching, was threatened by the military's plans to increase its hegemony over the society. A small segment of the female population continued to fight for the improved status of women and several gains were made. For example, among several resolutions put forward by the Confederación de Trabajadores de Cuba in 1939 was a demand to end sexual discrimination.⁶⁰ Subsequently, the Constitution of 1940 reinforced women's equal status before the law, reiterated her new political status as a voter, prohibited discrimination on the basis of sex and provided for equal pay for equal work. Unfortunately, the laws remained merely words on paper. Women's roles in Cuba did not reflect the progressive atti-

⁵⁷ Mario Riera Hernández, Cuba Republicana 1899-1958 (Miami: Editorial AIP, 1974)

⁵⁸ Chavez and Dworkin, p.94

⁵⁹ Pedro Martínez Fraga, "Speech delivered at the opening of the Cuban Pavilion, New York World's Fair, on May 20, 1939" p.19-21.

⁶⁰ Stubbs, p.143.

tudes revealed in the legislation. Furthermore, the provisions made by the 1940 Constitution were meaningless until a law on women's civil rights, passed in December 1950, established the regulations necessary for the implementation of women's legal equality.⁶¹

The few powerless women's groups that remained, such as the Professional Women's Club of Havana, directed their battles toward infant health campaigns, raising funds for tuberculosis hospitals, and studies investigating youth courts. The scope of their political action revolved around the promotion of the Suárez Rivas law which, when enacted in 1937, was to ensure equal parental responsibilities and paternal authority.⁶² During World War II, the government successfully mobilized women on behalf of the war effort to help in the propaganda networks and the preparation of support services in the case of invasion. In 1942, the minister of National Defense created the Servicio Femenino para la Defensa Civil. It was headed by a woman and claimed 35,000 volunteer members.⁶³ Typically, the military schools created especially for the female volunteers were named after the heroines of the struggles for Independence--Mariana Grajales and Lidice. The organization planned action on

⁶¹ Casal, p.187.

⁶² Jes/us Figueras y González, Posición jurídica de la mujer (Havana: Obispo 521, 1945) p.29-30, 103-105.

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Mary Louise Blanco, "Cuban Women Fight Inflation" Pan American (Vol.5 Issue 3, 1944) p.49

social issues in the post war period; however' with the end of the threat of invasion, membership tapered off and the organization slipped into obscurity.

Religion also served as a pillar to prop up the patriarchal values of Cuban society. Although the Catholic Church may have been a weak institution within Cuba, its values were well accepted by a large portion of the female population. The passive female role, best articulated by the church's teachings on Mary, informed the self-image of many women. Sacrifice and submissiveness were the female ideal just as dominance and authority were to symbolize the male ideal. The ideology of Machismo entered the twentieth century reinforced by the church and even those who subscribed to different religions or cults could not escape the all pervasive influence of Catholic ideology. Similarly, the African religions, that were preserved by the Cuban slave population, maintained their solid influence on the black population. However there were few cults that let women practice important rites, and some even forbade female membership.⁶⁴

Despite the magnitude of the obstacles put in their way, Cuban women had a long and respectable history of political involvement and participation in protest during periods of crisis such as the wars for independence or the popular overthrow of the Machado dictatorship. No further precedents were needed to predict that women would continue to take up

⁶⁴ Thomas, p.518

important leadership roles during future struggles. It is important, however, to recognize the qualitative differences manifested by women belonging to different social classes and ethnic groups. While conclusive evidence that would detail the exact degree of women's political involvement in areas outside obvious government institutions during periods of relative stability is not available, it is possible to surmise that, in general, most women were excluded from power structures. Nevertheless, it is clear that throughout the first half of the twentieth century, advances made by educated and economically secure women in liberal democracies around the world increased political expectations and demands by Cuban women. These expectations can be characterized as feminist in nature but not radical since the objectives of the women's movement which flourished for a short period was limited by the class interests of its participants. The next phase of the struggle for women's rights deviated from the course set by bourgeois women as a new era of crisis emerged with the dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista.

Chapter II

NICARAGUA: RAFAELA HERRERA TO DOÑA CHEPITA

The manner in which Nicaraguan women must begin to prepare themselves for modern existence, enormously advanced since the World War, is to walk before leaping and to stop firmly before the new path; which is to say, that to follow the Feminist Movement of the period, one must begin by first resolving the simple problems and advancing **gradually** in the conquest of one's rights, without fatal leaps that put one's social and domestic life in danger.¹

As in colonial Cuba, women's place in the power structures of 17th and 18th century Nicaragua was determined by patriarchal social relations imported from Spain. Any departures from conventional sex roles occurred only under extreme circumstances in a few romantic episodes such as Rafaela Herrera's heroic defence of a Spanish outpost on the San Juan River against English invaders in 1762.² When Nicaragua gained its independence as a member of the short-lived Mexican Empire in 1821, there was no change in women's status. The men and women who made up the majority of the population remained effectively alienated from any form of political organization. The traditional landed elite main-

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Josefa Toledo de Aguerri, Anhelos y Esfuerzos collected articles from Revista Femenina Ilustrada and Mujer Nicaraguense (Managua: Imprenta Nacional, 1935) p.34

² Toledo de Aguerri, p.118-119

tained the feudalistic economy introduced by the colonizers, and social relations and political institutions were defined by the relations of production on the large haciendas that relied on the coerced labour of the largely mestizo and indigenous peasantry to produce indigo for export.

While the rest of Central America was modernizing its agricultural sector and introducing capitalist modes of production on coffee plantations, Nicaragua's transformation from a colonial backwater was retarded by the intransigence of its ruling classes. It was not until mid-century that the slowly emerging merchant producers from the northern city of León began to challenge the dominance of Granada's Conservative elite. In 1855, the Liberal challengers sought out the help of American filibuster William Walker and his band of mercenary soldiers to overcome Conservative military forces in the south. Walker and his supporters in León were only temporarily successful because one year after defeating Nicaragua's traditional rulers, the southern hacendados were able to muster considerable popular support against a regime that sought to reintroduce slavery and impose English as the official language. The Liberal forces were discredited for the next thirty years and the Conservative elite was able to maintain political dominance in a stagnating economy.³

³ Ralph Lee Woodward, Jr. Central America--A Nation Divided (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985) p.136-144

The adventurers from the United States and the civil war accomplished a similar degree of dislocation and suffering among the Nicaraguan population as had the liberation battles in Cuba. Women were neither immune nor unaffected by the series of crises that beset the slowly evolving nation. Few women, however, left their mark on the resistance wars against the American filibuster, William Walker. Moreover, there is no evidence that women played even a minor role in the fierce wars that raged between Liberal and Conservative sectors of Nicaraguan society. The competing armies of the 19th century had little popular support and were often composed of untrained and unwilling poor men who could not count on medical or supply services to make their stay in the army less miserable.⁴ If the men were unwilling pawns in the power struggle between the tiny ruling oligarchy and the merchant class, neither could women be expected to participate in the carnage.

The female population in Nicaragua was divided, as in Cuba, along strict lines of class and ethnicity.⁵ Yet since there was no prolonged struggle for independence, a strong division between Spanish born Nicaraguans and the wealthy creole classes did not emerge. Instead political enmities developed between economic competitors. In addition, geo-

⁴ Richard Millet, Guardians of the Dynasty (Maryknoll N.Y: Orbis Books, 1977) p.18-19.

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Woodward, p.56-57

graphical barriers which isolated the Caribbean, or Mosquito coast, made women's interests and aspirations in the Spanish dominated western half of the country significantly different from those of their English influenced compatriots in the east. Moreover, a significant indigenous population survived, especially along the Mosquito coast, despite an initial population decline caused by the disease, slavery and genocide that accompanied European conquest.

The few thousand natives who remained by the end of the eighteenth century consisted of roughly four groups that were further divided by language, religion, culture and geography. The position of women within these societies was by no means egalitarian. A sex division of labour existed and was accentuated by the Spanish colonizers of the 18th century who efficiently exploited indigenous women's weaving and spinning skills.⁶ By the late 19th century, many indigenous men of the Miskito, Sumu or Rama societies were integrated into the cash economy. Women usually maintained traditional farming and gathering but were to become dependent on men's ability to provide newly introduced commodities. Women were excluded from politics, while male members of the community exercised a fair amount of influence as mediators between indigenous groups and Nicaraguan or foreign local officials.⁷

⁶ Linda A. Newson, Indian Survival in Colonial Nicaragua (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987) p.279

⁷ Christine A. Loveland and Franklin O. Loveland, Editors

Black women, who were first imported as slaves during the first centuries of the colonial period, shared a similar position with indigenous women at the bottom of the social pyramid. Unlike Cuba, Nicaragua did not end up with a significant slave population that eventually made a large contribution to the ethnic mix. Instead, the black population was generally confined to the Atlantic coast where British influence and the English language was more important than Spanish. As the decades passed the population that emerged owed its mixed ancestry to the various ethnic groups that were to make up the region. Nevertheless, the social status of the "Ladino" population was generally lower than that of those who maintained their European blood-lines.⁸

In the towns and cities, ethnicity often dictated social status through access to employment. Some creole women, or women of Spanish descent, were able to achieve a small measure of economic independence by competing in the market place. Even in isolated outposts along the Caribbean, there were women who were merchants, shop owners, hotel keepers.⁹ Most women, however, found employment as servants, seamstresses, shopkeepers, laundresses, bakers and cooks. There is no evidence, however, that women's gradual entrance into

Sex Roles and Social Change in Native Lower Central American Societies (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982) p.128-129

⁸ Woodward, p.57-59

⁹ Craig L. Dozier, Nicaragua's Mosquito Shore (Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1985) p.167

commerce and wage labour enhanced their status within power-structures. For instance, there is no reference to women's participation in organized labour until the last half of the twentieth century. Only the case of Juana Ubalda, the daughter and private secretary of President Manuel Antonio de la Cerda, "who with her father, dealt with all business of the state in the year 1842," provided a remarkable exception to the rule of female exclusion from Nicaraguan politics.¹⁰

Advances by women in the field of education provided the first significant challenge to traditionally assigned female roles. In 1852, for example, Josefa Vega fought and won the right to study philosophy at the University of Granada.¹¹ In 1880, the first normal school for women was founded in León and two years later another college, staffed by North American instructors, was founded in Granada.¹² Through the college in Granada, Nicaraguan women were exposed to feminist ideas imported from the United States. Graduates went on to publish the first Nicaraguan literature to deal with issues that concerned the growing population of educated women.¹³ Yet despite the important advances women in the privileged classes were experiencing in the field of letters, it was

¹⁰ Lucrecia Noguera Carazo, Evolución cultural y política de la mujer Nicaraguense (pamphlet - 1975) p.4

¹¹ Noguera Carazo, p.4

¹² Noguera Carazo, p.5

¹³ Josefa Toledo de Aguerri, Anhelos y Esfuerzos, p.4-5

not until 1923 that women began to graduate with professional degrees.¹⁴

Women's roles were slowly evolving in the urban areas but the countryside remained locked in the traditions of the patriarchal hacienda. The coercion of labour and increasing marginalization of the rural population accompanied the growth of large plantations. Men were forced into migrant labour when subsistence agriculture on shrinking plots of land was no longer capable of supporting a family. Usually, women were left behind to take care of the tiny family plots that remained. Nevertheless, female and child labour was often used in the coffee and cotton harvest. Wage differentials between men and women meant that even with an entire family employed in a harvest, the income generated by the extra labour was insufficient to meet the needs of the family.¹⁵

Women's integration into productive labour magnified the burden of women's responsibility for reproductive labour. Most campesinas, or female peasants, shared an intense struggle against brutal conditions imposed by poverty. The energy required simply to achieve the basic tasks of survival--fetching water, preparing the corn tortillas that formed

¹⁴ Noguera Carazo, p.10

¹⁵ For a discussion of the development of Nicaragua's agricultural sector see, Jaime Biderman "The Development of Capitalism in Nicaragua: A political Economic History." Latin American Perspectives (Vol.10, 1983)

the staple diet of the Nicaraguan peasantry, tending the crops and caring for the children--exhausted most women and prevented them from taking part in community politics. Similarly, even the most basic education eluded the majority of peasant women. Illiteracy was endemic. Lack of education, ignorance and traditional male prejudices kept many women from participation in organized politics. Nevertheless, because women were often equal partners in subsistence farming, they would not remain passive in the face of encroachment on their means of existence. Peasant women no doubt took part in the numerous uprisings that occurred throughout the late 19th century. In the 1881 "War of the Comuneros" thousands of indigenous people were massacred by government troops. Peasants had attempted to defend their ownership of communal land, called "ejidos", against the owners of the rapidly expanding coffee plantations who used legal manoeuvring and force to expropriate increasingly large sections of land.¹⁶

As the coffee industry grew in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, so too did the influence of the Liberal modernizing forces. By 1893, General José Santos Zelaya established a Liberal government which turned into a sixteen year dictatorship. The consolidation of power by Liberal forces paved the way for the concentration of landholdings into large coffee plantations and increased foreign invest-

¹⁶ Thomas W. Walker, Nicaragua - The Land of Sandino (Boulder: Westview Press, 1981) p.59

ment in export agriculture. As in Cuba, United States capital took advantage of cheap land and labour to reap enormous profits from export agriculture. The growth of large modernized coffee plantations also made it more difficult for moderate producers with little capital to compete. As the market for coffee became more competitive, smaller operations were squeezed out. An administration dedicated to the modernization of the economy provided a legal apparatus suitable for the expropriation of communal land holdings dedicated to subsistence agriculture and offered no protection to small landholders and the native peasantry who lacked the necessary land titles. As in Cuba, the government's alliance with the interests of foreign capital led to the further marginalization of the independent peasantry and the growth of enormous plantations dependent on displaced seasonal labourers. The further integration of Nicaragua into the world market economy ensured the continuation of the cycle of modernization and alienation.

Regardless of the obvious advantages the Liberal regime had for foreign investment, businessmen in the United States resented the strict regulations imposed by Nicaraguans to enhance their ability to reap the benefits of foreign capital and technology.¹⁷ The end result was decreased investment in Nicaragua and the construction of a canal route in the United States inspired republic of Panama. Relations

¹⁷ John A. Booth, The End and The Beginning (Boulder: Westview Press, 1982) p.23

between Zelaya's government and the United States deteriorated further when the Nicaraguan president began to pursue other sources of foreign capital. The United States viewed loans and negotiations with competing nations as a threat to its privileged economic interests in Latin America. When Zelaya began discussions with Germany and Japan to build a canal to compete with the route through Panama, military intervention by the United States Marines in 1909, at the behest of the power-starved Conservatives, led to the collapse of the Liberal government.

A Conservative government, favouring United States interests but dependent on external support, began twenty-five years of chaotic rule. Twenty of those years were characterized by the military presence of the United States Marines in the country and the United States administration's largely unsuccessful manipulations of Nicaraguan politics. However the Liberals were unwilling to allow the wealthy oligarchy to reverse almost two decades of economic modernization. Even Conservative factions became disenchanted when the Americans favoured political rivals. Nicaragua once again plunged into civil war and political instability. By 1912, the United States backed government faced a Liberal insurrection and a Conservative rebellion. Drastic measures were taken and a force of 2700 Marines was used successfully to crush the two-pronged effort.¹⁸ The government of Adolfo

¹⁸ Booth, p.30-32

Díaz finally was able to maintain Conservative dominance until the departure of the U.S marine forces in 1925.

The initial period of United States intervention inspired many Nicaraguan middle and upper class women to reassess their cloistered existence. The wives of the Marines who accompanied their husbands seemed shockingly independent but many Nicaraguan women were soon imitating their foreign visitors. Josefa Toledo de Aguerri described the effect:

When the wives of the American soldiers arrived in our country, around 1912, they provided us with the example of women who crossed their legs and went out into the street without a hat or cloak. As time went by, we familiarized ourselves with their customs, and we began to take and let ourselves be taken by the arm, and to go out alone unchaperoned by our mothers or our maids, giving ourselves to the unconstrained and free air.¹⁹

The presence of "liberated" North American women may have provided a cosmopolitan attitude toward female etiquette but it did not resolve tensions between Nicaraguan women of different social classes and economic rivals. Nicaraguan men and women remained divided along Conservative and Liberal lines. While some of the ruling class benefited from the greedy expansion of United States finance, others grew increasingly frustrated. Despite the creation of a new National Guard intended to replace the peacekeeping force of the United States Marines, civil war was initiated in May 1926 when the Liberals captured Bluefields on the Caribbean coast. The exiled Liberal vice-president of the Conservative

¹⁹ Josefa Toledo de Aguerri, p.39

and Liberal coalition government, Juan Bautista Sacasa, quickly proclaimed himself leader of the Liberal forces. With the help of the United States Marines once again, the new Nicaraguan National Guard forestalled all out civil war until August.

Peace was only temporary. Soon after the failed effort of May, a new Liberal effort, armed and financed by Mexico and headed by Sacasa and General José María Moncada, was able to hold the Atlantic region against government forces. The civil war that ensued polarized segments of society that had previously remained on the sidelines of the political and military struggles that plagued Nicaragua.

In 1926, a renegade Liberal soldier named Augusto César Sandino enlisted the local prostitutes of Puerto Cabezas to help his men gather up the arms left by Liberal forces who retreated from the city in panic when United States forces decreed the evacuation of the area.²⁰ Women became an integral force of Sandino's tiny band in the months that followed. But the Liberals were not the only ones to enlist the support of the female population. In 1927, the New York Times reported that "a battalion of women, formed and led by a 20-year-old girl, assisted the Conservative forces" to recapture the Liberal held town of Chinandega on the Pacific coast. Women cleaned the men's guns and passed out food and

²⁰ Claribel Alegría and D.J. Flakoll, Nicaragua: La revolución Sandinista, una cronica política 1855-1979 (Mexico: Ediciones Era, 1982) p.60

ammunition. Sixteen of them were wounded while attending the men in the trenches.²¹ Women on both sides often got caught in the crossfire of American and Nicaraguan forces. For example, the New York Times reported how Captain William Richards claimed he was forced, in self defence, to kill a machete wielding wife of the Liberal General he had just murdered in cold blood.²²

With the intensification of efforts on both sides of the conflict and the involvement of the Mexicans, the United States renewed its policy of armed intervention. The United States government provided air, naval and land forces to re-establish a military stalemate between Liberal and Conservative forces. Finally, negotiations mediated by Henry Stimson bore fruit when General Moncada agreed to a ceasefire to consider the United States proposal of free elections after the Conservative president Diaz's term of office had expired. The Liberals were assured of eventual electoral victory; therefore, they viewed the option as attractive. On 12 May 1927, all but one of the the Liberal generals signed the Espino Negro Pact wherein they agreed to lay down their arms and negotiate a political settlement. Few considered the peace plan flawed by the failure of one intransigent general to agree to the terms outlined.

²¹ New York Times, "Women's Battalion in Battle for Diaz" (12 February 1927, page 1.)

²² New York Times, "Shooting in Self-Defense" 28 May 1927, page 1.

General Augusto Sandino, Nicaragua's first great nationalist hero, considered the continuation of United States intervention in Nicaragua to be an even greater threat than Conservative rule. The United States fervent desire for political stability would remain frustrated by Sandino's tenacious struggle for national liberation. He became renowned throughout the country for the proficiency of his guerilla tactics in the Segovia mountains of northeastern Nicaragua. Sandino was a peasant leader who was able to gain popular support from both men and women in the countryside. The impoverished and landless peasantry that populated the rural area was attracted to Sandino's nationalist struggle, because he understood the needs and interests of the peasantry. Moreover, he had witnessed first hand the brutal treatment meted out to the country's impoverished indigenous population. At the age of 9, Sandino was forced to watch his Indian mother's "mistreatment and miscarriage in an unhygienic prison cell."²³

Sandino's guerrilla army was successful against the well-equipped United States Marines largely because the Nicaraguan peasantry guaranteed secure access to communication and intelligence networks, supplies, transportation, and manpower. Women played a critical role as informants, warning Sandino's "crazy little army" of enemy positions and

²³ Donald C. Hodges, Intellectual Foundations of the Nicaraguan Revolution (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986) p.3

strength. The best example was, of course, the "telegrafista" from the Segovias, Blanca Aruas "who from the beginning was the director of his [Sandino's] efficient intelligence and communications net."²⁴ Sandino eventually married Blanca but in typical macho tradition left her behind two days after the wedding to pursue his goal of "patria libre." Moreover, peasants were suspicious of women who were willing to follow the men into battle and often considered them to be less respectable because of it.²⁵ Perhaps Sandino himself recognized the prejudices against female incorporation, for when asked by one of his men if he would bring his new wife with him to the jungle, he replied, "No ... what do you think? Wives you leave at home, lovers are the ones who go with you."²⁶ Although eventually Sandino did summon his wife to battle by his side in the latter part of the war against the Marines, it was his Salvadoran mistress, Teresa Villatoro, who first helped make the general's six year war effort less solitary.

Despite general disapprobation, the Sandinistas benefited from women's support in areas that went beyond companionship. Many women accompanied the troops to cook or tend the wounded. John Booth describes how the incorporation of the entire family aided the guerrilla effort:

²⁴ Alegría and Flakoll, p.58.

²⁵ Elizabeth Maier, Nicaragua, la mujer en la revolución (Mexico: Ediciones de Cultura Popular) p.24

²⁶ Alegría and Flakoll, p.69.

...Sandino's forces moved in sympathetic territory, utilized the local populace for intelligence, and avoided open confrontations with the Marines and the Guard. The guerrillas often worked their fields by day, their weapons buried. Word of an approaching government or marine patrol worked a terrible magic. The invisible army suddenly materialized and moved into hidden positions along the trail. A chilling chorus of cries from the guerrillas' children--known as the "Angels' choir" (el coro del los ángeles)--would sound disorientingly all around the patrol. Within seconds the ambush would begin with a withering cross fire from the steamy forest, often devastating the government forces.²⁷

While Sandino conducted his relentless struggle in the jungles of north-eastern Nicaragua, political manoeuvring by the Liberals and the Conservatives in the urban centers led to changes in the political climate. In 1928, an election supervised by the United States, that was "by most reckonings the least fraudulent Nicaragua ever had," provided the Liberals with their first government since 1909.²⁸ At least 2,000 Marines remained to help government forces keep Sandino at bay. Their services were desperately needed since the National Guard proved unable to shake the peasant forces.

Contradictory reports of atrocities committed by all sides during the war split public opinion in the cities. Although one woman's magazine called upon the female population to support President Sacasa with the slogan "Arms to pacify the Segovias! War to obtain peace!", widespread pub-

²⁷ Booth, p.44

²⁸ Booth, p.44

lic opinion in favour of military manoeuvres in the countryside proved difficult to maintain.²⁹ For example, a special volunteer force organized by the Liberal government was forced to disband after public outrage over its terrorist tactics. Efforts in 1930 to relocate the peasants of the Las Segovias into concentration camps again proved to be a disastrous policy both militarily and politically and the National Guard was forced to abandon its strategy.³⁰ Furthermore, relations between civilian Nicaraguans and the United States Marines were uneasy. A handful of women married the invaders but most heeded the Catholic Church's advice to stay away from the foreigners.³¹ The arrogance and brutality of the United States Marines further undermined Nicaraguan toleration of the imperialist forces and increased support for the peasant general.

Eventually, the war against Sandino, increasingly unpopular both in the United States and in Nicaragua, became an economic burden and political liability that the United States government was no longer willing to share. It proposed a withdrawal of the Marines after the presidential election of 1932. Determined not to leave the Nicaraguan government entirely vulnerable to rebel forces, the Americans took several steps to bolster the strength of the

²⁹ Toledo de Aguerri, p.58

³⁰ Booth, p.45

³¹ Harold Norman Denny, "A 'Bamboo War' under the Tropic Sun," New York Times Magazine, (26 February 1928) p.4-5

National Guard. One of them was to select a new commander of the Nicaraguan forces. Thus Anastasio Somoza Garcia, or Tacho as he was affectionately known by supporters, made his first sally into Nicaraguan history.

Somoza's marriage into an influential family had sealed important political connections and helped him overcome his lower class background, while his popularity as a good tango dancer enhanced his favour with the influential wife of United States Ambassador Hanna. When he married Salvatora Debayle he became presidential candidate Sacasa's nephew and obtained the politician's warmest recommendations for the position. Gregorio Selser even suggests that Somoza obtained the position of head of the National Guard as a result of Mrs. Hanna's affections.³²

In 1933, the imperialist forces finally abandoned Nicaragua to political infighting and a rapidly politicized National Guard. Sandino's agenda had been accomplished and he immediately entered cease-fire negotiations with newly elected President Sacasa. Meanwhile, Somoza was using both fair and foul means to consolidate his control over the most powerful institution in the nation. His most effective strategy to wrest an overwhelming majority of military supporters proved one of the most dastardly events in Nicaraguan history. On the night of 23 February 1934, immediately

³² Gregorio Selser, Sandino translated by Cedric Belfrage (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1981) p.145.

after discussing the peace plan with Sacasa at the Presidential Palace, Sandino and his top officials were arrested then murdered by the National Guard. Despite the general disapprobation shown by the president and a horrified public, Somoza soon came forward to admit to having masterminded the entire affair. Not only did his crime go unpunished, he even had himself awarded medals of distinctive service on three different occasions to commemorate the deed. He had secured the loyalty of the armed forces through his dramatic move and was soon in a position to challenge the authority of the president by first tightening his control over the Guardia by replacing commanders appointed by Sacasa.

Rarely did female members of the Nicaraguan oligarchy make forays into the messy wrangling that characterized Nicaraguan politics. However, Somoza's transparent lust for power prompted President Sacasa's wife to collect arms and support from her Central American neighbors for her husband's cause. She even went so far as to meet with United States officials in an attempt to secure her husband's regime.³³ Instead, the United States turned a blind eye to Somoza's obvious challenge to the Nicaraguan constitution and legitimate government. It even ignored his involvement in and sponsorship of a fascist organization which served to terrorize or eliminate his enemies. When Somoza proceeded to have himself elected president after forcing Sacasa to

³³ Alegria and Flakoll, p.106.

resign on the 6 June 1936, the United States government had conveniently "abandoned its policy of not recognizing illegally seized governments."³⁴ Señora Sacasa was finally usurped as first lady by Somoza's wife, Salvatora Debayle.

Nicaraguan politics, already bloodied by civil war, spiralled ever further into violence. Supporters of Sandino were liquidated. After the first repressive sweep, political parties and opposition movements became silent shadows of their former selves. Somoza's zealous corruption made him the richest man in the country within a few short years. He made his fortune through executive levies, bribes from gambling, prostitution, illegal alcohol sales, cattle smuggling, land expropriations, manipulation of financial institutions, the selling of government concessions and almost every other conceivable form of avarice. The primary objective of political control was obvious--to amass the greatest possible fortune for the Somoza family and its supporters. It is within this context that we examine the position of women within Nicaraguan society during the forty-year dictatorship initiated by Anastasio Somoza Garcia in 1936.

As had been the case in Cuba, Nicaraguan women's legal status was inferior to men's legal status except in terms of criminal responsibility. Spanish civil law dictated that women must obey their husbands. Men were always considered head of the household. By 1939, the Nicaraguan constitution

³⁴ Booth, p.52-54

declared that all Nicaraguans were equal before the law, except for women, when "natural differences" and the good of the family prohibited it. Furthermore, professional activity was restricted by law. Women, however, did have free legal control over property owned before marriage and property obtained within marriage, in addition to having complete access to any salary earned.³⁵ It is doubtful, however, that Nicaraguan women enjoyed the economic independence provided by the constitution. Societal norms were rigidly enforced, whereas legal rights were consistently trampled in a country where successive military dictatorships used the law to legitimize policies that ensured the perpetuation of the country's economic elite.

The sexual double standard was institutionalized by divorce laws that treated female adultery more harshly than male adultery. Men enhanced their stature within a community by supporting more than one woman and one family.³⁶ Moreover, when divorce occurred, whoever had provided the economic sustenance of the children gained custody.³⁷ More often than not, women were simply abandoned and a tradition of male irresponsibility toward their offspring became the norm in Nicaraguan society.

³⁵ Eduardo Le Riverend Brusone, El Derecho de la mujer casada (Havana: Obispo, 521, 1945) p.81.

³⁶ Sandino's own father provides a famous example of how the two family rule operated in Nicaraguan society.

³⁷ Maier, p.28.

Not all women remained placid victims of a repressive patriarchal society. However, it was only economically secure and educated women who could safely challenge women's legal, social and economic inequity. Proof that educated and urban Nicaraguan women were not oblivious to politics and feminist currents within North America and the rest of Latin America was the existence of the Revista Femenina Ilustrada. The magazine's editor and chief contributor, Josefa Toledo de Aguerri, was an activist in international and Nicaraguan women's organizations.³⁸ A tireless educator and a pragmatic feminist, she was educated by the North American teachers of the Colegio de Señoritas in Granada, whom she credited with having broken the "ancient mold that condemned women to the educational standards of the past" and facilitating her entrance into the world of science and letters.

In her first issue of the Revista Femenina Ilustrada, in October 1918, Toledo de Aguerri was able to name, within a few lines, all the women who were politically active in Nicaragua, all the female professionals, writers, poets and novelists, and the intrepid women who pursued careers in areas that had always excluded women.³⁹ Determined to expand the number of potential feminist activists in Nicaragua she announced the organization of the Ladies Club of Managua

³⁸ Francesca Miller, "International Relations of Women in The Americas 1890-1928" The Americas (Vol.43, No.2, 1986) p.177

³⁹ Josefa Toledo de Aguerri, Anhelos y Esfuerzos, p.13

(Club de Señoras de la Capital), which proposed "to amplify the radius of action of Nicaraguan women with respect to morality, charity, hygiene and public adornment."⁴⁰

Doña Chepita, as she was affectionately known to her admirers, was determined to educate her contemporaries as to the intricacies of Feminist theory and the state of women's emancipation throughout the world. Her travels to the United States and throughout Latin America were published in the Revista Femenina and later in the journal Mujer Nicaragüense, and were meant to inspire Nicaraguan women to strive for the same political gains made in more developed countries. One article, written in September 1920, described a trip to Cuba and her interview with the president of the Cuban suffragist movement, Amelia Maiben de Ostolaza, who told her Nicaraguan colleague of her hope that women would soon gain the political rights they had been assured of by the government of the day.⁴¹ In general, however, Toledo de Aguerri was a cautious propagandist for the Feminist cause. For example, she informed her readers of the impressive advances of women in the Canadian parliament but cautioned against attempting to imitate their North American sisters when only 15 per cent of Nicaraguan women could even "write

⁴⁰ Josefa Todedo de Aguerri, "Palabras en la Inauguración del Club de Señoras de la capital" Anhelos y Esfuerzos, p.13

⁴¹ Josefa Toledo de Aguerri, A Correr de la Pluma (Managua: Imprenta Nacional, 19) p.67-68

letters correctly."⁴²

Despite the sophisticated discussions of Feminist theory which appeared in Toledo de Aguerri's magazines, women's organizations of the period remained ineffectual. Criticism of the patriarchal society they lived in was absent from the literature, as was criticism of the harsh social reality which inflicted most women with the terrible burdens of poverty and ignorance. Women who led a comfortable existence in the cities were cognizant of the plight of poor women but their attitude remained patronizing. For example, when Toledo de Aguerri was asked by the Pan-American Union of Women to undertake a survey of institutions of child welfare in her country, she discovered that five hundred out of six hundred children born in 1918 had died that same year. To her credit, she published the horrifying statistics and urged women to do something about the situation by joining two new organizations whimsically called the Drop of Milk (Gota de Leche) and the Cradle Room (Sala Cuna).⁴³ No attempts were made to join forces with peasant or working class women. Instead, women of the privileged classes were entreated to take up their charitable responsibilities as the moral leaders of the community. No investigation was made into the cause of such tragic losses in human potential.

⁴² Toledo de Aguerri, p.52-53

⁴³ Toledo de Aguerri, p.42-43

Despite Toledo de Aguerri's pioneering attempts to organize women in the 1920's, the stirrings of a feminist movement were not felt in Nicaragua until 1932 when the Liga Feminista Nicaraguense made its first appearance. The following year, the president of the organization published "Decálogo de Feminismo, o sea, Ideales y Programas de Trabajo que Tiende a Realizar la Liga Feminista de Nicaragua" which was based on the program already provided by the Liberal Party. Both organizations demanded the vote for women. Although vice-president, Dr. Rodolfo Espinosa R., maintained his party's pro-suffrage rhetoric when he was re-elected in 1933, any possibility of the introduction of female suffrage was smothered by the power struggles being waged by Sacasa and Somoza.

The issue did not completely disappear because the Liberal party, renamed by Somoza as the Partido Liberal Nacionalista (PLN), maintained its unfulfilled promise to grant women the vote. Yet the traditions of machismo carried the day and when further debate on the subject was aroused by Espinosa in 1939, his pleas for equality were countered once again by the age old argument that "woman is a weak feather that would move with the slightest breeze of religious influence."⁴⁴ The best women from the privileged classes could hope for was a few representatives in government

⁴⁴ Amelia Borge de Sotomayor, La Mujer y el Derecho (thesis) (Leon, Nicaragua: Universidad Nacional de Nicaragua, 1953) p.62

office and the occasional plum position as the head of some international or government sponsored organization. The price, of course, was utter loyalty to the Somoza regime, a price that meant ignoring the plight of the vast majority of women in Nicaragua.

Like most of her class, Josefa Toledo de Aguerri's political alliances moved easily from President Sacasa to General Somoza. In a country of less than a million people, women who found their way into Nicaraguan political history during the first twenty-five years of the dictatorship had intimate ties to the Somoza family. Doña Chepita omitted analysis of the dictatorship's repressive policies and instead wasted valuable space in the columns of her periodicals to write flattering accounts of Señora Somoza's hypocritical forays into the world of charity.

Political organization that threatened or could potentially threaten the privileged status of the Somoza family and its lackeys was not tolerated. On occasion, Tacho displayed a certain regard for women that his defenders might refer to as pro-feminist. However proclaiming his wife's birthday as the "Day of the Army" and putting his daughter's picture on one-cordoba bills was more an example of his desire to embellish his own status than it was to demonstrate his respect for women.⁴⁵ When a period of instability

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William Krehm, Democracies and Tyrannies of the Caribbean (Westport: Lawrence Hill and Company, 1984) p.117

threatened to bring down his regime during the period of 1944-1948, Somoza revealed his true disposition toward those who dared organize against him. Even respectable women from the upper classes were not immune to his ungentlemanly tactics. William Krehm provides a revealing anecdote:

When Managua society women organized an anti-government demonstration, he mobilized the city's whores to attack the politicking ladies.... The "loyal" forces carried the day by surprise.

Later, Somoza met with the knife wielding Madame who had lead the attack and thanked her "in hearty language proper to her trade." Krehm finishes the tale saying that Somoza's good friend "became quite a pillar of the regime, and even invaded the assembly to buffet oppositionist forces."⁴⁶

Such was the level of political wrangling that preceded the new constitution and its recognition of women's right to vote in 1950. Somoza's crude tactics hardly compare to the sophisticated methods by which Batista maintained order in Cuba; nevertheless, his manipulative use of the female half of the wealthy classes betrays a keen awareness that he would be forgiven for such extremes when it became clear that his National Guard was the best defence against the just demands of the impoverished majority. The PLN, through which Somoza distributed government largesse to worthy followers, opened its doors to female members of the Nicaraguan oligarchy with the creation of the "Ala Femenina Liberal."

⁴⁶ Krehm, p.123

According to one of the founding members of the "agrupación poderosa," Lucrecia Noguera Carrazo, the "perfectly organized" women's sector of the PLN helped ensure that the new political rights enshrined in the Nicaraguan constitution by Somoza's progressive Liberals in 1950 would garner the political support necessary when the time came for women to vote. It was no coincidence that the Ala Femenina Liberal was headed by Somoza's Vice-Minister of Public education and was given full support by Luis Somoza Debayle and his wife Isabel Urcuyo de Somoza. Nor was it surprising that the organization was given sufficient funding to enable it to establish committees at the national, provincial and municipal levels.⁴⁷ Noguera Carrazo revealed the purpose of the organization when she claimed that:

the electoral period arrives, the country's female Liberal majority, will be found prepared to exercise their right to vote in conformity with their convictions, which have come to constitute a determined and respectable bulwark in electoral results, already in the latest election polls, 60 to 67 per cent of the voters had given their support to the Nationalist Liberal Party, which is the superior party.⁴⁸

The hypocrisy with which Somoza's followers discussed electoral politics was belied by the everyday realities of an authoritarian regime. Bernard Diederich describes the grim reality of the Somoza regime:

⁴⁷ Noguera Carrazo, p.14-15

⁴⁸ Noguera Carrazo, p.15

Police state? There were no police in Nicaragua, just the army - but army permits were required to go from one city to another. In Managua in 1948, every street corner was under observation and the movements of all important people were charted. Telephone calls were monitored, private mail was opened, and the local press was under strict censorship.⁴⁹

How could women such as Lucrecia Noguera Carrazo believe that electoral freedom would re-emerge in a country where, in 1937, the president had himself re-elected by 99 per cent of the vote for an eight year term of office?⁵⁰ Obviously, the women of the privileged classes who could take part in politics without the threat of being arrested, tortured, murdered, or any combination of the three, had something to gain by playing a part in a regime that looked after the interests of the few at the expense of the many. By 1953, a few women were assigned ministerial duties as subsecretaries of education. Nine women served in the external service; there was one female criminal and civil court judge, and one woman served as Mayor in the Department of Boaco.⁵¹ Somoza and his accomplices clearly defined their duties:

she must form an active part of the political life of the country, once installed making use of her political rights while remaining fully conscious of that which complies with the sacred interests of the nation, which translates into the interests of the family, the central preoccupation and motive of all women.⁵²

⁴⁹ Bernard Diederich, Somoza and the Legacy of United States Involvement in Central America, (New York: E.P.Dutton, 1981) p.31

⁵⁰ Diederich, p.21

⁵¹ Borge de Sotomayor, p.65.

The dictator had a narrow and unwavering interpretation of the meaning of the phrases "sacred interests of the country" and "the interests of the family." One does not have to be a cynic to conclude that, in reality, only the interests of the families of the privileged classes were the equivalent of the "sacred interests of the nation." The maintenance of class solidarity was the implicit duty of the few women Somoza allowed to take office.

Very few, in fact, acknowledged or welcomed Somoza's "progressive" policies. Most Nicaraguans were conscious of the dictator's repressive policies which stole from them their livelihood and their children's future. The advances made by middle and upper-class women aligned to the regime were entirely irrelevant to women of the urban working class or the rural peasantry who were still recovering from the shattering losses caused by Somoza's revenge against the supporters of Sandino and by the great depression. The dictator made a few overtures to the working class during the forties when his control over the nation required a populist approach. However the gains made by unions and the Nicaraguan Socialist Party evaporated when popular support was no longer necessary to keep the dictator's Conservative enemies at bay. By 1950, Somoza had co-opted his traditional political opponents (the Conservatives) and had forced into exile or murdered any potential new rivals from the ranks of the

⁵² Noguera Carrazo, p.14

urban proletariat.⁵³

Somoza considered himself a farmer, and Nicaragua was his farm. Thousands of peasants were forced off the land to make room for an ever-expanding agro-export industry based on coffee, cotton and cattle. The depression of the thirties aided both Somoza and the agricultural exporting elite to add to their vast landholdings at an even more rapid pace. Smallholders and subsistence farmers lost their land through debt foreclosures or through physical removal by the private armies of the rich. (The largest, of course, was Somoza's National Guard.) With the expansion of capital-intensive agricultural industry, such as cotton and cattle raising, rural unemployment increased. The dispossessed travelled to the cities where they found even less employment and relief.

The first blow to the regime took place on 21 September 1956 when Rigoberto López Pérez assassinated Anastasio Somoza García. The young poet was immediately killed by Colonel Camilio González Cervantes.⁵⁴ The Somoza family recovered from the blow with remarkable speed and adeptness. Tacho's two sons, Luis and Anastasio II, known before his father's death by the diminutive Tachito, had been groomed since youth to carry on the dynasty. Tachito, a West Point graduate, had moved quickly up the ranks of the National Guard to his natural position of commander in chief. Luis played a

⁵³ Black, p.64-65

⁵⁴ Diederich, p.47-48

powerful role in the PLN and took over the political end of the regime. It took the two brothers barely a week to establish themselves at Nicaragua's helm - Luis as president and Tacho II as head of the National Guard. While Luis smoothed opposition to his ascendancy in the senate, Anastasio Somoza Debayle participated enthusiastically in the detention and torture of thousands of Nicaraguans suspected of having participated in his father's assassination. Tachito's favorite methods of quelling the nation's opposition to the new dynasty were:

electrical shocks with an airplane magneto, lifting or dragging by a cord tied around the genitals, imprisonment in a coffin-sized cell, or time in the Somoza family's private zoo. This last method incarcerated prisoners, for months in some cases, in barred cages open to the weather, next to lions and panthers, in the garden of the presidential residence.⁵⁵

Luis Somoza Debayle and his brother Anastasio Somoza Debayle continued Tacho's policy of limited female integration into the tightly confined power structure. Tachito's wife, Hope Portocarrero de Somoza, became the president of the National Junta of Social Assistance and Supply. Furthermore, women continued to obtain positions in the diplomatic service as counsellors, cultural attachés, and consular staff. There were twelve female representatives to the legislative assembly, and a female lawyer who served as an aid to the president of the Electoral Tribunal. At lower levels, women served as judges, municipal treasurers, or rent admin-

⁵⁵ Booth, p.72

istrators. Those not among the few elected or nominated to office could participate in the country's political affairs by joining the "Damas Colaboradoras del Partido Liberal Nacionalista" to help Doña Hope in her political campaigns on behalf of the party. Others could join the Red Cross, a veritable bastion for self-respecting ladies interested in charity and good deeds. The more radical among them could perhaps participate in organizations founded by the irrepressible Josefa Toledo de Aguerri--the Junta Femenina de Beneficia, Club de Señoras, Escuela de Prensa para Obreras, Mesa Redonda Panamericana, Unión de Mujeres Americanas, La Gota de Leche or the Sala Cuna.⁵⁶ Professional women organized themselves into various associations, while housewives joined organizations such as "Esposas de Ingenieros y Arquitectos, Médicos, Abogados."⁵⁷

As a consequence of the conscious efforts of Somoza and his ardent supporters to placate the middle-class, women from the wealthy classes cannot be said to have been entirely alienated from the arena of power. Intimate ties to the Somoza family were necessary to ensure one's status within Nicaraguan oligarchy. The Somozas were the richest and most powerful family in the country and as such could command the political loyalty of those who depended on government

⁵⁶ Bertilda Portocarrero de Chamorro, Influencia de la mujer educadora en la humanidad. Doña Josefa Toledo de Aguerri, (Managua: Bertilda Portocarrero de Chamorro, 1962)

⁵⁷ Noguera Carazo, p.16-19.

repression and corruption to maintain their privileged position. Female Somosistas shared responsibility for the depraved regime; therefore, the women's groups they organized represented the few at the expense of the many.

Chapter III

REVOLUTIONARY STRUGGLE IN CUBA AND NICARAGUA

Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, nationalist ambitions, class interests or even ethnicity were stronger political motivations for Cuban and Nicaraguan women than were common perceptions of gender oppression. In both countries, precedents for female participation in liberation struggles, peasant revolt and labour unrest were easy to find, however there is little evidence to suggest that women's participation in Martí's Mambisa troops and Antonio Mella's Joven Cuba, or Sandino's guerrilla army, provided a feminist vanguard among middle-class conspirators, impoverished peasants or workers. Neither Cuban nor Nicaraguan women's experience of struggle against the status quo inspired a feminist political consciousness. It proved that women were capable of taking up arms against an oppressor but it did not prevent women from withdrawing from the political battlefield when they were no longer required.

The few women brave enough to step back into the political arena were inspired by the feminist ideology and suffrage movements that developed in Europe and North America at the end of the nineteenth century. The increasingly educated and articulate women of the Cuban and Nicaraguan mid-

dle-classes began to expand the scope of their economic and political horizons. Nevertheless, attempts to create a broad base of support for a "feminist" agenda which included universal suffrage, equal pay for equal work, improved access to education and employment were almost non-existent or at best opportunistic. Attempts to overcome class barriers initiated by Cuban Feminists in the 1920s came only during a period of extreme crisis and was quickly extinguished by the contradictory interests of the parties involved. In Nicaragua there is no evidence of cooperation at all between middle-class women and the poverty-stricken majority. At no time did women come together as a united front to demand a restructuring of social relations in either country. Few middle-class women were interested in radical change; they simply wanted improvements.

In view of the history of Cuban and Nicaraguan women that preceded the liberation struggles that led to the revolutionary governments led by Fidel Castro and the Frente Sandinista de Liberacion Nacional (FSLN) it would seem unlikely that women's participation in the Rebel Army or in the Sandinista forces would initiate a change in social relations between women and men. The discussion that follows is an attempt to analyze the nature of women's participation in struggle in order to assess the potential for radical change in the emerging revolutionary power structures.

Cuba: Fighting With Fidel

When my son was born there were difficult moments, such moments as any woman goes through when she is bearing a child. The pain was terrible, pain enough to tear out one's insides, yet there was also the strength to keep from crying, screaming or cursing. And why? Because a child was coming.

That was Moncada. In spite of the pain, the feeling of being lost, the sorrow there, greater than any other, I believe we kept our serenity because we knew what was to come from it all.¹

1952 marked the end of Cuba's twisted version of liberal democracy. Batista orchestrated the fall of the government of Carlos Prío under the pretext that he had evidence that the president was contemplating a pre-emptive coup to prevent the Cuban People's Party, better known as the Ortodoxos, from winning the coming election. Batista's "golpe" encountered little resistance from the indecisive president. Only the student movement and labour responded with apparent animosity. The public seemed apathetic, resigned as it was to a continuation of the gangsterism of the previous decade. The Americans gave Batista's regime prompt recognition. The middle-classes and the elite accepted the new dictator's promise of elections in 1953 and stood by his restructuring of government administration. Constitutional guarantees were suspended and although Batista claimed that the essence of the 1940 constitution, which he himself had helped draft, was upheld in the new constitutional code he instituted, "rights of speech, of assembly and of press could be auto-

¹ Haydée Santamaría, Moncada Translated by Robert Taber (Secause, NJ: Lyle Stuart Inc., 1980) p.97-98

matically suspended at any time for forty-five-day periods."² In addition, the police force and the military were expanded and their loyalty rewarded with greater generosity than ever before.

Public response to the installation of the new regime was muted. Only the students managed to maintain a level of protest equal to the situation. The autonomy of the university initially provided them with a minimal amount of security from which to launch what little opposition there was. At first their demonstrations against the government were neither remarkable for their size nor for their ability to attract public attention but when Batista provided them with their first martyr, Rubén Batista, on 15 January 1953, the momentum began to shift toward more spectacular manifestations of protest. In April, an armed group of students and lecturers were arrested as a result of their attempt to persuade the military officers at Campamento Columbia to join them in their struggle against Batista. Other demonstrations against the government ended in violent dispersals, beatings and even deaths. Finally the university was closed on 14 April. Although the extent to which women played a role in the first few months of protest is unclear, a week after the closing of the university 175 students were arrested; thirty-two of them were women.³

² Hugh Thomas, Cuba The Pursuit of Freedom, p.790

³ Thomas, p.800-801

While women who continued the tradition of student protest initiated during the thirties experienced harsh treatment at the hands of the Batistianos, women of the ruling class were handsomely rewarded for their support of the current regime. Indeed, when Batista formed his "consejo consultivo" to replace the incapacitated congress of 1952, seven women of high status were assigned posts.⁴ Numerically, their participation in the government executive matched the degree of incorporation women had experienced after the 1936 elections.

Bourgeois women not directly involved in government made their presence known in the public sphere in other ways. Informed by religious morality, the general's ladies obtained flattering press coverage for their involvement in charitable programs for the poor and underprivileged. They thrived on the conspicuous attention that could be gained by the right dedication to the right kind of cause. Consequently, a well publicized charitable event, such as giving out gifts to the poor during the Christmas season, helped maintain their public status among the few who could afford to give. The poor, the orphans, the homeless, and the handicapped became the responsibility of wealthy women - not the government.

⁴ Riera Hernández, p. 169-170

Similarly, Batista used his wife as a mechanism to seduce an irritated opposition; according to Hugh Thomas, "Marta Fernández de Batista began to make gifts of charity in the style of Evita Perón, stretching out the hand of the First Lady in the hope of soothing disturbed political sensibilities."⁵ In fact, Marta Fernández even became the subject of a laudatory book written by one of the many sycophants who admired her dedication to physically handicapped children in need of orthopedic equipment, poor women in need of sewing machines, the homeless victims of Hurricane Jaimanitas, orphans and the aged who needed care, working-class women who needed layettes on the birth of their children, and countless other worthy causes.⁶ Nevertheless, Marta's fan club was nowhere near the size of Evita's and social reality underscored the hypocrisy of her pose as the champion of the underprivileged. It was common knowledge that the trickle of wealth so graciously dispensed by Marta and her husband had been accumulated at the expense of Cuban workers. The Batistas' insensitivity to the plight of the average Cuban was hidden behind a continual flood of government propaganda that publicized the few projects meant to enhance social welfare.

⁵ Thomas, p.791

⁶ Edelmira González, Martha Fernández Miranda de Batista (Havana, 1955)

The economic boom during the fifties made it easy for Batista and his allies to take credit for rising standards of economic and social welfare. Similarly, statistics regarding female integration into the labour force, electoral politics, public office, and institutions of higher learning were used to portray the progressive nature of Batista's republic. In addition to laudatory books, pamphlets and newspaper reports detailing the advances made under the regime, documents such as the 1953 Cuban census became, for some, the basis on which to determine the social and economic status of women in the pre-revolutionary state.

In contrast, others have taken a critical view of the data provided during the Batista era. Historians such as María Martínez Guayanes are more likely to stress statistical revelations which confirm their description of the miserable conditions facing most women during the pre-revolutionary half of the century.⁷ Although the analysis provided by Martínez Guayanes is used to enhance the progress made by the revolutionary regime under Castro, her interpretation of the census is valid simply because it is so detailed and critical. Her discussion of women's integration into the labour force is particularly useful.

⁷ See for example, María A. Martínez Guayanes "La situación de la mujer en Cuba en 1953" Santiago (Cuba) Vol.15 1974.

According to Martínez Guayanes's dissection of the 1953 census, most working women were to be found in the urban setting, particularly in Havana. The service industry employed 65 per cent of women workers, mainly as domestics. Moreover, of the thousands of domestics included in the calculation of the active labour population, 82.5 per cent of these women worked less than 10 weeks per year.⁸ Their isolation and irregular employment effectively prevented the largest sector of female labour from organizing. Of the remaining sectors of the female labour force, almost 19 per cent were in manufacturing, 16 per cent could be categorized as professionals (mainly teachers), 14 per cent as office employees, 2 per cent as executives and 6 per cent as agricultural workers.⁹

Traditionally, in some rural areas, such as Las Villas, Camaguey, and Matanzas, less than 3 per cent of the female population was employed outside the home. The precarious position of rural women in the labour force was further reflected in the sugar industry, which formed the basis of the Cuban economy. The seasonal work-force upon which it depended was almost entirely male. In 1958, only 1.3 per cent of the labour force employed by the country's sugar industry was female.¹⁰ Furthermore, the seasonal nature of

⁸ Martínez Guayanes, p. 208-209

⁹ Martínez Guayanes, p.208

¹⁰ Martínez Guayanes, p.210

the few jobs that were open to women prevented effective organization. The case of rural and domestic workers is obvious, but even urban women remained powerless. Textile workers, for example, were unable to organize more than a third of their number because of the practice of exploiting homeworkers.¹¹ Nonetheless, a limited amount of labour organization did take place and there are a few references to labour actions taken by women. For example, Martínez Guayanes describes a hunger strike by matchworkers in response to the layoffs which accompanied the creation of an industry monopoly.

Women's employment was tightly constrained by educational opportunities and cultural values which in turn reinforced class and gender status. According to the 1953 census, 21.21 per cent of the female population over the age of ten was illiterate and 65 per cent of these women lived in rural areas. At the other end of the scale, 22 per cent of the female population over the age of 14 had matriculated at some level, whether it was primary, secondary, or university and only .48 per cent of that total obtained university degrees during the 1952-1953 school year. Those women who went to university were concentrated in a few areas of study: education, pharmacy, and arts, while a few studied law, medicine, and administration. In contrast, the sciences, engineering, architecture, and the like, rarely attract-

¹¹ Martínez Guayanes, p.211

ed female students.¹² Thus professional women were found in areas where "feminine" qualities were thought to be of use. Similarly, huge areas of employment were off limits to women because they were thought to endanger their reproductive functions. Moreover, the middle-class bias against physical labour ensured that women who could afford it would depend heavily on domestic help. Ironically, these women improved their opportunities to enter the work force in professional areas such as teaching or medicine, while others were forced to accept miserable working conditions and pitiful pay justified by status concepts.

In addition to cultural bias and class divisions, racism further complicated the employment situation for women. Although the 1940 constitution proscribed racial discrimination and proclaimed equality, reality contradicted the standards of fairness enshrined by law. Black women were forced to take the worst paying, least respected positions. According to Martínez Guayanes, most black women worked as tobacco strippers, domestics, washerwomen, or ironers--jobs that were at the bottom of the economic scale.¹³

If one was poorly educated, black, or both, opportunities for decent employment that would provide sufficient pay with which to feed and shelter a family were scant indeed. It is no wonder that so many women resorted to prostitution. In

¹² Martínez Guayanes, p.224

¹³ Martínez Guayanes, p.207

1953, the Instituto Nacional de Reforma Económica estimated 10,560 women to be engaged in prostitution and 42.85 per cent of that population was concentrated in the capital. Later estimates repudiated the earlier findings as too conservative and suggested that by 1958 there were 15,000 to 20,000 prostitutes in Havana alone.¹⁴

Women who were forced into prostitution because of an economic system which failed to recognize the worth of their labour, also fell victim to police exploitation of their trade. Batista's National Police Force found it easy to procure new prostitutes from among the desperate "guajiritas" (young peasant girls) who continually made their way to the city to escape the oppressive poverty of the countryside.¹⁵ Moreover, Batista maintained political hegemony by allowing the National Police Force to insure the privileged position and wealth of its members through a system known as the "forrajeo." The president looked away while the police extorted a percentage of profit from almost every legal or illegal business activity in the country. One of the most profitable avenues of the forrajeo was the exploitation of the massive trade in prostitution. Ramón Bonachea and Marta San Martín provide a detailed account:

¹⁴ Martínez Guayanes, p.220

¹⁵ Ramón L. Bonachea and Marta San Martín, The Cuban Insurrection 1952-1959 (New Brunswick N.J.: Transaction Books, 1974) p.33

In Havana alone, there were approximately 2000 houses of prostitution Each casa paid an amount calculated by the local patrolman after figuring out the number of clients per night, and the fees charged each one. Thus, very humble casas could pay from \$50 to \$70 per night, while the richest of all - Casa Marina - contributed from \$3000 to \$5000 a night. All payments were due between 12 midnight and 5 am. Uniformed policemen would arrive at the various casas, and the Madame would have the cash on hand. The transaction was made in front of any clients who happened to be on hand.¹⁶

In the end, the forrajeo proved Batista's undoing. According to Bonachea and San Martín, prostitutes turned spies were an excellent source of information and support for the underground movements of the period. They pried information from important clients who were linked to government agencies then either transferred their findings to an agent or served as messengers to operatives in the countryside. They also helped protect those hiding from Batista's forces and in some instances fell victim to police assassination when their collaboration was discovered.¹⁷

Prostitutes were not the only sector of society to react against the corruption and steady repression meted out by Batista's army and police force. New political forces which recognized the suffering borne by the vast majority of Cubans were on the horizon. The most significant act of protest following Batista's rise to power was a dramatic assault on the National Guard's second largest military gar-

¹⁶ Bonachea and San Martín, p.33

¹⁷ Bonachea and San Martín, p.34 and note on p.354

rison. The attack on the Moncada Barracks took place on 26 July 1953, a date which also marked the centenary of the birth of Martí. The participants of the disastrous raid were, for the most part, workers and farmers. The leaders were intellectuals and members of either the middle-class or the petite-bourgeoisie with links to the Ortodoxos. There were only two women involved but they were closely involved through family ties to the movement's leadership and thus played a significant role in the formation of the group's program. Nevertheless the women's participation during the assault was confined to the rearguard. Although Melba Hernández and Haydée Santamaria trained with equal dedication for combat, they were allowed only to go along as nurses at the insistence of the guerrillas' doctor.¹⁸ The two women would become an important component of the rebellion against Batista, however the significance of their participation would become more symbolic than representative of women's integration into the revolutionary struggle that ensued.

Militarily, the attack was a complete failure, yet it symbolized a new phase in the struggle against Batista. The organization that carried out the attack, known only as the 26 of July Movement, gained popular sympathy as a result of the brutal treatment received by the first group of captured rebels. All of the men made prisoners by the Guard during the attack, save three, were eventually tortured then mur-

¹⁸ Carol Robb and Alice Hageman, "Let Them be Examples..." Cuba Review (Vol.4, No.2, 1974) p.21

dered. Both of the women involved survived but were forced to listen while their fiancés and Haydée's brother, Abel Santamaría, were tortured to death.¹⁹ However the movement was saved from total obliteration because of the public outrage generated by the Guardia's extremes. Rebels captured a week after the attempt received due process and were able to carry on the struggle from behind bars. Through the development of a clever communication network, made possible by the dedication of prison inmates and several women, the leader of the 26 July Movement was able to publish the movement's first manifesto.

Fidel Castro's History Will Absolve Me speech, performed first in court, then distributed in published form a few months later by Haydée Santamaría and Melba Hernández would be the first hint as to the direction of a new and seemingly insignificant challenge to Batista's Cuba. In it, the obscure rebel leader defended his violent challenge to Batista's authority claiming that he and his followers had not participated in an armed uprising against the constitutional powers of the state since "the dictatorship that oppresses the nation is not a **constitutional power**, but an unconstitutional one...."²⁰ Castro went on to claim widespread support for his movement, stating that "if Moncada had fallen into

¹⁹ Thomas, p.838

²⁰ Fidel Castro, "History will Absolve Me" On Trial, Fidel Castro and Régis Debray (London: Lorrimer Publishing, 1968) p.17

our hands, even the women of Santiago would have shouldered arms. Many rifles were loaded for our fighters by the nurses of the City Hospital! They fought alongside us."²¹ He further stressed the potential of the female sector of the population when he graphically told of Haydée Santamaria's courage in the face of mental and physical torture at the hands of the Batistianos. Concluding that, "never have the heroism and dignity of Cuban women reached such heights."²²

Most importantly, Castro asserted that had his forces been able to wrest power from the tyrant he would have immediately imposed five revolutionary laws:

1. The restoration of the constitution of 1940 as the "supreme Law of the State" and its implementation through the executive, judiciary, and legislative powers of the revolutionary movement.
2. Property grants would be given to "all planters, non-quota-planters, lessees, share-croppers and squatters who hold parcels of one hundred and sixty-five acres or less of land...."
3. Workers would share at least 30 per cent of the profits made by large industrial, mercantile and mining enterprises.
4. All planters would gain "the right to share 55% of the sugar production," and a minimum quota of would be set for all small planters "who have been established three or more years."
5. All property gained through fraud and graft under previous regimes would be confiscated and the proceeds put toward the betterment of workers and the underprivileged.²³

²¹ Castro, "History Will Absolve Me," p.22

²² Castro, "History Will Absolve Me," p.44

²³ Castro, "History Will Absolve Me," p.29-30

Although women's rights were not specifically mentioned among the changes that would have been imposed by the revolutionary movement, the earlier rhetoric about female heroism and the importance given to the progressive constitution of 1940 does suggest a certain degree of commitment toward improving the status of women.

Despite Fidel Castro's impassioned self-defence, the court imposed a sentence of 15 years imprisonment. The women received only seven months each.²⁴ With the insurgents behind bars and the opposition weakened by internal strife, Batista moved to legitimate his regime through the manipulation of the elections of 1954. He stepped down temporarily while the nine parties lobbied intensely for public support. Students continued to clash with the police and terrorist attacks against the government did not cease. However the divisions within the opposition proved disastrous when combined with electoral fraud and police coercion used by Batista and his supporters. Finally, the two main opposition parties withdrew from the election when their demands for a direct vote were denied. The general was re-elected for another four year term and the charges of electoral irregularities fell on deaf ears.

The widespread belief that the elections of 1954 were a sham failed to budge the new regime from its path of corruption and repression. Protest seemed not only futile but sui-

²⁴ Bonachea and San Martín, p.28

cidal. The insurrectionist strategy waned while the leaders of the 26 July Movement remained in prison. The opposition, however, maintained its pressure on the government to release its political prisoners. After a successful media campaign, Fidel Castro was released in May 1955. He immediately re-established his connections with the Ortodoxos but found little support for his strategy of armed insurrection until he was recommended to Frank País by Ortodoxo activist María Antonia Figueroa. Like Figueroa, País was from the province of Oriente, a region where female participation in political struggle had historically been strong. Figueroa, then provincial treasurer for 26 July Movement, was largely responsible for Fidel Castro's most valuable recruit.²⁵ País and his experienced followers in the Acción Nacional Revolucionaria (ANR) eventually agreed to incorporate themselves with the 26 July Movement in late 1955. Finally, enough support for 26 July Movement's insurrectionary strategy had been garnered to allow Castro to begin planning the next phase of revolutionary struggle--the creation of an "elite insurrectionary movement."

While Castro was deciding to embark upon his revolutionary strategy from abroad in July of 1955, José Antonio Echevarría, was meeting with student activists and agitators to formulate the Directorio Revolucionario (DR). An important sector of the student movement had been radicalized by the

²⁵ Bonachea and San Martín, p.35-40

example of Moncada and their leader, Antonio Echevarría was convinced, like Castro, that a violent overthrow of the Batista regime was the only option left to opposition forces in Cuba. They found the Federación Estudiantil Universitaria too unwieldy an organization to promote an insurrectionary movement, but Antonio Echevarría was unwilling to have the student movement co-opted by the 26 July Movement. Thus the DR maintained protest against Batista independently while Castro retreated to Mexico to plan the next phase of the revolution. The DR directed a series of violent student protests throughout the country and helped co-operate massive strikes with the labour movement. Although it is unclear how many women were involved in the student protests, it can be assumed, based on previous examples of female integration into the student movement, that female participation would have been significant yet not dramatically different from what it had been in the past.²⁶

In contrast, more precise information is available on the role of women in Castro's movement. While Castro was in Mexico training a new group of recruits as an invasive force, a sector of his movement led by men such as Frank País

²⁶ Unfortunately, most scholars have focused on women's involvement in the M-26-7 and have ignored their participation in both legal opposition parties, Batista's government and rival insurrectionary movements during the period. The bias in the literature available tends to be reinforced by Cuban scholars who view Castro's movement as the only legitimate force of the period simply because it was the most successful. Women's participation in the power struggles and popular protest of the period remains vague.

remained in Cuba to develop the support necessary for such a venture. Although the vast majority of those recruited directly into the ranks of the 26 July Movement to train for combat and sabotage were male, a small number of women were incorporated as organizers, publicists and liaisons.²⁷ Women who had been involved in the radical movements of the thirties provided important contacts and solid revolutionary experience. Several women, both veterans and newcomers, eventually took on leadership positions and as such made critical contributions to the initial survival of the organization; however it must be stressed that female participation was significant only on an individual basis.

In a strategy consciously reminiscent of Martí's epic venture, Fidel Castro and a group of newly recruited revolutionaries set sail from Mexico in December 1956 aboard an ill-equipped vessel known as the Granma. Women were not allowed to join the eighty-two man invasion force. Nevertheless, a few women did play a critical role in the venture. For example, Teresa Casuso was instrumental in obtaining funds for the invasion; Celia Sánchez organized efforts to meet the invaders with trucks and supplies; and Vilma Espin played an important role in the attempt to coordinate several uprisings with the landing of the vessel.²⁸

²⁷ Thomas, p.895

²⁸ Judson, p.56-57; Thomas, p.895; Herbert L. Matthews, Revolution in Cuba (New York: Charles Scribners and Sons, 1975) p.75

Despite the attempts by the 26 July Movement to co-ordinate efforts throughout the island, the floundering yacht was spotted by Batista's army. Most of the men on board died within a few hours of disembarking. Fidel Castro and a tiny group of survivors fled to the Sierra Maestra to recover from their losses and reignite the struggle. Again, the movement's tiny female contingent played an important role in the survival of the armed wing of the movement. Because the military rarely suspected women of collaboration with the rebel forces, female members of the 26 July Movement were able to provide a crucial link to the world outside the mountains during the initial stages of the Rebel Army's development, carrying messages, or obtaining and transporting money and arms.²⁹

While the "Barbudos" finally achieved military success by attacking government troops stationed in the mountains, the movement's activities in the urban centers extended the scope of female integration.³⁰ Throughout the 1957 Christmas season Batista and his National Guard were harassed by frequent bombings. In response, the police rounded up suspected members of the movement and murdered 22 men.³¹ Public

²⁹ Margaret Randall, Cuban Women Now (Toronto: The Women's Press, 1974) p.10

³⁰ The guerrillas were referred to as the "bearded ones" since men who had no opportunity to shave were considered by the military and the peasantry alike to be members of the Rebel Army.

³¹ Thomas, p.909

response to the brutal repression was generally muted; however, when four youths were captured and tortured by the police, 500 women marched in the streets demanding that the torture and assassination of their children cease.³² In addition to peaceful protest, many women of all ages and classes were mobilized to undertake sabotage assignments. Vilma Espin, who by the end of the struggle co-ordinated all clandestine work in the province of Oriente, cited the example of a seventy year old woman who ran a safe house and mobilized young girls to carry out acts that ranged from transporting of weapons and medicines to planting bombs.³³ One particularly telling event occurred in 1957, when an eight year old girl was arrested while placing a bomb in Guantánamo.³⁴ Other female saboteurs were experienced veterans of the 1930s, members of groups such as Joven Cuba.³⁵

The civic resistance, the urban front for the 26 July Movement, was not responsible for all the bombings and assassinations but could count on greater support from the multitude of organizations dedicated to the overthrow of Batista. Co-operation between José Antonio Echevarría's DR and the 26 July Movement reached its height in the disastrous attack on the National Palace. Both organizations suf-

³² Thomas, p.912

³³ Randall, Cuban Women Now, p.299

³⁴ Thomas, p.956

³⁵ Thomas, p.945

ferred grave losses as a result of their defeat and the intense persecution of suspected participants that followed the event. Nevertheless, urban solidarity was continually bolstered by the flamboyant and often suicidal attacks on the Batistianos. Batista was no longer invincible and the electoral route was thoroughly discredited by the determination of the insurrectionists. As the violence increased, the United States government maintained its support and the business community silently condoned the repression until a new ambassador was named in June 1957. Relations between Cuba and the United States faltered when Ambassador Earl Smith witnessed the hosing down and violent arrests of dozens of women who were protesting the murder of Frank País.³⁶ Nevertheless, Batista remained in control despite popular sentiment and cooling relations with the Washington.

Despite the blow received by the urban front, the Rebel army in the Sierra continued its pressure on the Rural Guard. Women's incorporation expanded in the rural areas as it had in the cities. Some sources estimate a five per cent rate of female participation in the Guerrilla troops of the Sierra Maestra; however, few actually saw combat duty.³⁷ Male prejudices confined most women to secondary roles, and those whose determination enabled them to engage in direct

³⁶ Thomas, p.957-958

³⁷ Dickey Chappelle, "How Castro Won" Modern Guerilla Warfare Editor, Franklin Osanka (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1962) p.327

action were often resented and criticized.³⁸ Although many women eventually won respect and admiration for their abilities, those who took part in combat were segregated and used to inspire greater bravery among the men. For example, the eleven women who made up the Mariana Grajales Platoon were forced to prove themselves first as nurses and messengers, and were only allowed to see action after obtaining the approval of the male comandante who directed their training. After they had proven their capacity to fight, the platoon was kept at the front because the commander claimed that "when the women advanced there wasn't a single man who fell back."³⁹

By the end of the struggle, one of the Rebel Army's most famous and important commanders, Ernesto "Che" Guevara, viewed the integration of women as an important feature of the Rebel Army's success. He was clearly influenced by his admiration and respect for Lydia Doce and Clodomira Ferrals, two female martyrs who fearlessly served as messengers for the guerrillas of the Sierra Maestra.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, he believed that women's special relationship with children, their gentleness, sympathy, and creativity made them obvious candidates for support roles in areas such as teaching, med-

³⁸ Che Guevara, Reminiscences of the Cuban Revolutionary War (New York: Grove Press, 1968) p.147-148; Ramos, p.63; Randall, Cuban Women Now, p.140

³⁹ Randall, Cuban Women Now, p.141

⁴⁰ Guevara, p.147-150

icine, social work or war-time manufactures.⁴¹

While a few women overcame traditional prejudices and took up guns, the scope of most female participation, throughout the two year period, was defined and limited by the sex division of labour. The exploits of the handful of women in the Mariana Grajales platoon are often cited as proof of women's incorporation into every aspect of the struggle. However, there is a consensus among historians that the bulk of women's contribution to the revolution took place in the area of communications, organization, and intelligence. Women sewed the insignias of rank on their "compañero's" uniforms, carried out supply assignments, trained as medical brigades, directed the first literacy programs in the liberated zones of the sierra, and most importantly, operated as messengers.⁴²

Although women obviously made important contributions, the two year period of struggle was made possible by the support of men and women from the popular sectors of society--the peasantry, migrant labourers, the urban working class, and the unemployed. Class was more important than gender when it came to achieving support for a revolutionary movement that promised to erase the social and economic

⁴¹ Che Guevara, Guerrilla Warfare Introduction and case studies by Brian Loveman and Thomas M. Davies Jr. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985) p.134

⁴² Thomas, p.917; Ana Ramos, "La mujer y la revolución en Cuba" Casa de las Americas (Vol.65, 1971) p.63; Chappelle, p.327; Randall, Cuban Women Now, p.10

injustices of the past. Even some Batistianos were aware that support for the 26 July Movement stemmed from popular dissatisfaction over basic issues such as land ownership, housing and wages. For example, wiser members of Batista's rural guard took note of the link between peasant support and Rebel strength in the rural areas. Aware that peasant loyalty might be bought, one Colonel embarked on a program that saw the construction of houses, a school, a soup kitchen, and clinic in the rural zone he was assigned to.⁴³ Batista could afford such ploys--Cuba's economy was booming and United States businessmen were more eager than ever to invest in Cuban industries. However, the insincerity of the program was apparent to the supposed beneficiaries. Moreover, such attempts to win peasant loyalty were transient and old policies re-emerged whereby landowners and the military co-operated to exploit and dispossess the rural poor.

By early 1958, Fidel Castro and his rebel army were in control of the entire Sierra Maestra. The morale of Batista's National Guard was badly shaken. Almost daily, troops began to defect or simply flee their responsibilities in the army. Sabotage continued in the city. By the end of the year, the Rebel Army's descent from the mountains into the cities was complete and Batista prepared to flee.

⁴³ Thomas, p.924

When Fidel Castro's small army of about 3000 men and women marched into Havana on January 1st, 1959, many women celebrated New Year's day knowing they had made an important contribution to Batista's ignominious departure. As during previous struggles for liberation, women proved their willingness to take up arms if necessary. Nevertheless, the level of women's integration in the revolutionary struggle was confined to a few dedicated and courageous heroines even though Cuban women had revealed their capacity to enter the political battlefield with such verve in the past. Clearly the sex division of labour and macho prejudice prevented many women from participating at all. Moreover, women of the middle-class had no agenda that required alliances with the radical sectors of society. They had already won the opportunity to share in the spoils of government corruption. Advances in education, professions and in electoral politics had seemingly cooled the enthusiasm of one sector of the female population. Moreover, Castro's movement had yet to address issues that were relevant to middle-class women. Furthermore, by 1958, women's role in the economy had declined significantly in comparison to the earlier part of the decade. The female sector of the working class had actually shrunk. According to the Consejo Nacional de Economía, women made up only 13.3 per cent of the active labour force by 1958.⁴⁴ Women's participation in the labour movement had

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Martínez Guayanes, p.209

actually declined since the thirties.

Although a significant number of women had been active as both leaders and foot-soldiers in the campaign against Bati-sta, their participation had not been without precedent nor had it at any point exceeded levels arrived at in the past. In fact, women's presence on the battle front was exceptional rather than typical. There were no independently led women's organizations working in solidarity with insurrectionary groups. Instead, women's incorporation was subsumed under the direction of male inspired and led organizations. Unlike the thirties, women did not take on a visible role within the student movement or the labour movement. Many women had answered the call to action demanded by the political crisis. However, even more women remained silent spectators, safe in the haven of the casa.

Nicaragua: "Sandino's Daughter's"

When I began to participate I felt super happy. I began to feel that I could do something. Before, well, it was like I had lived alone with my problems. Now those problems don't agonize me. ...I now understand all about the system we live in, all about machismo, I already encountered the why of everything. I saw that I was capable of not only being a mother, because all women are capable of being mothers, to care for the children, the home and everything, but what I saw was that I was able to transform this society. (Market woman, 42 years old, 9 children, divorced, FSLN militant)⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Quoted in Elizabeth Maier, Nicaragua, la mujer en la revolución (Mexico: Ediciones de Cultura Popular, 1980) p.73

In contrast to the Cuban experience, Nicaraguan women's participation in the revolutionary struggle waged against the Somoza regime in the late seventies was not only numerically greater, it was a radical break with traditional female involvement during times of political and economic crisis. The case of Cuban women's involvement in revolutionary activities did not signify a break with precedent. In Nicaragua it did. However, to understand the differences in female involvement in the two countries some discussion of women's economic and political status during the period directly before the revolution is necessary.

The economic, legal and social position of women within Nicaraguan society during the seventies had changed dramatically from what it had been fifty years earlier. Although a majority of the country's population remained impoverished rural dwellers, Nicaragua was experiencing a constant urbanization and internal migration caused by the concentration of landholdings. In 1975, two women hired by the USAID office in Managua used an impressive array of government statistics, field interviews and an analysis of secondary sources to write a "Report on The Role of Women in The Economic Development of Nicaragua." Although their findings were presented in an optimistic and positive light, the information they gathered in the study paints a damning picture of the miserable existence most Nicaraguan women were forced to endure. Their discussion of the predicament of rural women is particularly revealing:

The rural woman is sentenced to a life of involuntary servitude by all the social forces which weigh upon her. Unlike her male counterpart who can and does abandon his family and seek better opportunities for himself, she 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.⁴⁶

Although women's incorporation into the Nicaraguan labour force was similar to rates in developed nations, the profound differences between urban and rural areas remained a constant reminder of women's secondary role in a predominantly agrarian economy. Furthermore, the transitory nature of most employment in agriculture makes the already low figures for female employment in rural areas unreliable.

In the urban setting, women were mainly employed in service industries where they were most often employees rather than employers. The exception seems to be in the area of commerce, hotels and restaurants, where 46.7 per cent of the employers were women, and 68 per cent of the women in that sector were self-employed. However it is revealing that 74.6 per cent of the women working in the area were unpaid family members. During the 1936- 1971 period, levels of female employment were made in most areas, yet overall women's total per centage of the economically active population declined by 3 per cent. By 1974 42.3 per cent of the urban work force were women; however, 72.8 per cent of the

⁴⁶ Paula Diebold de Cruz and Myra Pasos de Rappacioli, Report on the Role of Women in the Economic Development of Nicaragua (Managua: USAID Office of Planning and Development, 1975) p.47

economically inactive urban population were also women.⁴⁷

Despite the high degree of female integration into the urban work force, women were found consistently in the lowest paying jobs. Women professionals were concentrated in areas such as teaching, nursing, and social work--areas traditionally relegated to women and traditionally low paying.

According to Diebold and Pasos:

Incomes are generally low in Nicaragua, but women are concentrated in the lowest paying jobs. In the weekly income range of 1 to 199 cordobas fall 68.7% of working women, compared to 55.9% of men. The average income for a working woman is less than C\$100. per week. In the highest income brackets, C\$1,000. weekly and over, 80.2% are men and only 19.8% are women.⁴⁸

Female agricultural workers in the rural areas often performed the same tasks as men for a third less pay. Progressive labour laws, which established the principle of equal pay for equal work, job security in case of pregnancy, and paid maternity leave, had already been promulgated by 1975. Nevertheless, the labour code was consistently ignored by employers, and women remained under-paid and subject to discriminatory labour practices.⁴⁹ Social security coverage did not extend to domestics nor were they subject to the eight hour day and 48 hour work week regulations. Moreover, employers were not legally allowed to demand overtime work

⁴⁷ Diebold and Pasos, p.65

⁴⁸ Diebold and Pasos, p.68

⁴⁹ Diebold and Pasos, p.14

from women. The result was that women had no legal recourse to demand extra pay when they were forced by their employers to work extra hours.⁵⁰

In turn, the inability of most Nicaraguans, regardless of sex, to provide adequate sanitary and nutritional standards for their families is reflected by the following statistics for 1971:

-67 per cent of the general population lived in crowded, inadequate housing

-47 per cent of the total Nicaraguan population lived in unhealthy conditions

-63 per cent of the population had access to neither public or private sanitary facilities

-only 28 per cent of the population had access to internal water systems connected to a public or private system

-another 9 per cent of the population had access to public water systems connected outside of dwellings

-6 per cent of the rural population had access to any kind of water facilities.⁵¹

The result of inhuman living conditions was high infant mortality rates. The main causes of infant death were illnesses caused by the lack of access to sanitary living conditions and clean water supplies. Doris Tijerino's description of the Christian charity taught to the children of the well to do is reminiscent of Joeseфа Toledo de Aguerri's response to the tragedy of infant death:

⁵⁰ Diebold and Pasos, p.15

⁵¹ The following statistics were summarized from Diebold and Pasos, p.33

Once--and this is one of the memories that has impressed me most--when I was seven or eight years old, a child with the last name of Diaz died in one of the little huts on the plantation, and they notified the ranch house. We were given the shroud and candles to deliver. The shroud was ready quickly because it was one of the activities we devoted ourselves to--sewing shrouds for the children.⁵²

Children were not the only victims:

The average Nicaraguan woman can expect to live to age 54.8 or 4.2 years longer than her male counterpart; over half, or 55.6% of her children will be born out of wedlock and if she is a rural dweller, she will probably have been pregnant 8 times by the time she is 34, although she will only have 3.7 living children by that age as will her urban sister.⁵³

The report goes on to reveal that 15.6 per cent of women with children in the department of Managua were neither married nor living in free union. Moreover, "by the age of 34, 49% of the single women in Managua Department will have borne an average of 4.8 children each."⁵⁴ The extra economic burden these children represented for Nicaraguan women was exacerbated by few job opportunities and low wages. Child-care was almost non-existent. The National Welfare Board (JNAPS) provided only 5 nurseries for the entire country. The sole daycare in Managua, entirely funded by the government, served only 15 children.⁵⁵ The remaining independent

⁵² Doris Tijerino, Inside the Nicaraguan Revolution as told to Margaret Randall, Translated by Elinor Randall (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1978) p.22-23

⁵³ Diebold and Pasos, p.3

⁵⁴ Diebold and Pasos, p.7

⁵⁵ Diebold and Pasos, p.81-82

daycares or Guarderías that existed in the marketplaces of Managua were destroyed by the earthquake in 1972 and had not been replaced by 1975. In the countryside, day to day existence was so precarious that families depended on older children to perform adult tasks. Boys were expected to help in the fields, while girls usually tended the younger children and performed household tasks such as cooking and cleaning. Occasionally, during intensive harvest periods, the entire family would work in the fields as a unit.

Poor educational opportunities deepened the plight of Nicaraguans. The degree of powerlessness that resulted from the general lack of opportunity and constant economic insecurity can only be surmised. Poverty maintained a cycle of illiteracy because children were needed to work for the family's survival and consequently they rarely made it past elementary school. Moreover, many children who had mastered basic literacy skills while in school were unable to retain those skills because of limited opportunities for intellectual pursuits. Although, statistically, Nicaraguans as a whole decreased illiteracy rates from 62.6 per cent in 1950 to 42.2 per cent in 1971, the adult population had failed to make significant improvements. The illiteracy rate for 1971, among Nicaraguans over the age of 9, was 58 per cent.

In general, rates of illiteracy were slightly higher for women than for men. Programs aimed at solving the literacy

problem were often male biased. For example, a project intended to provide local educators of indigenous languages for a Mosquito community in the 1960s trained only boys as teachers. In the same community there were more male than female students attending schools set up by the government or churches. Such biases may explain why for example, many indigenous women have remained illiterate in Spanish and their own language until the present day.⁵⁶

In rural areas the illiteracy rate for women was as high as 70 per⁵⁷cent. On the political level, illiterates were prevented by law from voting before the age of 21, those who were literate were able to participate in electoral politics by the age of 18.⁵⁸ In general, therefore, rural women and especially indigenous women were systematically kept out of the political process for what amounted to a significant portion of their adult lives.

Yet the authors of the report remained convinced that women had made some inroads politically, regardless of the depressing illiteracy rates and general poverty. Diebold and Pasos felt that women were well represented as community leaders in both formal and informal power structures. They noted that:

⁵⁶ Mary W. Helms, Asang Adaptations to Cultural Contact in a Mosquito Community (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1971) p.175.

⁵⁷ Diebold and Pasos, p.19-20, 23.

⁵⁸ Diebold and Pasos, p.14

In 83 (62%) of 134 municipalities listed in the 1971 census, women presently hold at least one of the 6 major elected public offices. Of the elected mayors, 25 (19%); city treasurers, 29 (22%). There are 17 women (6%) who are opposition party supervisors of municipal government.⁵⁹

One female senator from the department of Zelaya and 6 female representatives at the national government level provide other examples of female political integration at the formal level. In addition, their evaluation of women's presence in informal community organization led Diebold and Pasos to agree with one study which indicated that women were "the primary organizers of community activities and projects."⁶⁰

Nevertheless, the authors placed a great deal of hope in the promises and potential displayed by government agencies, legal reforms and agrarian reform. The Nicaraguan peasantry was not so easily convinced. They had suffered 30 years of Somoza rule and were making up their minds concerning the burden of responsibility for the deaths of their children and the destruction of their future.

By 1970, the Somoza family had been in power for well over a third of a century. Their control over the political and economic existence of the country was seemingly unassailable. Although rebel groups and guerrilla forces inspired by the success of the Cuban revolution had existed through-

⁵⁹ Diebold and Pasos, p.75

⁶⁰ Diebold and Pasos, p.75

out the 1960s, their threat to the regime was negligible and their popular support almost nonexistent. The Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (FSLN), formed in 1961 by Carlos Fonseca Amador, Silvio Majorga, and Tomás Borge, formulated a strategy of insurrection against the Somoza regime which was directly modelled from the experiences of the Cuban revolution. They were determined to ally themselves with the peasantry, since urban activism had been all but extinguished by the repression that followed the assassination of Anastasio Somoza García in 1956.

When the Frente initiated its guerrilla war against the Somoza dynasty, their first battles took place in the countryside, specifically in what had been the mountain stronghold of Sandino.⁶¹ After a series of disastrous attacks against the National Guard throughout the 1960s, the FSLN abandoned Fidel Castro's Foco theory, which had stressed the preeminence of the revolutionary vanguard and its ability to inspire popular support, and withdrew from direct confrontations. Instead, they quietly focused their efforts on clandestine organization in the countryside and in the cities.⁶² Similarly, the trade union movement, students, and the Nicaraguan Socialist Party (PSN) were forced to function with limited success underground. It was not until the mid-

⁶¹ Jaime Wheelock Román, Frente Sandinista: Hacia la ofensiva final (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1980) p.61

⁶² Mike Gonzales, Nicaragua - Revolution Under Siege (Toronto: International Socialists, 1985) p.22-23

seventies that Somoza's National Guard faced an insurrectionary threat large enough to require a war against the country's population.

During the initial stages of the Nicaraguan struggle, the incorporation of women was not an explicit objective. However, the movement recognized the need to organize and coordinate the spontaneous actions of the popular classes, from female domestic servants to agricultural labourers.⁶³ Gradually, peasant women were drawn into the struggle, first as sympathizers providing safe haven and reliable communication networks, and later as combatants as their support for the guerrilla movement brought on increased repression from the National Guard.⁶⁴

Peasant supporters of the FSLN became the prime targets of military retribution for Somoza's humiliation in December 1974, when the FSLN made a dramatic reappearance with a successful armed hostage-taking at the extravagant Christmas party of a leading Somocista that led to the release of 18 Sandinista prisoners, the broadcasting of the Sandinista platform, half a million dollars and safe passage for all involved. Somoza responded by imposing martial law that lasted 33 months. With no restrictions remaining, the National Guard was able to pursue its program of terror

⁶³ Humberto Ortega Saavedra, 50 años de Lucha Sandinista (Managua: Ministerio del Interior, 1979) p.101-103

⁶⁴ George Black, Triumph of the People (London: Zed Press, 1981) p.78-81

against the Nicaraguan peasantry which supported the FSLN in the northern provinces. The result was massive dislocation as people fled the genocide inflicted by the Guard. Many headed to safety in the mountains and joined the guerrilla forces.⁶⁵

In the urban setting, structural violence--poverty, dislocation, and family break-up--prompted women to fight back. High unemployment, alcoholism, internal migration caused by the expropriation of peasant lands, the dependency on seasonal labour and the ideological factor of machismo, prompted men to increasingly abandon their families, forcing more women and children to flee to the urban centers in search of work. Men stayed in the countryside. According to the 1973 census, there were 20 per cent more women than men in towns with a population over 10,000.⁶⁶ Diebold and Pasos's analysis of several studies made of head of households revealed that 3 out of 5 studies reported "26% of families as having female heads of households." Another study calculated the percentage at 48 when single and abandoned mothers were counted together. They concluded that the actual number of households headed by women was probably higher than 48 per cent "when abandoned families, single women, widows, and women separated and divorced from their husbands are taken into account."⁶⁷ In another survey done in 1978, it was

⁶⁵ Maier, p.65-67

⁶⁶ Diebold and Pasos, p.3

estimated that one third of Nicaraguan families were headed by women.⁶⁸

Few opportunities were available for women to support themselves. Prostitution was endemic and the competition intense enough to make the average earnings from several clients \$4.00 to \$6.00 a night. As in Cuba, the trade in sexual favours was controlled and organized by the "authorities" who had no qualms against the recruitment of children as young as 9 years old.⁶⁹ Those who escaped the clutches of the military pimps attempted to make a living in the market stalls or on the street peddling what ever they could manage to find.

Patriarchal controls over women's economic participation were being broken down and women's emergence from the "casa" (house) to the "calle" (street) led to increasing politicization of their struggle for existence. While most women sought a means to organize against their oppressors, a few joined the forces of repression.⁷⁰ Despite the exceptions,

⁶⁷ Diebold and Pasos, p.10-11

⁶⁸ Norma Stoltz Chinchilla, "Women in revolutionary Movements - The Case of Nicaragua" Revolution in Central America Edited by Stanford Central America Action Network (Boulder: Westview Press, 1983) p.427

⁶⁹ Juan M. Navas y Barraza, La educacion sexual: Estudio de la sexualidad en Nicaragua, en Centroamerica y en Ruben Dario (Managua: Ciencia de la Educacion, 1967) p.70

⁷⁰ For example, Gladys Monge, charged with war crimes as a member of the National Guard, claimed she had been abandoned by her husband and had joined Somoza's forces out of economic necessity. Joseph K. Skinner, "Somocistas on

women's involvement in the cities initially took the form of protest against human rights abuses. Women from both the privileged and poor classes entered the fray as their children and the male members of their families were imprisoned, tortured and murdered by Somoza's henchmen.⁷¹ While peasants and workers had always faced government repression, some middle class professionals--lawyers, doctors, journalists, and even the independent business community--also became targets of abuse. Those middle-class women who came face to face with the reality of the situation could no longer ignore the repression meted out in horrific proportions on the poor. After investigating the National Guard's treatment of their own family members, they discovered the atrocities committed against entire communities. In 1977, a group of middle-class women united with peasant and working class women to "... denounce repression in the concentration camps, the mass murder of peasants and the rape of peasant women."⁷² Later, they organized to create the Association of Women Confronting the National Problem (AMPRONAC). Their objectives were to defend women's political, social, and economic rights, to promote women's involvement in the political struggle, and fight against human rights abuses in

Trial" Monthly Review (March, 1982) p.57

⁷¹ Chinchilla, p.428; María Santos, interviewed by Alpern Engel "Women in the Nicaraguan revolution" Frontiers (Vol.7 No.2, 1983) p.45; Margaret Randall, Sandino's Daughters, p.68, 186, 196.

⁷² Miranda Davies, Third World Second Sex (London: Zed Books, 1983) p.164

general.⁷³ Because the women's movement in Nicaragua enjoyed a certain degree of freedom of action partially because of its middle-class members, its actions from the start were an effective form of protest. As its profile grew, the social composition of the movement also evolved. Because the poor were by far the most common target of government abuse, it was inevitable that the movement would come to represent increasing numbers of working class and peasant women. And as more women from the impoverished sectors of society became involved, AMPRONAC's ties with the FSLN grew stronger. Finally the relationship was cemented when the majority of its members publicly committed themselves to the Frente during its first national conference in July 1978.⁷⁴

Although AMPRONAC offered a legitimate means of participation for women during its initial stages, women still had to overcome many barriers before entering the struggle. They faced resistant husbands and families in addition to the fear of government repression.⁷⁵ Once involved in the Frente, women still found their participation restricted. They had difficulty convincing many of their compañeros that they were capable of going beyond domestic tasks.⁷⁶ It seems

⁷³ Black, p.324

⁷⁴ Black, p.325

⁷⁵ Susan Ramírez-Horton, "The Role of Women in the Nicaraguan Revolution" Nicaragua in Revolution Edited by Thomas Walker (New York: Praeger Publishing, 1982) p.150; NACLA Report, "Women Challenge the Myth" NACLA (Sept/Oct. 1980) p.30

that the FSLN was well versed in the definitive Latin American handbook on guerrilla warfare. Drawing from his experience in the Sierra Maestra, Che Guevara stressed the "extraordinary importance" of women's contribution to the struggle and asserted that women were capable of performing any task, but it was "natural" that women be assigned to duties that take advantage of or coincide with their "habitual tasks of peacetime." For instance:

The woman as cook can greatly improve the diet and, furthermore, it is easier to keep her in these domestic tasks; one of the problems in guerrilla bands is that all works of civilian character are scorned by those who perform them; they are constantly trying to get out of these tasks in order to enter into forces that are actively in combat.⁷⁷

As in Cuba, the "muchachas" (most of the female combatants were indeed "girls") were forced to begin as messengers or train as nurses and only after proving their physical stamina were they allowed to take part in combat. Nevertheless, men's and boys' attitudes were continuously challenged throughout the protracted struggle against Somoza. According to some accounts, domestic duties in the guerrilla army were shared equally among men and women and an egalitarian spirit invaded many of the base camps.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Randall, Sandino's Daughter's, p.66

⁷⁷ Guevara, Guerrilla Warfare, p.132-133

⁷⁸ Ramírez-Horton, p.151-152

In general, however, the majority of women collected food, money, and clothing, learned to fabricate bombs, kept safe houses and maintained avenues of escape for fleeing compañeros. Communication networks were established and entire communities organized to protect themselves from the violent incursions of the National Guard. Barricades were built and medical units established. During the final offensive, many women performed critical support and intelligence services for the FSLN.⁷⁹ Carlos Vilas stresses the differing "mode of participation" among the male and female participants in the struggle.⁸⁰ His contention that women were more important in the rear guard is borne out by Ramirez-Horton's characterization of female duties during the war: "Women in the countryside contributed food and served as cooks. Some made flags and bandanas for the rebels. They eventually served as spies and runners, transporting supplies across country."⁸¹ Furthermore, The rebel forces took advantage of the macho attitudes prevalent in the society by depending on women who were pregnant or accompanied by children to carry out clandestine duties with greater freedom from suspicion. Nor was the Frente opposed to exploiting the sexual attractions of its female members. For example, Nora Astorga became a heroine of the revolution when she lured a

⁷⁹ Ramirez-Horton, p.151-152

⁸⁰ Carlos Vilas, The Sandinista Revolution (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1986) p.279

⁸¹ Ramirez-Horton, p.150

particularly vile Somocista general to his death.⁸² The women rebels were fully cognizant of their ability to use the sexist attitudes of the National guard to their own advantage. The success of the tactic likely alerted society at large and their own compañeros that it was wrong to underestimate women's capabilities, therefore, it may have served to undermine the very prejudices it took advantage of. On the other hand, the strategy also reinforced the fallacious notion that, in general, women use devious and underhanded methods of defeating an enemy while men must rely on "honest" forms of combat. In a male dominated culture, the "manly" forms of war are those that receive the greatest praise.

Although male attitudes conspired against them, women were determined to use every means of combat to defeat the Somoza regime. They took part in both spontaneous and organized uprisings. Women swelled the ranks of the Sandinista guerrilla army in unprecedented numbers.⁸³ In the final days of the insurrection "even prostitutes, wielding knives, advised Somoza's National Guard Patrols to keep going."⁸⁴ Most sources claim high levels of incorporation in combat, several going as high as 30 per cent of the FSLN forces.⁸⁵

⁸² Randall, Sandinista's Daughters p.120-124

⁸³ Booth, p.147-150

⁸⁴ James Petras, "Whither the Nicaraguan Revolution" Monthly Review (Vol.31 No.5, 1979) p.2

⁸⁵ Randall, Sandinista's Daughters, p.iv; Catherine Gander,

Others stick to a more conservative estimate of 25 per⁸⁶cent. In contrast, Carlos Vilas characterizes the bulk of the FSLN combatants as young urban males from the poorest barrios and challenges claims of high rates of female participation in combat. Drawing his evidence largely from an analysis of the statistics made available through the pension and subsidy program for family members of the combatants and supporters who died during the struggle, Vilas calculates that women made up only 6.6 per cent of the lists of dead combatants. Although his evaluation is based on a random sample of only 640 cases out of 6000, it effectively challenges the common perception of women's incorporation.⁸⁷

While historians may differ as to the number of women involved in combat, none disregard the significance of the presence of women at every level of leadership within the FSLN. The most famous example of the three women at the highest level of commander was Dora Téllez, who acted as second in command during the daring assault on the National Palace. She conducted all the negotiations with Somoza by phone. "She secured the Roman Catholic Bishops as mediators and gained various critical concessions, including the

"Nicaraguan Women at War: Part 111 - Military Defense" Canadian Dimension (Vol.20 no.3, 1986) p.25; Black, p.324

⁸⁶ Henri Weber, Nicaragua: The Sandinista Revolution. (Thetford, Norfolk: Thetford Press, 1981.) p.51; Booth, p.151

⁸⁷ Vilas, p.108-109

withdrawal of troops from nearby."⁸⁸ Téllez also helped win a cessation of guard helicopter and sniper attacks on the palace, the publication of a manifesto calling for popular insurrection, the release of key Sandinistas from prison, \$500,000 in ransom, safe passage out of the country and the sixty freed prisoners.⁸⁹ Later, Téllez commanded the entire Rigoberto López Pérez western front, "one of the most important in the war."⁹⁰ Women's obvious participation in combat, especially in leadership positions, regardless of the numbers, was an important step toward changing relations between men and women in Nicaragua.

It is estimated that fifty-thousand people lost their lives in the final eighteen months of the struggle to wrest power from the Somoza family. Most of the dead were civilians. Years of repression, corruption, and economic exploitation finally led to the extreme politicization and widespread rebellion of all sectors of the population.

⁸⁸ Booth, p.147

⁸⁹ Booth, p.162

⁹⁰ Booth, p.151

Chapter IV

FIDEL'S "NEW WOMEN"

So often I see you, red card proud in the pocket of
your shirt.
Your honour, your medals, your guns ...
You make revolution and I clean shirts,
Shining pots, floors so clean you can eat on them or
spit on them.
When I meet the wonder at the rag I hand you
To help dismiss the dust
Keep your fear in shadow
So no one will discover your macho at the base of
your spine.
Now that your specialty is breaking balls for the
future
Learn to cook your own food while I study.
Sara Gonzales¹

In January 1959, Fidel Castro's Rebel Army filled the political vacuum left by Batista's defeat. The harsh lesson of the CIA-backed overthrow of the reformist government of Arbenz in Guatemala in 1954 taught Cuba's new leaders to depend on a highly politicized military force dedicated to the objectives of the revolution. Immediately after Batista's departure, the reorganization of the Cuban Armed Forces took place. Batista's officers were either retired, executed or jailed. Members of the 26 of July movement or other revolutionary organizations replaced them. The complex ranking system disappeared and an attempt was made to destroy the rigid hierarchy that had previously reinforced class

¹ Sara Gonzales, quoted in Ideas - Inside Cuba: 25 Years with Fidel (Toronto: CBC Transcripts, 1985) p.26

distinctions within the army. The highest rank within the Revolutionary Armed Forces--Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias (FAR)--became that of Commandante or major. In addition, a workers' militia was created in April 1959, to further expand the popular base of the new armed forces.²

According to James Petras, the expansion and reorganization of the Rebel Army and the development of small community based defense committees served as "transitional forms of state power in the immediate circumstances."³ From the beginning, the rebel leadership viewed the insurrectionary force as the revolutionary vanguard of the people. Therefore the regime's executive was composed almost entirely of men who had been involved in armed struggle from the assault on Moncada to the descent to the plains.⁴ A handful of women, most of them veterans of the 26 of July movement or affiliated organizations, were given important positions within the new government. For example, Raquel Pérez de Miret was made Minister of Social Welfare and was the only woman member of the council of ministers.⁵ One of the larger social welfare projects concerned with ameliorating the living conditions of the slum of Manzana de Gómez was directed by Ame-

² Rafael Fermoselle, The Evolution of the Cuban Military: 1492-1986 (Miami: Ediciones Universal, 1987) p.269

³ James Petras, Class, State and Power in the Third World (London: Zed Press, 1981) p.217

⁴ Thomas, p.1073

⁵ Leo Huberman, Paul Sweezy. Cuba Anatomy of a Revolution (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1960) p.105

lia García Ponce.⁶ However the bulk of political participation by women took place at the grass-roots level in mass organizations created and directed by former members of the Rebel Army.

There was little room for political pluralism in the evolving regime. The conservative political institutions previously aligned with the Batista government were completely alienated from the political process from the start. The Agrarian Reform Law enacted in May 1959 encouraged political rifts among those who envisioned radical change and those who had merely wanted to oust Batista and his cronies. The moderates, who had been ensconced in power during the first few months of 1959, were eventually removed from their positions of responsibility and replaced by "loyal veterans of the Sierra Maestra and trusted leaders of the former underground."⁷ The upper and middle-classes who saw the threat to their comfortable existences fled to Miami and the "radicalization" process was able to continue unabated because Fidel Castro had the undeniable support of the people and the Revolutionary Armed Forces.

Many of the immediate benefits achieved by the rural and urban poor were offset by the problems caused by the middle-class exodus. For example, the positive impact one would expect from expanded medical services in the rural areas was

⁶ Huberman and Sweezy, p.106

⁷ Huberman and Sweezy, p.86

constrained by the lack of doctors. According to one source, "roughly 40 per cent of Cuba's 6,300 physicians emigrated after the revolution."⁸ As a result, the infant mortality rate actually increased and did not descend to 1959 levels until the seventies. Yet despite the slow progress, most poor Cubans were convinced that the new regime had their interests at heart. Despite criticisms and mounting United States hysteria over the new direction the regime was taking, the vast majority of Cubans were solidly behind reforms which attacked the most visible sources of economic and social injustice: the vast tracts of land left idle by the foreign companies that owned them; foreign banks which exerted a financial stranglehold; and the industries which benefited from weak labour legislation and government repression of labour organization.

Counter-revolutionary forces, economic pressures, the disenchantment of the wealthy classes, and nationalist sentiment, combined with the perceived threat of United States intervention (which finally manifested itself in the CIA sponsored Bay of Pigs invasion of April 1961) hastened Cuba's radicalism and further bolstered the need for economic and political support from alternate power blocs. The demise of the sugar quota and an oil embargo led the Cuban government further into the Soviet camp and led to the rapid acceptance of a socialist political, economic and military

⁸ Arthur McEwan, Revolution and Economic Development in Cuba (London: Macmillan, 1981) p.79

model. Nevertheless, the Cuban state which evolved was as much a product of indigenous factors as it was the product of Soviet influence. The charismatic leadership of Fidel Castro and the 26 July Movement proved to be the single most important political force in the country. Organizations which had participated in the overthrow of Batista, such as the Revolutionary Directorate and the Partido Socialista Popular (PSP - the original communist party of Cuba) were given an equal voice in the decision making process when the Integrated Revolutionary Organizations (ORI) was formed in 1961. Yet they were forced to acknowledge the leadership of the 26 of July Movement a year later, when Fidel Castro dismantled the ORI and replaced it in 1962 with the National Directorate which with the FAR charted the course of the revolution until the Communist Party of Cuba was inaugurated in October 1965.⁹

The first Central Committee of the Communist party of Cuba in 1965 was composed of 100 members, all of whom were selected personally by Fidel Castro. Sixty-eight of the first one hundred were former members of the Rebel Army. There were five women, four of whom had also been active in the Rebel Army. The military presence in the secretariat and politburo was even more pronounced, as is indicated in the table 8. Former Rebels directed the new armed forces, the militia, the United Youth Movement, the national newspaper

⁹ William M. LeoGrande, "Continuity and Change in the Cuban Political Elite" Cuban Studies (Vol.8 No.2, 1978) pp.4-9

and other media. Provincial committees of the Communist Party were also well-represented by individuals from the army.¹⁰

The high concentration of members of the 26 July Movement and officers from the FAR among the political leadership, logically coincided with the low degree of women's incorporation. Numerically, women's participation in the Rebel Army had been almost insignificant. Yet regardless of the implications the Rebel Army's political preeminence had for women, the general inexperience and low education of the majority of the female population made them unsuitable for the task at hand. Nevertheless the Cuban government created new organizations and initiated numerous programs which would prepare women for future participation. Perhaps the most important of these was the creation of the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC) in August 1960. Vilma Espin, who has been the organization's only president since its inception, was encouraged by Fidel Castro to bring together the various women's organizations that remained operative in Cuba since the triumph of the rebel forces. Espin was hesitant at first, asking "...why do we have to have a woman's organization? I had never been discriminated against. I had my career as a chemical engineer. I never suffered, I never had any difficulty."¹¹

¹⁰ Thomas, p.278

¹¹ Quoted in Max Azricri, "Women's Development Through Revolutionary Mobilization: A Study of the Federation of

Despite Espin's anti-feminist sensibilities, an organization was formed with the aid of a group of women activists who had participated in the First Latin American Congress of Women, held in Santiago, Chile in November 1959. The FMC quickly had a membership of over 17,000, promising to open the door to power-structures that formerly excluded women. Women had proven a formidable source of opposition to the unjust regimes of the past, thus it was with clever foresight that the revolutionary government sought to make women's issues a catalyst for radical change and a generator of popular support.

Although the FMC quickly proved its ability to mobilize women and to implement government programs on their behalf, it was Fidel Castro's constant promotion of an improved status for women that prepared the way for much of the change that took place. He was astute enough to recognize women's potential as a loyal revolutionary force capable of making the sacrifices necessary in the transformation to socialism.

There has always been a female presence in Fidel Castro's inner circles from the time of the formation of the rebel movement to the present day. No doubt Haydée Santamaria and Melba Hernández helped Castro formulate his image of the female revolutionary, just as Celia Sánchez, Castro's personal secretary and top aid since the Sierra Maestra, helped

him recognize women's potential in the new society. Yet, feminist writers have been quick to point out the flaws in Castro's view of the "new woman". Susan Brown found that women's work within the home was consistently devalued in Castro's speeches. Moreover, his belief that women's reproductive capacities are a source of oppression makes nature to blame for continuing inequalities instead of society. She also claims that Castro renders women's labour invisible when he fails to consider work done in the service sector as productive.¹² Castro saw no need to challenge the sexual division of labour that manifests itself both within the home and within the economy. For instance, progressive legislation, such as maternity leave, remains inherently sexist because there are no provisions that allow men to be primary caregivers if they desire. Brown traces the flaws in Castro's thinking to his acceptance of Friederich Engels's treatment of the "woman problem" in The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State.¹³

Perhaps, Castro's relationship to Célia Sanchez symbolizes the role women are expected to take within Castro's vision of revolutionary society. Sanchez was a woman of immense political influence who acted as Castro's closest assistant on all matters but also took charge of his person-

¹² L.Susan Brown, "Women in Post-Revolutionary Cuba: A Feminist Critique" The Insurgent Socialist (Vol.13, Number 4, 1986) p.46-48

¹³ Brown, p.49

al housekeeping. She not only served as a personal secretary who controlled access to the supreme commander, she also "polished his boots, supervised the soldier detail which daily cleaned his room and made sure that the kitchen detail took special pains in preparing the food."¹⁴ Women could freely enter the political sphere if they wished; however, they were still expected to fulfill their domestic duties.

At the same time, the struggling regime recognized women's potential as a military force in the defense of the revolution. At the end of the civil war, women who participated in noncombat positions in the Sierra joined the Mariana Grajales platoon to form the first female company in the FAR. But the real push for female participation took place in the militia.¹⁵ Issues of Verde Olivo, the official periodical of the FAR, published in 1960 contain many articles celebrating women's participation in the revolution, including articles which dealt specifically with women in the militia. Photographs of women receiving military training were common.¹⁶ Nevertheless, women's presence within even the militia remained beset by the obstacles of prejudice. Blanca Melchor Bermejo remembered her frustration when the first university brigades for the militia selected an all

¹⁴ Lee Lockwood, Castro's Cuba, Cuba's Fidel (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1967) p.80

¹⁵ Randall, Cuban Women Now, p.142

¹⁶ For example see issues 1 through 5 for March, and April 1960 in Verde Olivo

male group to attend a course for militia commanders despite the fact that 35 to 40 women had applied alongside 700 men. Luckily the women had the opportunity to complain directly to Fidel Castro and within a few days 15 women were chosen to be trained as leaders of the Battalion "Lidia Doce"¹⁷

After only one year, the FAR had organized a militia of almost 200,000 men and women. According to Richard Fagan, people who had previously been marginalized from positions of prestige and power, in particular blacks and women, were given the opportunity to associate themselves with the revolution's symbolic figures - "an armed peasant or factory worker defending his right to build a better future."¹⁸ Despite the fact that many people viewed the incorporation of women into military activities as immoral, the newly created FMC promoted the mobilization of women with vigor.¹⁹ Thousands of women and girls heeded the call to be like the revolutionary heroines Tania or Lydia and Clodomira. The "Federadas", as the members of the FMC are called, formed their own "women's militia" and encouraged other women to enlist in the revolutionary police force or become active in

¹⁷ Blanca Melchor Bermejo, "Mi punto de partida revolucionaria: la milicia 'José Antonio Echeverría'" Brigada Universitaria José Antonio Echeverría y Bon 154 Editor, María Luisa Lafita de Juan (Havana: Communist Party of Cuba, 1983) pp.158-159

¹⁸ Richard Fagan, "Mass Mobilization in Cuba: The Symbolism of Struggle" Cuba in Revolution, Editors, Nelson P. Valdés and Rolando E. Bonachea (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1972)

¹⁹ Randall, Cuban Women Now pp.98-99

the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (CDRs).²⁰ According to CIA documents, by November 1961, 83,000 members of the Cuban Militia force of 250,000 were women. In addition, 10,000 girls were members of the 150,000 strong Rebel Youth. The CIA did not, however, give figures that would indicate the degree of female participation in the regular forces of the 32,000 member FAR, or national and rural police.²¹

The effectiveness of female mobilization was quickly proven when the revolutionary government faced its first external threat. Yet again, women stayed out of the trenches. During the Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961, Federadas became first aid workers, while the women in Matanzas "made mosquito netting, knapsacks, sewed tents" and they also "substituted for the men in the factories, the men who went to fight."²² Similarly, during the missile crisis, in 1962, women did guard duty or again went to the factories to replace the men who swelled the ranks of the FAR.²³ Women's participation in the country's defense gave added legitimacy to the struggle to extricate women from their domestic pris-

²⁰ Larguia, p.439; Randall, p.302

²¹ CIA Reports, "Memo - The Situation and Prospects in Cuba, Nov. 3, 1961" Latin America 1946-1976 Editor Paul Kesaris (Frederick, MD: University Publications of America, 1982) Reel 3 Page 7.

²² Randall, p.146, 302

²³ Terence Cannon, Revolutionary Cuba (Toronto: Fitzhenry and Whiteside, 1981) p.235

on. The military leadership recognized women's ability to contribute to the defense of the revolution yet there was little indication that they had altered their perception of women's potential beyond that of a reserve force.

Although the militarism of Cuban society obviously had an impact on the way in which women's roles in society were perceived, militarism became increasingly male-centered as the years went by. In 1963, all male citizens between the age of 16-45 were subject to conscription for a period of duty of two and a half to three years.²⁴ Members of the militia who were male were absorbed into the regular army. By 1964, the popular militia were disarmed. Later they were replaced by reserve forces made up of men who had served their three year compulsory service in the regular forces and who dedicated 45 days per year to the reserve forces afterward.²⁵ By 1969, "one in every 31 Cubans was in the armed forces, as compared to one of every 103 Americans and one of every 292 Canadians."²⁶ While there is scattered evidence of continuing female participation in the FAR after compulsory duty was established, there is no statistical evidence to prove rising or declining levels of women soldiers. However, it can be inferred that because the army grew steadily with the addition of thousands of male con-

²⁴ Adrian J. English, Armed Forces in Latin America (London: Jane's Publishing, 1984) p.199

²⁵ Fermoselle, p.289

²⁶ Fermoselle, p.293

scripts throughout the 1960s and 1970s, an increasingly small portion of its members would be women.

Yet participation in the physical defense of the revolution was not the only way in which women were challenged to take up new responsibilities in the post-revolutionary period. Thousands of women and young girls were mobilized to take part in the highly successful literacy campaign of 1961. Women benefited directly from the revolution's attempts to overcome the burden of illiteracy. "In the city of Havana, exactly one new school had been built in the 57 years between the establishment of the Republic and the Revolution; in the first year of the Revolution, 37 new schools were added."²⁷ The illiteracy rate of 24 per cent declined rapidly, especially in the rural areas where in 1959, 42 per cent of the population over the age of 10 was unable to read or write and the absenteeism rate was almost 80 per cent. The first literacy campaign saw the participation of 270,000 volunteer teachers and reached over 700,000 illiterates.²⁸ The majority of participants and teachers were women.²⁹

During the first decade of the revolution, access to education was dramatically increased. However, quality suffered as well-trained professionals grew scarce with the flight

²⁷ Huberman and Sweezy, p.97

²⁸ Casas, p.105

²⁹ Fagan, The Transformation of Political Culture in Cuba, p.45

of the middle- class. Nevertheless, free education and scholarships encouraged improved attendance at regular schools while adult programs ensured that women trapped in domestic employment and prostitution would have an opportunity to escape the confines of ignorance. In 1961, "Evening Schools for the Improvement of Domestics" achieved an enrollment of 20,000 students in Havana. In the countryside, "The 'Ana Betancourt' Schools for Peasant Women" trained 17,000 women to sew and improved their understanding of nutrition and hygiene. The Office for the Improvement of Women in conjunction with the FMC directed the two major programs aimed at women from the lowest strata of society. The programs continued into the late sixties and saw a steady decrease in enrollment as the population of trained women gradually surpassed the diminishing supply of illiterate and unskilled women. The organizations supplemented their base programs with courses designed to produce more teachers for remote areas and, in addition, offered many intensive short-term courses in sewing, training of day nurseries personnel, health education, social services, brigade leadership, pioneer guiding, transit guides, sport and physical education, nutrition, carving, crafts, hair dressing, rabbit raising, aviculture, floriculture, horticulture, artificial raising of calves, and tractor driving.³⁰ By 1967 the Federation of Cuban Women claimed that the Cuban govern-

³⁰ Federation of Cuban Women, Access of the Cuban Woman to Education (Havana: Instituto de Libro, 1967) p.44-47, 51

ment had created many of the necessary social infrastructures that would allow women to participate in "productive" labour and not be penalized by the "double shift".³¹

Women were being "liberated" from the home in impressive numbers, yet the areas in which women were seeking employment did little to challenge basic concepts about sex roles. Women's employment, after all, was being directed in the area of social services and the socialization of the domestic sphere. It was still women who were given the responsibility to see to the reproduction of the labour force before they themselves could participate in productive labour.

In his May Day Speech in 1966, Castro congratulated the revolution for having "eradicated practically all prostitution" from Cuba, and for having created greater opportunities for women's entrance into productive sector as "workers of high efficiency" and a "sense of responsibility." He further acknowledged that free day-care was necessary for women to enter the labour force and pledged to provide free access to all day nurseries, schools and school cafeterias.³² Nevertheless, in a speech a few months later, Castro qualified his promises with the statement that:

³¹ Federation of Cuban Women, Access of Cuban Women to Education, p.43

³² Fidel Castro, "The New Role For Women in Cuban Society" Women and the Cuban Revolution A Merit Pamphlet (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1970) p.3-4

The conditions for the liberation of women, for the full development of women in society, for an authentic equality of rights, or for authentic equality of women with men in society, require a material base; they require the material foundations of economic and social development.³³

The rapid socialization of women's traditional work within the home would not happen overnight. Official logic acknowledged that before women could achieve a better position in society, they had to be incorporated into the wage labour force. Yet to overcome the inevitable double-shift, domestic tasks had to be socialized. Slow progress on both fronts was justified with the argument that the cost of childcare, food-processing plants, laundry services, public dining rooms, and the like, was a heavy burden on an economy that was attempting to industrialize and diversify.

Despite the inability of the state to reduce the burden of domestic tasks by removing them from the home and making them a public instead of personal responsibility, women's participation in mass organizations increased dramatically after Cuba's new regime survived the initial period of foreign aggression. The FMC grew rapidly; for example, it had more than doubled its membership by 1961 and again in 1962.³⁴ Table 3 in the Appendix reveals the continuation of that growth. In 1963 there were 660,000 women incorporated

³³ Fidel Castro, "Women's Liberation: 'The Revolution within the Revolution'" From the Santa Clara Speech delivered 9 December 1966. Women and the Cuban Revolution A Merit Pamphlet (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1970) p.8

³⁴ Azricri, p.32

into the CDRs membership of 1,500,000.³⁵ Later, hundreds of women were recruited through the FMC to run programs "such as the Woman's Improvement Plan, the Schools for Directors of Children's Circles, The Ana Betancourt School for Peasant girls, and the Schools for Children's Circle Workers."³⁶

Yet it is not fair to point to the large female membership of mass organizations such as the FMC and CDRs and to conclude that women were being included in the political process at the grass-roots level. Unfortunately, the hierarchical organization of the FMC has inhibited the flow of ideas and concerns from the bottom up. As a mass organization, it has been used as a mechanism for what Richard Fagan calls the "political socialization" of one sector of the Cuban population.³⁷

Unfortunately, the political values and practices that were to be inculcated were decided by a predominantly male leadership. For example, Oscar Lewis, Ruth M. Lewis and Susan Rigdon describe the rigid approach taken by study groups sponsored by the FMC and CDRs which were "structured around a group leader, possibly trained in one of the Party's Schools for Revolutionary Instruction, who has been given a set topic for discussion."³⁸

³⁵ Fagan, p.209

³⁶ Azricri, p.33

³⁷ Richard Fagan, The Transformation of Political Culture in Cuba (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1969) p.2

Moreover, the creation of the revolutionary women was not guaranteed by the success of mobilization campaigns led by the FMC if one recognizes that

...mobilization does not depend on the prior internalization by the citizenry of the new norms and values sponsored by the political elite. Skilled leadership, the restructuring of opportunities, social and political pressures, and various types of rewards, incentives, encouragements, deprivations, and punishments are the ingredients of successful mobilization campaigns.³⁹

After interviewing approximately 150 women, mainly from the urban lower class, in an attempt to "show the impact of the Revolution and its institutions upon individuals and their families," Lewis, Lewis and Rigdon contend that although the organization has successfully mobilized women for education, production and defense, "it has probably not, at least as of 1970, offered adequate moral support on a personal level to those who are truly threatened by the proposed changes in life-style."⁴⁰ They paint the FMC as rather unsympathetic to those women who were unwilling to face obstacles to their integration with the same zeal as organization members. Moreover, they found traditional and reactionary attitudes concerning gender attributes flourished even among women who were long-time activists in the FMC.⁴¹

³⁸ Oscar Lewis, Ruth M. Lewis, Susan M. Rigdon, Four Women - Living the Revolution An Oral History of Contemporary Cuba (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1977) p.xvi

³⁹ Fagan, The Transformation of Political Culture in Cuba, p.9

⁴⁰ Lewis, et al. p.xiii

⁴¹ Lewis et al., p.xiv

Women coming from the poorest sectors of Cuban society, slum dwellers such as those interviewed for Neighbors, were found to present a different kind of resistance to FMC initiatives. For them

..."liberation" did not imply independence from home and children and incorporation in the labour force and mass organizations. "Liberation" meant release from outside work, taking care of their own homes, and having time to spend with their children.⁴²

Lewis, Lewis and Rigdon's study of the Buena Ventura slum revealed that few women were active in mass organizations or participated in volunteer labour and were generally suspicious of government programs and initiatives.

Despite the mobilization failures described by Lewis, Lewis, and Rigdon, the FMC was generally successful in providing new roles for women in the cities. In the rural sector, however, change came slowly. Ideally, collectivization would provide women with economic independence by making them visible members of the labour force who were allotted their share of the surplus generated by their labour. However, agrarian reform benefited men first. In the private sector, the formation of the National Association of Small Producers (ANAP) involved few women because its positions were filled by the heads of families. Unionization of agricultural workers focused on those in permanent positions, while the majority of women played a role as surplus, part-time labour. Thus rural women did not find an immediate

⁴² Lewis, et al., p.xv

route into the decision making process. Moreover, the retention of a small private sector in agriculture left some rural women in a position where even the ideological commitment toward female equality was practically non-existent.

Women's role in agricultural labour has expanded since the revolution but because of the seasonal nature of the employment in the sugar industry, "women have tended to form the reserve labour force in both collective and private sector."⁴³ Despite attempts by the FMC to mobilize women through agricultural brigades, the volunteer or temporary nature of the employment has not proven sufficient to draw more women into production. Elizabeth Croll warns that "if women are not involved in large numbers in production, then they are automatically excluded from exercising control over production."⁴⁴

Recent attempts to integrate rural women into paid production have proven more successful. The FMC/ANAP brigades that had been formed in 1966 paved the way for women's participation in the voluntary collectivization that took place in the mid-seventies when the government offered the same benefits enjoyed by employees of state farms to private sector farmers who pooled their resources into cooperatives.

⁴³ Elizabeth J. Croll, "Women in Rural Production and reproduction in the Soviet Union, China, Cuba, and Tanzania: Socialist Development Experiences," Signs (Winter 1981) p.387

⁴⁴ Croll, p.386

Agricultural cooperatives had much to offer women in the way of housing, water, sanitation, electricity, health centers, schools, day care centers, communal eating facilities and stores for basic necessities.⁴⁵ From 1976 to 1980, 900 production cooperatives were created. In contrast to earlier policies that had only recognized the head of the household (usually the man), all adult members of each household were given membership status.

By 1983, women constituted 26 per cent of the members of Cuba's production cooperatives. In addition, women in ANAP held 16 per cent of the local leadership positions by the mid-seventies. Nevertheless, women were still primarily seasonal employees and thus did not participate in production on equal terms with men.⁴⁶ Moreover, women in collectives "frequently traded visibility and remuneration for intensified labour."⁴⁷ The inability to socialize the domestic sphere meant that women in the rural areas were encouraged to participate in production but were left to struggle with the domestic tasks that were still expected of them. Statistics provided by the Anuario Estadístico de Cuba reveal that few women in the agricultural sector have access to day care. The number of women whose children were receiv-

⁴⁵ Carmen Diana Deere, "Rural Women and Agrarian Reform in Peru, Chile, and Cuba," Women and Change in Latin America, Helen Safa and June Nash, Editors (Massachusetts: Bergin and Garvey Publishers Ltd. 1986) p.201

⁴⁶ Deere, p.202

⁴⁷ Croll, p.386

ing day- care almost doubled from 1971 to 1972 but then increased at a very slow pace until 1980 with the exception of 1977 when almost 400 women gained further access to childcare. The following year the number dropped by over 650 and the previous pattern of access re-established itself. An urban bias was clearly indicated in the statistics because, in comparison with the industrial and service sector, few women benefited from free childcare in the agricultural sector.⁴⁸

Despite the limited success agrarian reform has had in Cuba, there are other obstacles to women's equal participation in the new power structures. The subjective obstacles which hindered the attempts of the FMC to integrate women more fully into the "productive" economic part of society are demonstrated in Margaret Randall's collection of interviews with Cuban women. When asked whether attempts to keep women out of physically demanding employment was wrong, many women cited the need to protect the reproductive capacity of women as a justification of employment discrimination. The list of jobs barred to women by the Ministry of Labour's Resolutions 47 and 48 was seen by many as a necessary protection. When women did take part in heavy physical labour, they formed their own brigades and did not work with the men on an equal basis. Their labour was seen as supplementary to

⁴⁸ Anuario Estadístico de Cuba 1975 (Havana: Comité Estatal de Estadísticas, 1975) p.205 and Anuario Estadístico de Cuba 1980, p.214

meet high production goals. The director of a school for girls outside of Bayamo told of a plan to use female cane cutters to stimulate a platoon of male cutters who were having low productivity.⁴⁹ There was no uneasiness about the attempt to harness "machismo" and, in the end, the plan fell through because of a lack of equipment for the women.

Subjective barriers affect both rural and urban women regardless of the ideological commitments espoused by the government. Yet Cuba has not failed to recognize the trap domestic obligations represent for women. In 1974, a family code was enacted which attempted to weaken the attitudinal bias against women and to vanquish the concrete barriers to women's equality by liberating them from household drudgery. Articles 24-28 proclaimed that men were required to share housework and childcare when their wives worked or studied.⁵⁰ This attack on women's "second shift" provided a legal framework for equality far advanced over any country in Latin America. However, the Family Code failed to rectify the most basic obstacles to equality. No evidence exists of efforts made to enforce the code. Furthermore, Cubans foster the image of the working-mother while neglecting that of the working-father. To this end, Maxine Molyneux says that motherhood is still the most favoured theme of social-

⁴⁹ Randall, Cuban Women Now p.55.

⁵⁰ Marjorie King, "Cuba's Attack on Women's Second Shift, 1974-76" Women in Latin America (Riverside, California: Latin American Perspectives, 1979) p.120

ist propaganda dealing with women.⁵¹

In effect, the Family Code simply announced Cuba's failure to create a system where equality between men and women was a reality. Programs like the Plan Jaba, where women who worked outside the home were given priority when shopping, or the Family Code's articles which required men to share domestic tasks, all served only as detours around the basic obstacle of economic priorities. Demanding fewer work hours or days from women was also attempted but the strategy "ultimately discriminated against and financially penalized women in the productive sector."⁵²

Many feminist scholars view with suspicion the changes that have been made by the Cuban mobilization model. Like Susan Kaufman Purcell they point out that change occurred when it was compatible with the "high-priority developmental goals" of the country.⁵³ For example, the emigration of skilled workers, professionals, managers and administrators necessitated the resocialization and education of women and the regime focused on the mobilization of women into the work force when labour seemed scarce. As an expatriate, Carmelo Mesa-Lago views the slow incorporation of women into the work force with a critical eye. He claims that the process of incorporating women into the labour force was not

⁵¹ Molyneux, p.84

⁵² Croll, p.367.

⁵³ Kaufman Purcell, p.262

initiated by the revolution; it was only accelerated. Neither is he impressed by the rate of absorption that has taken place since 1959.⁵⁴

Lourdes Casal disagrees, arguing that the elimination of prostitution, a decrease in domestic employment, and the flight of middle-class elementary school teachers should have created a "catastrophic temporary decrease in the female labour force participation rate."⁵⁵ Critics of Castro's regime agree with Mesa-Lago, arguing that there was little incentive for women to work outside the home because there was little to buy with the added income, and besides, the government focused mobilization efforts on volunteer labour.

Tracing the changes in the labour force participation rate, Mesa-Lago found that, from 1962 to 1971, fewer people were incorporated into the labour force because of emigration, expanded education possibilities and changes in retirement patterns. The incorporation of females did not off-set the decrease in the percentage of the population forming the labouring sector but it did change the characteristics of the labour force. With the FMC's mobilization of women to help with the sugar cane harvest in 1970 came an increase from the 15.8 per cent participation rate of 1968

⁵⁴ Carmelo Mesa-lago, The Economy of Socialist Cuba (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1981.) p.117

⁵⁵ Casal, p.190

to the 18 per cent rate of 1970. Female participation stagnated during 1971-72 and the 1973 campaign to incorporate women to the degree of 33 per cent before 1980 failed.⁵⁶

Claes Brunenius is less concerned about levels of employment and more interested in the nature of female integration in the labour force. He notes that by the 1980s the degree of female participation in the labour force was similar to levels found in industrialized countries--one third of the labour force. However the increased participation was absorbed through the creation of new jobs, suggesting that women tended to dominate in certain fields and men in others. Furthermore, there have been no dramatic increases in the representation of women in jobs traditionally held by male workers. Despite the well publicized activities of female cane cutters, tractor drivers, and construction workers, women's participation in the public sphere has increased largely in areas which represent the socialization of the "reproductive" sphere. The statistics given by Brunenius for the period of 1970 to 1979, show that the social services and other service industries saw increases in female employment by 31.8 and 34.3 per cent respectively, whereas there was only a 13.2 per cent increase in agriculture, forestry and fishing and a 16.2 per cent increase in industrial activities.⁵⁷ Although, the revolution has opened

⁵⁶ Mesa-Lago, p.118

⁵⁷ Claes Brunenius Revolutionary Cuba: The Challenge of Economic Growth with Equity (Boulder, Col.: Westview Press,

up many new areas of employment for women, the statistics compiled in Table 4 and 5 in the appendix provide further evidence of the continuation of a sex division of labour outside the home. While occupational stereotypes concerning women were overcome in many areas, the reverse was true for men. For example, few Cubans thought men were suitable for professional childcare. Consequently, men have not begun to shift their patterns of employment because of machismo and because "women's work" usually pays less. If employment in childcare, health care and education is seen as appropriate only for women, the division of labour on a gender basis can not be overcome.

In addition to the limitations on women's employment imposed by sex division of labour, the creation of new jobs failed to keep up with the increasing supply of female labour. The unemployment rate for women calculated by Brunenius actually increased alongside the growth of the female labour force. Contrary to the findings of Mesa-Lago, unemployment grew from 1970 to 1979 (although Brunenius points to the large migration to the United States in 1980 as a possible alleviating factor).⁵⁸ In 1979, 5.4 per cent of the labour force, or 188,000 people, were unemployed. Brunenius finds it remarkable that:

1984.) p.136

⁵⁸ Brunenius, p.59

129,000 or 69 per cent, of the unemployed were women. In other words, while male unemployment only increased from 1.3 per cent of the male labour force in 1970 to 2.5 per cent in 1979, female unemployment increased from 1.2 per cent to 12 per cent.⁵⁹

According to Brunenius, job creation has not been sufficient to provide employment opportunities for all the women who desire to work outside the home. Increased educational opportunities, material incentives, childcare, changes in traditional attitudes, and the decrease in unemployment and underemployment in the first decade of the revolution radically altered women's expectations and needs but may have underestimated the material basis required to absorb women into the public sphere. Fundamental changes in employment policies during the seventies meant that productivity took priority over employment creation.⁶⁰ Just when the female labour force was doubling, the government was focusing on increasing productivity rather than maintaining full employment. Thus a conflict between the need for full employment and productivity emerged. Muriel Nazzari takes her analysis one step further, arguing that Cuba's shift from a system that relied on moral incentives and economic distribution based on need to a distributive system based on material incentives and margins of profit perpetuates women's inequality in the work force because demands for childcare, maternity leave, and flexible working hours are perceived to

⁵⁹ Brunenius, p.60

⁶⁰ Brunenius, p.58

cut into productivity.⁶¹

Economic policies detrimental to women's long-term strategic interests prevented women from gaining access to revolutionary power structures through increased integration into the labour force. In Cuba, access to the Cuban Communist Party, unquestionably the most powerful political institution in the country, comes mainly through the work place. An individual is nominated by her fellow workers if she proves herself to be worthy of such an honour. It is then up to the party to investigate the candidate's "revolutionary worth." She becomes a full member if she has contributed at least three years in the Union of Young Communists (UJC) or has undergone a year as an observer within the party itself.⁶² Approximately five per cent of the population are currently members of the party which operates in a hierarchical and centralized form.

Even Cuba's attempt at decentralization and democratization through the creation of the Organs of People's Power failed to lessen the Communist Party's dominance. In 1976, political boundaries were restructured and 481 deputies were elected to the People's Power Assembly (Asemblea del Poder Popular) to represent the newly created 14 provinces and 169

⁶¹ Muriel Nazzari, "The 'Women Question' in Cuba: An Analysis of Material Constraints on its Solution" in Signs (Volume 9, Number 2, 1983) p.247

⁶² Peter Marshall, Cuba Libre Breaking the Chains? (Boston: Faber and Faber, 1987) p.78

municipalities. Although women held 50 per cent of the leadership positions in the CDRs and 43 per cent leadership in trade unions at the base level, only 8 per cent of those elected to the People's Power Assembly at the municipal level in 1981 were women. In 1985 the level had risen to 11 per cent.⁶³ Most of the representatives elected to the popular assembly were screened first by the Communist Party and the resulting high levels of Communist party members within municipal, provincial and national assemblies maintained the political process in the hands of a small elite.⁶⁴

According to Carollee Bengelsdorf, the Communist Party's attempt to make female representation in the party equal to the percentage of women in the work force only brought the levels up to 18.9 per cent in 1980. She claims that upper level party structures have continued to push for women's representation in the 1984 elections since at the national level of Popular Power women comprised 22.6 per cent of the deputies while at the municipal level the total number of female deputies stood at 11.5 per cent. Despite attempts to inspire more female political participation through representation at the highest levels of government, only two women served on the council of ministers in 1984, and these women headed ministries which encompassed traditional female

⁶³ Marshall, p.174

⁶⁴ Andrew Hopkins, "The Nicaraguan Revolution--A Comparative Perspective" Australian Outlook (Vol. 41, No.1, 1987) p.31

work categories - education and light industry.⁶⁵

In 1986, women made up 22 per cent of the National Assembly of the PCC but only made up about 20 per cent of total party membership. There were 41 women in the Central Committee.⁶⁶ Again, it was obvious that increases in female representation were stimulated from upper levels of government. Regardless, women did not fare extremely well from the shifts made at the highest level of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee in 1985. Only Vilma Espin was promoted from alternate membership to full membership and Yolanda Ferrer and Rosa Elena Simeón were made alternate members, thereby increasing the total of female members to three from one.⁶⁷

There are many subjective and structural factors that prevent women from attaining a more statistically fair representation at the political level. Most of them have been discussed throughout; however, the barriers inflicted by latent racism are difficult to quantify in light of the Cuban government's claim to have vanquished discrimination based on the colour of one's skin. Enthusiastic observers such as Margaret Randall stress that structural racism has disappeared in Cuba but there are no statistics to back up the claim. In fact, the lack of statistics perhaps signifies

⁶⁵ Bengelsdorf, p.43

⁶⁶ Marshall, p.174

⁶⁷ Fermoselle, p.341

the continuing political marginalization of black women since Cuba's promoters rarely fail to point out progressive change. Fidel Castro acknowledged the existence of a white bias in the power structure during his address to the Third Congress of the PCC when he stated:

In order for the Party's leadership to duly reflect the ethnic composition of our people, it must include those compatriots of proven revolutionary merit and talents who in the past had been discriminated against because of their skin color. The promotion of all capable members of our society and their incorporation into the party and its leadership must not be left to chance.⁶⁸

Detailed analysis of statistics available to the scholar who has access to Cuban archives would still be problematic because of the inherent biases found in racial demography in Cuba.⁶⁹

Most feminists and critics of the Cuban regime point to the nature of women's incorporation in the labour force as the most important structural barrier. Today, however, women make up 40 per cent of the work force, 43 per cent of university lecturers, 68 per cent of teachers, 67 per cent of doctors and 54 per cent of technical and scientific professionals.⁷⁰ The new figures seem to contradict the dour predictions of Mesa-Lago, Brunenius, and Nazzari of the

⁶⁸ Fidel Castro, "Address to the 3rd Congress of the Communist Party of Cuba" Granma (16 February, 1986, Year 21, No.7) p.1

⁶⁹ Carlos Moore, "Congo or Carabali? Race Relations in Socialist Cuba" Caribbean Review (Vol.40, No.2, 1986) p.12

⁷⁰ Marshall, p.173

regime's ability to further incorporate female labour, but they do little to counterbalance the poor showing of women in positions of political influence (see Table 6 for a summary of women's political integration over the past 29 years). The impressive integration of women into the labour force has done little to challenge the "male bond of Castro and the guerrilla elites."⁷¹ There is a more important obstacle to female participation in the power structures that has been consistently overlooked--Militarization. (See Table 7)

The militarization of the Cuban society, whether justified or not, is arguably the most severe barrier women face in the struggle to obtain proportionate influence within political structures. The Revolutionary Armed Forces is highly politicized and most of its members belong either to the Communist Party or to the Union of Communist Youth. The military not only absorbs the best male talent in the nation, it remains a "feeder institution" providing most of the nation's leaders--civilian and military.⁷² Jorge Domínguez maintains that

Cuba is governed in large part (although not exclusively) by civic soldiers, that is, military men who actually rule over large sectors of military and civilian life, who are held up as symbols to be emulated by all military and civilians, who

⁷¹ Alfred Padula and Lois Smith, "Women in Socialist Cuba 1959- 1984" Cuba: Twenty-Five years of Revolution Editors, Sandor Halebsky and John M. Kirk (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1985) p.89-90

⁷² Thomas, Fauviol, Weiss, p.16

are the bearers of the revolutionary tradition and ideology, who have civilianized and politicized themselves by internalizing the norms and organization of the Communist party and who have educated themselves to become professionals in military, political, managerial, engineering, economic and educational affairs.⁷³

William LeoGrande points out that the institutionalization of the revolution which took place during the First Congress of the Communist Party of Cuba in 1975, significantly reduced the role of the military in Cuba's political and economic sphere, when the proportion of active military officers in the Central Committee "fell from 57.0% in 1965 to only 29.8% in 1975".⁷⁴ In addition, the Third Congress of the Cuban Communist Party in 1985 resulted in the further weakening of military influence in the Central Committee.⁷⁵ Domínguez's characterization of the "civic soldier" has important implications for the process of women's liberation in Cuba, especially in view of the "low degree of elite attrition" that accompanied the shift away from military control of civilian institutions in the 1970s (see Tables 8 and 9). Although the number of men with military connections decreased slowly the old guard remained in firm control; only 38 per cent of the expanded Central Committee formed in 1975 were newcomers, 77 per cent of the 1965 Central Commit-

⁷³ Jorge Domínguez, "The Civic Soldier in Cuba" Armies and Politics in Latin America (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishing, 1976) p.318

⁷⁴ LeoGrande, p.14

⁷⁵ Fermoselle, p.339

tee remained.⁷⁶

Women's absence from the military elite would seem to ensure their slow integration in the political process at the upper levels. Regardless, the low levels of female members of the Communist Party and other organs of power suggests that, in spite of all intentions, the Cuban government's approach to women's emancipation is flawed. The increasing militarization of the society, and the sluggish rate of change in male attitudes seem interconnected. Moreover, militarism represents more than just a cause of unequal distribution of resources. The militaristic bias of the society also influences social relations. Militarism has practical implications as well; many social programs are organized imitating the military's pyramid structures and blind loyalty.

Fred Judson's detailed study of Cuban Revolutionary mythology and symbolism is largely a description of the cult of male-dominated heroism which pervades the society at every level.⁷⁷ Buildings, streets, civilian and military organizations are named after revolutionary heroes. Children are given military training at an early age. Boys and girls both receive training in firearms in addition to regular lessons in military discipline and obedience. By Junior

⁷⁶ LeoGrande, p.20

⁷⁷ Fred Judson, "Continuity and Evolution of Revolutionary Symbolism" Cuba: Twenty-Five Years of Revolution, p.241-245

High, the children are streamed into educational tracks which will ultimately determine their future in the work force and in the power structure. Ostensibly girls and boys are judged by their talent, capacity for hard work and revolutionary morality. The best students are either fed into the university track or the military schools, the latter of which supplies most of the students for the military academies later on. The remaining students are sent to vocational schools.⁷⁸ Women's low rate of incorporation within the armed forces suggests a male-bias from the earliest stages.

Women's near absence from leadership positions within the military also suggests that the institutionalized discrimination inherent in male conscription has served to retard women's entrance into the political sphere. The CIA's comprehensive biographical "Directory of Personalities of the Cuban government, official organizations and mass organizations" revealed only two positions out of 207 listed under the Ministry of Revolutionary Armed Forces (MINFAR) held by women. In 1974, Second Captain Thelma Bornot Pubillones was chief of the history section, while Lieutenant Nora Riquenes Veves was assigned the position of art editor for FAR's official magazine, Verde Olivo.⁷⁹ The CIA's 1977 list showed

⁷⁸ Fermoselle, p.303

⁷⁹ The CIA used a wide variety of official Cuban periodicals to compile the list. CIA Research Reports, "Directory of Personalities of the Cuban Government, Official Organizations, and Mass Organizations" Latin America 1946-1976 Reel 3

little change, one more woman was added to MINFAR as chief director of instruction for the Youth Labour Army. The three positions occupied by women out of 121 in the MININT again revealed their marginalization from positions of influence-- Chief of identification and information directorate, deputy director of the National Section of Identification Card population, and a member of the Traffic and Safety division.

Despite declining levels of active military officers within the National Assembly of the PCC from the mid-seventies to the present day, the army still maintains its dominance within government bureaucracy since the most influential positions within MINFAR and MININT are held by the military and the two ministries are the largest government institutions in terms of the number of employees.⁸⁰ A cursory look at the biographical information provided by the CIA's handbook for 1974 and 1977 listing the members of all government departments reveals the overwhelming presence of men who are military officers. Finally, the influence of the FAR is still obvious at the highest levels of the government, the prime example of course being Fidel Castro himself.

Rafael Fermoselle's more recent compilation of the most important personalities within MINFAR and the Ministry of the Interior (MININT) does not include any women. Moreover, his fairly detailed, albeit biased, analysis of the Cuban

⁸⁰ Fermoselle, p.308

military during the post-revolutionary period mentions the potential of the female component of the military only when discussing the militia or military education at elementary and junior high school levels. The biographies he provides of the current military leadership do not include any female members.

Cuba's military involvement in Africa has provided the impetus for the continuing militarization of the society. Since September 1974, almost all Cuban soldiers have seen active duty in Angola or in Ethiopia. Thousands of them died defending other people's revolutions. Fermoselle claims "it is possible that an average of 25 Cubans per month are losing their lives in Angola... It can be assumed that close to 10,000 Cubans have been killed fighting in Africa between 1975-1985."⁸¹ The wars in Africa gave the Cuban army valuable practical experience; however, Rafael Fermoselle contends that the casualties sustained during the past 13 years have caused both individuals and society to suffer. He also perceives a potential power struggle within the military as a result of pressure from returning veterans from the African front, who would feel that some sort of advances in rank would be justified after their long and arduous tours of duty. Military success must be rewarded and perhaps this would lead to the retirement of many of the old guard.⁸²

⁸¹ Fermoselle, p.422

⁸² Fermoselle, p.307

Women have shared the burden of Cuban intervention in Africa by taking part in home defense. Especially since Ronald Reagan's inauguration in 1981, new efforts were made to mobilize women into defense activities. Again, in response to the United States invasion of Grenada in 1983, Cuban women were marshalled to perform their patriotic duty. According to Peter Marshall, "since 1984 there has been an all-women combat unit in the Revolutionary Armed Forces."⁸³ By 1985, the Territorial Militia Troops (MTT) had a membership of approximately 1,200,000, half of which were female. Members received basic training in conventional and unconventional warfare with the objective of home defence. Fermoselle claims that the top positions within the MTT are held by regular army officers.⁸⁴ Thus it can be surmised that within the militia, few women hold important posts.

The FMC does not perceive the male directed militarization of the country as a threat to women's integration into the political structure. It has maintained its support of the militaristic mobilization model designed by Fidel Castro and has not challenged its male bias. On the contrary, the FMC seems satisfied with women's role as a rearguard force in the event of foreign aggression. For example, the percentage of delegates to the FMC congress in 1974 who belonged to a CDR (97 per cent) or to the militia (86 per

⁸³ Marshall, p.166.

⁸⁴ Fermoselle, p.329

cent) best indicated the commitment of the organization to the Cuban mobilization model.⁸⁵ Moreover, Federadas have not criticized the war effort in Africa nor have they complained about cuts to their own programs due to increased military spending. Yet the ability of the FMC to serve women's political interests through women's mobilization into the militia remains questionable.

The almost insignificant role women played in the Cuban Rebel Army provided the initial barrier to their incorporation into power structures during the reconstruction period. Isabel Larguia and John Dumoulin warn that if the army is to be "the military arm of the class in power, all exclusion from it on the basis of sex has repressive implications for the social consciousness of women."⁸⁶ They believe, however, that Cuba successfully breached an important barrier to women's concientizacion when the militia and revolutionary police force began to recruit women in response to internal and external threats to the revolution. Larguia and Dumoulin claim that "one of the most formidable barriers in the division of labour by sex was thus broken down and an unprecedented number of women became engaged in military activity."⁸⁷ Their assessment is debatable. Women's impressive

⁸⁵ Randall, Women in Cuba: Twenty Years Later, p.142

⁸⁶ Isabel Larguia and John Dumoulin, "Hacia una ciencia de la liberacion de la mujer" Casa de las Americas (Vol.65-66, 1971) p.53

⁸⁷ Larguia and Dumoulin, "Women's Equality and the Cuban Revolution" Women and Change in Latin America Editors,

response to the crises that threatened the revolution did not reflect a radical change in gender roles. As the military was able to increase its political hegemony through physical expansion and increasing participation in the socio-economic sphere, the structural barriers to women's political participation became more entrenched despite radical attempts to overcome subjective factors. One wonders, then, if greater participation during the actual revolution would have placed women in a more powerful position within the post-revolutionary society. Women's participation in the Nicaraguan revolution provides an excellent opportunity to place women's position in post-revolutionary Cuba into a broader context.

Chapter V

LA LUCHA CONTINUA - THE STRUGGLE CONTINUES

Someone who has picked up arms to defend her country and to overthrow a tyrant is not going to be told that the affairs of the world are none of her business.

María Santos¹

In July 1979 it seemed that Nicaraguan women were in a position to make rapid strides within the fluid political spheres of post-revolutionary Nicaragua. Thousands of women had been radicalized by their direct involvement in combat. AMPRONAC recognized that women's participation in armed combat was a symbolic step toward emancipation by renaming itself the Association of Nicaraguan Women Luisa Amanda Espinosa (AMNLAE) after the first female combatant to die as a member of the FSLN.² Yet Nicaraguan women's participation in the struggle did not erase centuries of male dominance just as it could not guarantee a just and egalitarian society built on the ruins of a shattered economy.

¹ Maria Santos interviewed by Alpern Engel, "Women in the Nicaraguan Revolution" Frontiers (Vol.7 No.2, 1983) p.44

² Miranda Davies, Third World Second Sex (London: Zed Books, 1983) p.164

The FSLN, unlike the Cuban Rebel Army, was a military force supported by an uneasy coalition of anti-Somocista forces. In Cuba, the charismatic leadership and the mythical qualities of the heroic members of the Rebel Army allowed for radical change to be directly influenced and implemented by a single dominant force. In contrast, the National Directorate (DN) of the FSLN was characterized by its cooperative and pragmatic leadership which relied on the consensus of its members.³ There was no "Castro" in Nicaragua to lead the diverse interest groups that had coalesced in the final months of struggle against Somoza. The FSLN's ability to maintain its position as the dominant political force in the aftermath of Somoza's departure was assured only by its popularity among the masses and its organizational powers.

From 1979 to 1985 power in Nicaragua was exercised by two governing bodies. The Governing Junta of National Reconstruction (JGNR) was the executive arm of government with the Council of State as its legislative wing. The membership and voting strength of mass organizations and government institutions affiliated with the FSLN ensured the Sandinistas' ability to influence the direction and degree of change in the first five years. Out of the initial 47 seats on the Council of State, for example, the FSLN was assured 6 positions, the Sandinista Defense Committees (CDS) 9 posi-

³ David Close, Nicaragua: Politics, Economics and Society (New York: Pinter Publishers, 1988) p.113-114

tions, the Sandinista Workers Federation (CST) 3, the Rural Workers Associations (ATC) 2, the National Union of Ranchers and Farmers (UNAG) 2, and the Sandinista Youth, Armed Forces, and AMNLAE one position each.⁴ As a result, the mass organizations controlled 44 percent of the membership.

The remaining seats were distributed equally among the various organizations and interest groups that had participated in the anti-Somocista coalition. However, five private sector interest groups with representation in the Council withdrew after 1980, claiming that the JGRN, by allowing mass organizations affiliated with the FSLN to occupy seats, had shifted the balance in the Council in favour of the left. In 1981, four more seats were created, and the Council was finally composed of 51 members, the majority of whom could be counted on to support the FSLN agenda. In the same year, the conservative members of the original five member Junta resigned, leaving only Daniel Ortega, Sergio Ramirez and Rafael Córdova Rivas to man the executive until they were to be replaced by an elected president and vice-president in 1985.

The withdrawal of conservative sectors from the Sandinista government did not mean that right-wing interest groups had resigned themselves to the Sandinista's political agenda. Foreign sponsored ex-national guardsmen, members of the

⁴ Luis Héctor Serra, "The Grass-Roots Organizations" Nicaragua The First Five Years Editor, Thomas Walker (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1985) p.76

disillusioned bourgeoisie, disgruntled peasants, and even a former leader of the FSLN organized counter-revolutionary movements that threatened the stability of the struggling regime.⁵ In addition, minority groups, such as the Mosquito, Rama and Sumu Indians, who had been insulated from Somoza's oppressive regime because of their geographic isolation, challenged Sandinista hegemony in the Atlantic coast region when the new government proved insensitive to their interests.

Not all women supported the revolution either. Motivated largely through fear of "godless communism" and the loss of their land and possessions through forced collectivization, many peasant women joined their mates on the front lines of the counter-revolutionary war. One interview with a male Contra revealed the extent to which women played an integral part in his experience in the counter-revolutionary guerrilla army:

Of course, we had a lot of women with us. They were armed like men, carried FAL guns and the same backpacks. In fact, I believe the women were much stronger than we were. Men often go crazy after a day-long march in the bright sun, and become feverish woman then take the men's backpacks and carry them on their heads - in addition to their own stuff, of course. You only had to carry your gun, the women carry all the other things.... As I told you, many things worked out well only because we had so many women with us.⁶

⁵ For example, Eden Pastora, the famed Commander Zero who directed the assault on the National Palace, was commander and chief of a counter-revolutionary movement based in Costa Rica.

⁶ Deiter Eich and Carlos Rincón, "Conversation with Emerson

Similarly, a Nicaraguan Mosquito, who had been captured and forced after months of torture and brutal living conditions to fight with the Contras, also told of women among the troops who received military training or acted as nurses on the battle front.⁷ Yet despite evidence of the participation of some women in counter-revolutionary movements, the overwhelming majority of Nicaraguan women realized that their interests were better served by the Sandinista army which did not rely on terror to maintain the cooperation of the rural population.

The disenchantment of conservative sectors of the population and the CIA sponsored military aggression based on the Honduran and Costa Rican borders created a climate in which the implementation and enforcement of progressive legislation was difficult. There was no mass exodus of the middle-classes as in the case of Cuba nor has there been a quick and decisive victory over the armed counter-revolutionary movement, thus national security and economic stability have taken precedence over all other matters on the national agenda.

Uriel Navarrete Medrano" The Contras: Interviews with Anti-Sandinistas, (San Francisco: Synthesis Publications, 1985) p.99

⁷ Eich and Rincón, "Conversation with Orlando Wayland" The Contras Interviews with Anti-Sandinistas, p.127, 131

Although Nicaragua's enemies justify the Contra actions with the claim that the FSLN has imposed a harsh totalitarian regime on Nicaragua, most evidence suggests the contrary. Criticism of the Sandinista government focuses on the limitations on political and civil liberties imposed by the State of Emergency proclaimed in 1982, which was revoked shortly before the 1984 elections then re-established in October 1985. Yet many find the restrictions involved consistent with the reactions of most states to foreign aggression. Furthermore, although it is true that Sandinista soldiers have been convicted for the "the murder, rape, or wounding of 35 persons since 1983," organizations such as the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights of the Organization of American States and Amnesty International emphasize that examples of mass violations of human rights have not occurred.⁸

In contrast, Reed Brody has collected and published sworn affidavits of eyewitnesses that document the atrocities committed by Ronald Reagan's "Freedom Fighters". A pattern emerged from the incidents investigated which substantiated similar findings by Amnesty International and Americas Watch. The contras not only intimidated, kidnapped, tortured, raped, murdered and mutilated civilian victims who they perceived to be pro-Sandinista (for example, teachers,

⁸ Margaret E. Crahan, "Political Legitimacy and Dissent" Conflict in Nicaragua Editors, Jiri Valenta and Esperanza Durán (Boston: Allen and Unwin, 1987) p.101

health workers, priests and nuns, community activists and government representatives), they also committed various abuses against random targets that included unarmed men, women, children and the elderly.⁹

Considering the scope of the military conflict, efforts to create a popular democracy under siege are as impressive as the confines of a state of emergency are disturbing. For example, one study of the regionalization and decentralization that has taken place since 1979 found that the mechanisms developed to encourage popular participation in local government at the municipal and regional level were particularly impressive and unique among Latin American countries.¹⁰ Indeed, the Nicaraguan model is quite distinct from the highly centralized Cuban administration. Women are more likely to benefit from a form of government that operates from the municipal level upwards since women tend to be more active in local forms of government.

The war with the Contras has brought the Nicaraguan economy to the brink of collapse. By 1985, the country had sustained over \$1.3 billion in damages, the foreign debt had spiraled to \$5 billion and over half of the government's

⁹ Reed Brody, Contra Terror in Nicaragua Report of a Fact-finding Mission: September 1984-January 1985 (Boston: South End Press, 1985) p.21

¹⁰ Patricia A. Wilson and Rolf Pendall, "Regionalization and Decentralization in Nicaragua" Latin American Perspectives (Vol.14 No.2, 1987)

budget was spent on defense.¹¹ The expansion of social services was halted and government subsidies on basic consumer goods had to be cancelled. Little remains for the reconstruction of schools and health clinics destroyed by the Contras, nor are there sufficient funds to provide the much needed programs to deal with the thousands of displaced peasants, wounded and crippled civilians and soldiers, orphans and bereaved families. The exigencies of war dictate that job training opportunities, adult education, birth control, mother and child programs and day care facilities and the like are low on the priority scale when it comes to funding.

Despite the serious setbacks to the Sandinista program caused by the war, women's short and long term interests did receive significant attention. Buoyed by its popular support in the rest of the country and its firm control over a well organized military force, the FSLN has been able to withstand right-wing belligerence. The confiscation and redistribution of the Somoza family's wealth, allowed the Sandinistas to fulfill economic promises to the poor in the short term, without totally alienating the rest of the country's landowning class. The Sandinistas introduced basic reforms aimed at ameliorating living conditions for the poorest sectors of the society and since more women than men were trapped at the bottom of the economic pyramid, they stood to

¹¹ Richard L. Harris, "The Revolutionary Transformation of Nicaragua" Latin American Perspectives (Vol.14, No.1, 19

benefit the most from the restructuring of the economy and the expansion of social programs. Land distribution in the rural sector, credit programs for small farmers, subsidized transportation and basic food items, housing projects, improved access to health care and child care, immunization programs, improved levels of education, and community projects aimed at improving basic services such as water and sewage meant that the short-term practical interests of Nicaraguan women were receiving the first serious attention in decades. (See Table 10)

Women's longterm strategic interests were addressed by a series of legal reforms, a few of which were promulgated less than a month after Somoza's defeat. First, prostitution and female sexual slavery were accorded severe penalties under the law. Next, "the utilization of women as sexual or commercial objects" was prohibited. Decrees 573 and 583 ensured that peasant women and minors were directly compensated for their labour (previously wages could go to the head of the family) and domestic workers had their working hours cut from 14 to 10 hours per day.¹² The Statute of Rights and Guarantees proclaimed equality before the law regardless of sex, equality of rights within the family, the right to full employment, and equal pay for work of equal value. Many of the statute's clauses were even more progres-

¹² Association of Nicaraguan Women Luisa Amanda Espinosa, A Woman Should Make Revolution Wherever She is (pamphlet, 198) p.6-10

sive than Cuba's Family Code, but again problems of enforcement persisted because there was no material base with which to overcome objective barriers to equality and sexist attitudes ingrained by centuries of male dominance.

Nevertheless, in addition to changes in their legal status, Nicaraguan women made significant inroads into the political system under the new government. Thousands of women had sacrificed their lives during the revolutionary struggle, some like Doris Tijerino endured years of incarceration and brutal torture, others were raped and murdered and became martyrs of the sadistic regime.¹³ The revolutionary leadership acknowledged the country's debt to the thousands of women who, through their sacrifice, had ensured themselves of a place within the evolving power-structures. Female FSLN activists were appointed to administrative posts throughout the various government institutions. Several were assigned top posts in recognition of their proven leadership capabilities. For example, a woman was named attorney general and given the responsibility of setting up the new legal system.¹⁴ Similarly, Dora Maria Téllez was assigned to the Nicaraguan cabinet as the minister of health.¹⁵

¹³ Doris Tijerino Inside the Nicaraguan Revolution p.99-106

¹⁴ Santos, p.44

¹⁵ Close, p.119

Yet the same time women were making an impressive entrance into the political sphere, within the Sandinista army women's position was quickly eroding. Although Nicaraguan women had many occasions to prove their combat abilities throughout the long struggle, the military proved the most intransigent sector of the male population in terms of ideological transformation. In George Black's opinion, the most visible change in the first year of the revolution was "the conscious demilitarization of women."¹⁶

As the threat of counter-revolution became serious in 1981, the primary objective of the newly created Ejercito Popular Sandinista (Sandinista Popular Army - EPS) was to create an organizational structure capable of maintaining a disciplined military presence throughout Nicaragua. It increased its military capabilities by organizing the Sandinista Popular Militias (MPSs).¹⁷ The hierarchical structure of the military and the democratic nature of the Popular Militia were to create contradictions within the power structure which would affect women to a greater degree than men. From the beginning plans were made to replace the military's dependence on the militia through the institution of mandatory military service. Irregular forces were disarmed and restructured; separate brigades were formed for women and children in both the regular army and in the popular

¹⁶ Black, p.327

¹⁷ Vilas, p.124

militia.¹⁸ In essence, women's participation in the militia was being downgraded.

Despite the fact that the women who opted to remain in the Sandinista army were determined to reject former sex roles and were more than willing to continue to receive the same treatment and training as men, there are concrete examples of discrimination which resulted in a withdrawal of women from the EPS.¹⁹ The majority of the women who remained in high ranking positions in the EPS were concentrated in administrative and technical positions. For example, in 1986, 90 percent of the political instructors at the Carlos Aguero Military School in Managua, were women.²⁰

While women were perceived as a valuable combat force in the event of a foreign invasion, female soldiers were encouraged to take up nonmilitary duties in the reconstruction process. The EPS was more interested in career soldiers and women were assumed to be incapable of making such a commitment because they were expected to "settle down" at some point and raise a family. Men, of course, could free themselves of family obligations in the event they were called upon to defend their country.

¹⁸ Black, p.225

¹⁹ Ramírez-Horton, p.156

²⁰ Catherine Gander, "Nicaraguan Women at War: Part III - Military Defense" Canadian Dimension (Vol.20 No.3 1986) p.26

Women who remained in the army were given subtle reminders of the pre-eminence of their familial duties. Defence was portrayed as a motherhood issue although it was expected that, for women, motherhood came first. Policies which allowed them certain privileges, like living outside army bases with their families, were used later to justify the denial of women's right to take part in combat. Women were not allowed to fully participate in national defence and they were kept from the battles on the Honduran border.²¹

As a result of government efforts, few women are currently incorporated into the Irregular Warfare Battalions that engage in combat duty against the Contras. In 1986, Catherine Gander noted that the only women she saw on the Honduran border were assigned as a cook, radio operator, and a health and sanitation person.²² The need to segregate women from the dangers of sharing the intimate experience of combat duties with large groups of men justified women's exclusion. As a consequence, by the end of 1979, Stephen Gorman calculated that women made up only 8 to 10 percent of the armed forces.²³

²¹ Christiane Dupré et al. "Nicaragua: un Féminisme différent" Luttes Urbaines (Vol.3, No.4, 1982) p.15

²² Gander, p.26

²³ Steven Gorman, "The Role of the Revolutionary Armed Forces" Nicaragua in Revolution Editor, Thomas Walker (New York: Praeger Publishing, 1982) p.123 In contrast, Gary Ruchwarger claims that, in 1982, women composed 25 percent of regular armed forces and formed the majority of the popular militias. Furthermore, until 1983, women made up 30 percent of the reserve battalions which were

Stephen Gorman explains the decrease in the percentage of women combatants in the Nicaraguan revolutionary armed forces as the result of the heavy male enlistment. In addition, a large portion of the male members of the Sandinista Popular Militias were also incorporated into the EPS.²⁴ By 1980, there were only 15 women officers out of a total of 230 in the armed forces.²⁵ At least some women maintained their presence at the highest levels. Moreover, according to Ramírez-Horton, many women left the military to serve in the police force or in the militia where they obtained prominent positions. For example, in 1986, Commander Doris Tijerino served as Vice-Minister of the Interior and head of the Sandinista Police Force.²⁶

While many women were given the opportunity to fill influential posts within the government because they had proven their leadership capabilities during the struggle against Somoza, the path into the political sphere for most women was through membership in the FSLN and the mass organizations. For most women, participation in mass organizations was the most accessible route. Yet considering the number of time saving devices available to Cuban women in

engaged in active combat against the Contra forces. His statistics seem questionable in light of a consensus in the literature pointing to women's withdrawal from the military.

²⁴ Gorman, p.123-124

²⁵ Black, p.327

²⁶ Gander p.26

comparison to Nicaraguan women, such as running water, modern appliances, and other luxuries, it is remarkable that Nicaraguan women have been incorporated so rapidly within the swelling memberships of the ATC, AMNLAE or the Sandinista Defense Committees. For example, a study of the average work day of a Nicaraguan peasant woman and her family found that

together they spent over 17 hours a day on housework and childcare; of that total, the father and son together contributed 50 minutes. The mother contributed the lion's share, 9 hours and 39 minutes, while her two daughters together accounted for 6 hours and 39 minutes.²⁷

Despite Nicaraguan women's impressive ability to find the time to participate in mass organizations, a faltering economy and foreign aggression posed severe limitations on the ability of those organizations and their participants to direct change within the society. Gary Ruchwarger places the position of the mass organizations in perspective:

...the limited development of the productive forces in Nicaragua acts as a brake on all social and political organizations in the country. Generally, mass organizations operating in societies that have the most meager resources of capital, technology and skilled personnel face tremendous obstacles in developing their capacity to act as a counterweight to state and party organs; and they inevitably have to compete with these power centres in a situation of scarcity.²⁸

²⁷ Stephens, p.10

²⁸ Gary Ruchwarger, "The Sandinista Mass Organizations and the Revolutionary Process" Nicaragua a Revolution under Siege Editors R. Harris, C. Vilas (London: Zed Books, 1985) p.115

Regardless of financial constraints, during the first years following the collapse of the Somoza regime, membership in AMNLAE continued to expand. The organization retained its ability to keep the specific problems of women's incorporation in the public view and on the political agenda. AMNLAE maintained its efforts to mobilize women to make practical improvements in their communities. Nicaraguan women were easily inspired to take part in Popular Health Campaigns and participated heavily in the National Literacy Crusade. In fact, they formed the majority of volunteers.²⁹ Women also dominated in the field of health education.³⁰ AMNLAE organized sewing, ceramics and handicraft collectives.³¹ It co-ordinated a program that provided "medical attention, nutritious foods and social security benefits" for families suffering from malnutrition. In addition, there were programs to help families achieve material self-sufficiency through communal gardens and food preservation.³² Nevertheless, as the war with the Contras intensified, the organization agreed to place women's practical and strategic interests second to the defense of the revolution.³³

²⁹ Beth Stephens, "Women in Nicaragua" Monthly Review (Vol. 40 Number 4, 1988) p.7

³⁰ Ruchwarger, p.112

³¹ Héctor Serra, p.70

³² Ruchwarger, p.101-102

³³ Molyneux, p.250

AMNLAE dedicated itself to mobilizing support for the war effort. However, when the Patriotic Military Service law was passed in 1983, the government practically eliminated the role of the Sandinista Defense Committees and AMNLAE in recruiting members for the Sandinista Popular Militia. AMNLAE campaigned against the compulsory male draft because it represented the end of female military service. Despite the struggle against the discriminatory law, women were not included in the draft legislation and although AMNLAE successfully won the right for women to volunteer for military service, the hundreds of women who signed up had not been called up as of May 1986. Moreover, after the draft law was put into service, the all female militia battalions that had received intensive training and combat duty were disbanded and the members incorporated into "territorial" militias to defend neighborhoods and workplaces.

The Sandinista Defense Committees that evolved during the course of the struggle against Somoza continued to play a role in local defense through collaboration with state security and the Sandinista police in the effort to defeat counter-revolutionary actions or criminal activities such as prostitution and drug trafficking. The CDSs also helped coordinate the distribution of basic necessities in the attempt to prevent hoarding and speculation. In addition to ensuring the success of health and literacy programs, the CDSs organized community planning and improvement in areas

such as sanitation or volunteer housing projects. In 1984, there were 15,000 CDS base committees which had active membership of almost 600,000.³⁴ Although women formed the majority of the membership, they were not found in proportionate representation at leadership levels.

In Henri Weber's estimation, the CDSs were used for social mobilization, community vigilance and local administration but did not become a source of power for their constituents. He criticizes the FSLN's use of a "paternalistic, bureaucratic form of government organizations."³⁵ Carlos Vilas is not so harsh but even he contends that the 1984 elections decreased the mass organizations' political autonomy because they were no longer guaranteed a place in the National Assembly unless their members were elected. Even then, the leadership of the mass organizations were usually members of the FSLN. Therefore, the representatives would be subject to the party's interests first, and their mass organization's needs second.³⁶

In contrast, Gary Ruchwarger contends that the FSLN has articulated the need for the mass organizations to maintain their autonomy and has instituted relations whereby:

³⁴ Héctor Serra, p.66

³⁵ Weber, p.113

³⁶ Carlos Vilas, "Mass Organization in Nicaragua: The Current Problematic and Perspectives" Monthly Review (November, 1986) p.30

Zonal and regional officials of the grassroots organizations regularly send written reports to the zonal and regional offices of the FSLN, detailing both the achievements and problems of the popular associations. In turn, the FSLN sends 'orientaciones'-- orientations--to the mass organizations' leadership bodies. Orientations either set broad policy lines for pro-Sandinista organizations to follow, or call on the popular associations to carry out a specific revolutionary task. Moreover, orientations are delivered only after prior face-to-face consultation with mass organization officials.³⁷

Ruchwarger also points out that, in the past, mass organizations resisted the orientations provided by the FSLN, thereby working to protect the integrity of their members best interests. Furthermore, all of the mass organizations instituted direct and democratic procedures for the election of their officials in response to the problems caused by the "commandist tendencies" of executives which had been appointed from above during the initial post-revolutionary period.³⁸ The popular associations now have mechanisms which assure the accountability of their leaders, although only the CDSs have implemented a fixed term of office of one year for its leaders.³⁹

Yet, AMNLAE's autonomy is fragile. In 1985 the role of AMNLAE as an independent organization became a matter of sharp debate. Feminists criticized the organization for

³⁷ Ruchwarger, p.95

³⁸ Ruchwarger, p.104

³⁹ Nevertheless, other scholars point out that the National Directorate of the FSLN still nominates the elected leaders of the mass organizations. Close, p.117

having abandoned "women's issues" in favour of promoting the war effort. Others argued that women endangered the revolutionary process by making separate demands. By March 1987 the leadership of AMNLAE felt it had found a compromise when it announced it would no longer attempt to organize women separately as a mass organization but would function instead as a women's movement that did its work through other mass organizations. The new direction proposed by the leadership did not end the dispute over the organization's mandate. Six months later members were again divided. The issues raised have yet to be resolved and as a result the organization has continued to move toward the mobilization model common to socialist countries. Meanwhile, frustrated feminists have begun to organize separately. For example, in January 1988, an independently funded women's center opened in Masaya. Similarly, there are reports that groups of women are starting to organize themselves within peasant associations and professions.⁴⁰

If Nicaraguan women cannot depend on AMNLAE to maintain the goal of female emancipation on the government agenda, women's direct participation in the government would at least ensure women a voice in the future. There are no women in the National Directorate of the FSLN, and since 1985 the creation of an executive committee has further narrowed the scope of decision making within the Frente, ostensibly in

⁴⁰ Stephens, p.16-18

order to be able to deal with the war against the Contras in a more efficient manner.⁴¹ However, women's role within the Sandinista Assembly, a body similar to the Central Committee of the Cuba Communist party, is fairly impressive. In 1985, Nineteen of the 104 appointed members of the Assembly were women.⁴² Moreover, "by 1987, women occupied 31 percent of the managerial positions in the government, constituted 27 percent of the leadership in the Sandinista Front and accounted for just under 25 percent of the FSLN membership."⁴³ In addition, women who occupied high ranking positions such as minister of health or heads of provincial governments helped create a "noticeable climate of acceptance for women in important roles which require them to supervise men."⁴⁴

Women's increasing participation in the political sphere is made possible by their steady integration into paid labour. While the war has had tragic consequences for most women, at the same time, it has forced women into the productive sphere both in rural and urban areas. In the countryside, women represent almost half the temporary and seasonal workers but even more importantly, women made up over one third of the permanent salaried agricultural work force

⁴¹ Close, p.115

⁴² Close, p.116

⁴³ Stephens, p.7

⁴⁴ Stephens, p.8

in 1987.⁴⁵ While improving their ability to participate in wage labour and at the same time benefit from government initiatives aimed at the labouring classes, the war has meant that resources that might be available during peacetime to socialize the domestic sphere are not available. Once again women have been called upon to double and triple their efforts in order to support their families while their men serve their military duties.

Women in the rural sector continued to face many barriers to their participation in power structures. At a conference in 1983, delegates from both the ATC and AMNLAE met to discuss the particular obstacles facing women farmworkers. The women cited low levels of literacy, obstinate husbands, the double shift, the lax enforcement of laws meant to ensure equal pay for equal work, discriminatory hiring and training practices, and the intransigent sexism of male members within the unions as the source of women's low incorporation at every level of organization.⁴⁶ The ATC responded to some of the complaints. According to Ruchwarger, one regional office of the ATC decided to "reserve 23 percent of its leadership positions for women, and to hold training courses only for women, or with women comprising the majority of the students."⁴⁷ Nevertheless, in 1984, women still only accounted

⁴⁵ Stephens, p.8

⁴⁶ Ruchwarger, p.108

⁴⁷ Ruchwarger, p.109

for 6 percent of the membership of the 480 unions belonging to the ATC and as a consequence, few women held managerial positions within government co-operatives.⁴⁸

In the cities, women's participation in wage labour has also increased because of the war and because of the depressed economy. Like their rural counterparts, urban women have yet to benefit from labour organization. There is no information to indicate the degree of female participation in the Sandinista Workers Federation (CST). However, it is possible to speculate that urban women encounter the same barriers as do women in the country-side. Women continue to enter the labour force at the lowest levels and find few opportunities for advancements in industries where men hold the majority of the managerial positions. Less access to training programs, weak representation in public sector unions, and reactionary attitudes toward pregnancy and maternity restricted integration of women in influential and higher-paying positions within industry.

In addition, the rapid urbanization caused by migration from the war-torn countryside has placed incredible stress on urban infra-structures. The meager social services that exist cannot support growing demands in a survival economy. Nicaraguans are left to fend for themselves. Thousands of impoverished women are forced into the streets as vendors of everything from bags of cold water to home made empanadas.

⁴⁸ Ruchwarger, p.108

In Managua most of the economically active sector of the population are self-employed street-vendors and speculators.⁴⁹

Unemployment and under-employment are exacerbated by the added weight of large families and limited access to birth control. Whereas in Cuba the trend has been toward smaller families at a later age, Nicaraguan women have not yet had the opportunity to control their fertility and in a country where almost 100,000 have perished through war alone in the past 10 years; high birth rate is are viewed as a mechanism for the reconstruction of a nation. Moreover, the Catholic church's strictures against birth control add to the ideological bias against birth control. Many women are in a state of perpetual pregnancy. Nevertheless, continuing high infant mortality rates make numerous pregnancies no guarantee of a large family. Malnutrition, difficult working conditions and limited or nonexistent prenatal care means that many pregnancies do not complete full term so women suffer the debilitating effects of pregnancy and the heartbreak of miscarriage. Women who survive dangerous home births or a slightly less risky hospital birth very often endanger their child through formula feeding. Despite widespread breastfeeding campaigns, many women quickly switch to formula so they can return to work, leaving older siblings to care for the new baby. As a result, gastro-enteritis still claims the lives

⁴⁹ Harris, p.9

of hundreds of infants annually.⁵⁰

The incredible burdens placed on the Nicaraguan population because of the heritage of poverty make women's attempts radically to alter social relations in the midst of economic crisis and foreign aggression remarkable. Gloria Carrión believes there are two approaches AMNLAE must take in order to "destroy the historic isolation of women--to change their socio-economic conditions and through political power to change the ideology."⁵¹ Nicaraguan women's ability to achieve these goals is severely limited by economic crisis and the increasing militarization of the male population. Beth Stephens warns:

To the extent that war and war heroics are primarily male, the society increasingly comes to praise skills and sacrifices that are associated almost exclusively with men. The laudable programs that offer war veterans a series of benefits, including special access to education and training, also pose a hidden problem for women: the next generation of skilled workers and professionals may be even more male than the current one, because of the large number of male veterans that will fill all the available training slots.⁵²

Army life reinforces machismo while at the same time contributing to family breakdown. Men who were isolated from family life for several years, have often returned home to find their wives, sisters or mothers are no longer willing to remain in subservient roles. While the war served to

⁵⁰ Dupré et al., p.14

⁵¹ NACLA Report, p.31

⁵² Stephens, p.14

reinforce the macho attitudes of men, it also served to radicalize more women by forcing them to fend for themselves. Furthermore, increasing numbers of women were integrated into mass organizations. The inevitable clash between female independence and machismo has had particularly grave results for women. Reports of increased violence against women and children in Nicaragua are linked to the brutalizing experience of war.⁵³

Despite the continued presence of a few women in leadership positions within the EPS and the Sandinista Police Force, the massive withdrawal of women at all levels within the military establishment means an important challenge to the status quo has evaporated. The impermanence of women's participation in the military further confirms Maxine Molyneux's observation that women's traditional roles have been politicized but not transformed.⁵⁴ Furthermore, the ideology of motherhood has been extended to encompass women's contribution to the defense of the revolution within the media of popular culture in Nicaragua. For example, a postcard printed by the Nicaraguan Institute of Telecommunications and Postal Service used the image of a young female combatant with a rifle on her shoulder and a child in her arms. On the back was a poem describing what it means to be a revolution-

⁵³ Sofia Montenegro, a Nicaraguan feminist, journalist, and senior editor of the FSLN's official newspaper Barricada in a speech given in Toronto on 13 March 198

⁵⁴ Molyneux, "Mobilization Without Emancipation?" p.237

ary mother:

A mother is not the woman that gives birth to a son and cares for him, to be a mother is to feel, in her own flesh, the pain of all children and all men and all youth as if they had come from her own womb.

The popular image of the guerrillera with her child is not without its Cuban parallel. Interestingly, the FMC's logo also harnesses the concept of revolutionary motherhood with the symbolic representation of a woman with both a rifle and a child. The contradictions apparent in the images used by the FMC and AMNLAE are disturbing to those who believe that women's emancipation cannot be achieved unless men enter equally into the sphere of social reproduction. While it can be argued that women's escape from the isolated world of the "casa" represents an important reversal of women's historic political marginalization, the massive resources necessary to support a large military force represents an economic drain that prevents the socialization of the domestic sphere. (see Table 11)

In 1983, both Cuba and Nicaragua had the largest armed forces as a percentage of their population in all of Latin America. Furthermore, they spent the highest portion of their Gross National Product on military expenditures.⁵⁵ In the context of United States sponsored armed aggression and the constant threat of further intervention, many observers

⁵⁵ Ruth Leger Sivard, World Military and Social Expenditures (Washington D.C.: World Priorities, 1986) p.33

would agree that in the case of Nicaragua the sacrifices demanded by such unbalanced expenditures are necessary just for the survival of a regime that has as its long term goal socialist transformation. Yet in light of the 26 years of relative freedom from armed aggression Cuba has enjoyed, it is not unfair to wonder whether peace in Nicaragua would lead to a rapid demilitarization as long as the threat of United States intervention remained.

If women are not allowed to take an active role in the determination of military policy how will they ensure that the institutionalization of the military sector will not lead to further alienation of women from power structures in the way it has in Cuba? Obviously, the rate of female integration into armed struggle in the pre-revolutionary period was no guarantee that women would maintain their position within the Sandinista Army and neither has their gain in influence within other government institutions ensured that women's long term strategic interests will be taken into consideration. Fortunately, the Sandinista leadership has proven its commitment to improving the status of women, especially poor women. The question remains whether the inability to provide a material basis necessary for egalitarian social relations will always be used as an excuse for regressive measures which reinforce the sex division of labour.

CONCLUSION

During the Wars of Independence, Cuban women escaped their domestic confines to gain a place in history as both foot soldiers and commanders in the liberation movements. These roles were temporary responses to extreme crisis. The status quo quickly reasserted itself when a neo-colonial state was established by the United States in 1898. Under United States occupation, all Cubans, female and male, were alienated from the power structures. Later a male dominated political class evolved under the close scrutiny of Cuba's powerful neighbor and racism and sexism were once again institutionalized in the corrupt regimes that followed the withdrawal of United States troops. Women were once again expected to resume their domestic duties, leaving political and economic matters to men. However, not all women were able to retire to the "casa". Many were forced into the "calle" as domestics and prostitutes by harsh economic conditions. They were kept powerless by their degraded status and their isolation. The rest of the urban and rural proletariat were kept in their place by state sanctioned repression of the labour movement. Black men and women, in particular, were forcefully reminded that they had no role to play in the power structure when the Partido Independiente de Color's bid for political recognition was extinguished along with 3000 of its supporters. Similarly, members of Cuba's dwindling peasantry also remained powerless in the face of the constant threat of dispossession.

At the same time, women from the wealthy classes were being influenced by suffrage movements abroad. Many of them joined the National Feminist Party, to demand increased educational and employment opportunities, fair pay and the vote. The women's organizations that flourished during the first few decades of the twentieth-century were not radical but as the political atmosphere grew increasingly unstable women received promises of improved status from almost every component of the political field, from the extreme right to the extreme left. By the 1920s, women were sufficiently organized to take part in a reform movement spawned by a depressed economy and as a result even working class women were beginning to gain some recognition from labour unions and political parties. Women's participation in the political movements of the period culminated with the fall of Machado and the creation of the student-led government in 1933. The degree of activism experienced by Cuban women during the twenties and early thirties has yet to be matched. Yet with the granting of the vote in 1934, and women's first participation in the elections of 1936, a steady decline in women's ability to effect change occurred. By the beginning of the Batista dictatorship in 1952 few women were organized to challenge patriarchal hegemony. Middle class women had been easily co-opted into the system and poor women were effectively repressed.

Nicaraguan women had no romantic history as heroines of liberation struggles or as the famed participants of the decades of civil war. They were instead the nameless and faceless victims of power struggles inspired by greed. Like Cuba, the majority of the female population in Nicaragua was effectively marginalized from sources of power even though they were an important component of a cheap and pliable labour force. Peasant women helped sustain export production by sustaining inadequately paid male workers by working tiny plots of land that had not yet been concentrated into the vast plantations belonging to the landowning oligarchy and foreign companies. Only during Augusto Sandino's war against "yankee invaders" did peasant women reveal their capacity to rally against repression and brutal living conditions. These women became the heroines who would inspire future generations of combatants.

As in the case of Cuba, the struggles of the rural poor meant little to the elite group of prosperous women who lived in the cities, yet they too were questioning their political impotence. They were exposed to the "modernizing" ideas brought by North American school teachers and the wives of the U.S Marines. Consequently, they began to formulate a more "liberated" view of women's political capabilities. They published their ideas but were timid when it came to organizing for their rights and so they remained content to form polite ladies' Clubs. While the tiny urban

bourgeoisie was not unaware of the rest of the population's indigence, they did not see the necessity of fundamental political change and sought only to improve their own position so they could more properly fulfill their roles as matrons of charity. They quite easily aligned themselves with the forces which looked after their interests best. Thus when Anastasio Somoza García consolidated his control in 1936, he was able to secure the support of the wealthy classes. He dispensed with those who opposed him in the same way he had dealt with Sandino's supporters--he had them murdered. The Nicaraguan bourgeoisie looked the other way and in return were rewarded. Eventually, middle class women were given the privilege of publicly supporting a morally bankrupt regime through their participation in Somoza's National Liberal Party. In 1950 they were given the vote and several women were selected to share some of the spoils of power.

Prior to the Cuban and Nicaraguan revolutions, middle class women in Cuba had made substantial gains in their political and economic status; wealthy Nicaraguan women could also boast several improvements. The success of a few women from the tiny elite did little to alleviate the continued powerlessness of the impoverished majority. While women from the wealthy classes were able to establish precedents for political activity, they rarely represented the interests of working class or peasant women. Attempts to

align themselves with poor women proved short-lived or merely opportunistic. During the 1920s in Cuba and the 1950s in Nicaragua, women were finally viewed as an important constituency that was capable of providing a political party with the legitimacy it needed; only then were women able to achieve a few strategic interests, such as access to the electoral system.

In both countries, the only option that remained for the poor was to support those who promised the radical changes necessary to guarantee them the opportunity to participate in power structures designed to serve the interests of the majority instead of the few. The Cuban Rebel Army and the FSLN depended on the peasantry for support; they were able to mobilize the rural population against state repression. As in the past, women became a critical component of both guerrilla armies. Despite the similarities, the degree of women's response differed during the periods of revolutionary upheaval in Cuba and Nicaragua. Cuban women generally opposed Fulgencio Batista's regime but only a handful actually took part in the struggle to oust him. In contrast, thousands of Nicaraguan women took an active part in the final insurrection. While Cuba had a much longer history of female involvement in mainstream and radical political movements, labour organization, clandestine organizations and guerrilla warfare, Nicaraguan women experienced a short period of massive politicization.

Women were active in supportive roles during the Cuban struggle and were integrated directly into the various wings of the rebel movement but they did not have a separate women's organization lobbying for change. Middle-class women were by and large alienated from the most important battles which took place in the Sierra Maestra and not in the urban centers. By 1959, only a few exceptional individuals, such as Vilma Espin, Haydée Santamaria and Celia Sanchez could be pointed to as having contributed significantly to the success of the revolution. Nevertheless, these three women have remained a focal point for women's continuing participation in post-revolutionary power structures. Within Cuba, several revolutionary myths became the mechanism by which many sectors of the society were mobilized and incorporated into the political process and economic transformation. The heroines of the revolution, although few in number, provided an example for the women who had previously been marginalized from political and economic spheres.

The legends of the Moncada Barracks, the Granma, and the Sierra Maestra were almost romantic episodes when compared to the years of struggle that called forth almost the entire Nicaraguan population to take part in the overthrow of the Somoza dictatorship. Only during the popular struggle against Machado did Cuban women participate at levels similar to women's integration during the last few years of the Nicaraguan revolution. In the late 1950s, Fidel Castro's

rebel army engaged in relatively few battles with Batista's "crumbling and irresolute" army, while the FSLN "survived eighteen years of struggle with the National Guard, which was numerically superior, better equipped, and trained in counterinsurgency."¹ While the level of female integration into the combat forces of the FSLN was remarkable, overall the nature of women's involvement in revolutionary struggle in both Cuba and Nicaragua remained the same; the basic tasks assigned women were similar and the characteristic sex division of labour remained largely unchallenged except in a few instances.

The Nicaraguan people's triumph in July, 1979 did not ensure or even promise to erase centuries of male dominance just as it could not guarantee a just and egalitarian society built on a shattered economy. The high level of women's incorporation during the long period of struggle in Nicaragua did not guarantee the rapid transformation of social relations between men and women. Like the Rebel Army, the FSLN was committed to providing social justice for women but soon after the triumph of the guerrilla forces it became clear that "the revolution within the revolution" was limited by the functional approach toward women's emancipation taken by the dominant male leadership. In both Nicaragua and Cuba, policies that advanced women's position within the society were only implemented if they did not have a detri-

¹ Booth, p.137

mental effect on the larger process of economic development. Programs that specifically benefited women were an integral part of the restructuring that occurred. However, the socialization of the domestic sphere has proceeded at a pace defined by economic priorities. Improvements in women's legal status were impressive yet the implementation of progressive legislation such as Cuba's Family Code or Nicaragua's Statute of Rights and Guarantees have remained simply words on paper because in order to implement the changes demanded by law certain economic conditions must be created.

Thousands of women were politicized during the long struggle with Somoza, however the ability of the Sandinistas to fulfill short term practical commitments and long term strategic interests was even more severely limited by material and ideological constraints. Nicaraguan cities and towns were literally destroyed by the civil war. Batista did not bomb Havana and Castro did not have to deal with thousands of displaced and injured victims of war. A material base was needed to create equality between the sexes and Nicaragua's agro-export economy remained highly vulnerable to the whims of world markets. The deterioration of trade relations with the United States, Nicaragua's dominant trading partner, imposed further obstacles to economic recovery and development. Nevertheless, the FSLN made a commitment to achieve social justice while attempting at the same time to accommodate the interests of all the groups that had sup-

ported its rise to power. Whereas Castro was able to fill a political void with his guerrilla leadership after the defeat of Batista, the FSLN had to work within a larger class coalition which included conservative factions. Radical policies affecting women were difficult to implement within the context of Sandinista attempts to mollify its conservative supporters. For example, in the context of the distortion and scarcity caused by the war in Nicaragua, it is impossible to say whether the maintenance of a mixed economy will hasten or retard the integration of women into the labour force. The highly socialized economy of Cuba has yet to create a female labour force that rivals most developed capitalist economies. Favorable labour legislation found in the platforms of both revolutionary movements has proven beneficial to many female members of labour unions and professional associations, although government influence or even direct control has done little to improve levels of female leadership. In Nicaragua for example, the State of Emergency has placed harsh limits on union activities and the prohibition of strikes has made the labour movement impotent in the face of an economic crisis that demands greater and greater sacrifices from an already overextended workforce.

The failure of Nicaraguan attempts to promote a radical agenda without alienating the bourgeoisie was exacerbated by their inexperience at peace-time political organization. In

contrast, Fidel Castro was a master of political manoeuvring and was quickly able to consolidate complete political control within the first few years. Moreover, when the Cuban regime quickened the pace of its shift to the left, the conservative sectors fled. In Nicaragua they stayed to form a vocal opposition that helped fund counter-revolutionary movements. The Catholic Church in Cuba soon found itself alienated from the political battlefield. In Nicaragua, the church hierarchy has maintained its open criticism of the Sandinista government and has failed to condemn the actions of the Contras. Finally, Cuba successfully rid itself of the threat of counter-revolution while Nicaragua has continued to struggle against an experienced CIA directed Contra force that has benefited from the lessons of its failed initiatives against Cuba.

On the whole, Cuban women meet the same obstacles as Nicaraguan women. Nicaraguans did, however, benefit from the example of another Latin American nation's experiment with socialist concepts of women's liberation. Furthermore, they were able to operate in a political climate influenced by the struggles waged by an international feminist movement. In a sense, Cuban women were pioneers of women's integration into the socialist model for change in Latin America. Yet the evolution of the women's movement in Cuba was artificially conceived. There is no evidence that Cuban women perceived themselves as an important political constituency

that required specific attention as did the peasantry or organized labour. Fortunately, the leadership of the Cuban revolution was astute enough to recognize the importance of cultivating women's support despite the fact that few women recognized their own potential to influence the evolving state system. Fidel Castro must be credited for having opened the door to female participation within the political sphere with the creation of the FMC. However, unlike independent women's organizations in the "western democracies" where "women's issues" are the prime concern, the main objective of the woman's movement in Cuba was, and still is, the mobilization of women in support of the revolution. Even twenty-eight years later, when Peter Marshall asked a FMC representative what thinkers best inspired the philosophy of the women's movement in Cuba, the response he received was that "'Our philosophy is not inspired by a particular thinker; we are Marxist-Leninist first and foremost.'"² They maintain that socialist transformation through class struggle will eventually achieve sexual equality. Therefore, it is more important for women to place strictly female concerns at the bottom of the agenda for change in the short-term. Women in Cuba accept the fact that they will be liberated only after the creation of a material base sufficient to allow for the full incorporation of women into "productive labour" without the added burden of the "double shift".

² Marshall, p.172

Like the Cubans, women in Nicaragua have struggled against the "propensity to withdraw" through their participation in a woman's organization which has as its goal the mobilization of women in the defense of the revolution. Yet there are important differences between the Nicaraguan women's organization and the FMC. First of all, AMNLEA's organizational roots go back to the pre-revolutionary period. The organization was not formed at the behest of a progressive male revolutionary vanguard. Instead women came together in order to change a desperate situation which affected them concretely. The women who formed AMNLEA from AMPRONAC were experienced politically, and were aware of the power they could wield through determination and organization. In contrast, the FMC was the brainchild of Fidel Castro, and the woman he selected to organize women had very little consciousness as to the need for women to organize around gender issues. It seems obvious that, from the start, the FMC's main objectives have been in the mobilization of female support for the male directed revolutionary process. The power structures within the organizations themselves are also different. It also seems clear that there is greater organizational autonomy within the AMNLEA. The FMC has never mounted a campaign against a piece of legislation or a change in the constitution, whereas AMNLEA in its 1983 bid to have women share equally in the burden of military defense clearly challenged the intentions of the proposed

legislation. The fact that the most realistic formula for women's equality is a source of debate within AMNLEA is a healthy sign. While some women are determined to maintain the autonomy of AMNLEA, the role of a separate women's organization has been attacked by hardline Marxist-Leninists as a source of division within a revolutionary context. They believe that too great an emphasis on so called "women's issues" weakens the solidarity among revolutionary classes by an unnecessary focus on gender issues. Given the hurdles that must be overcome in Central America before the construction of socialism in Nicaragua can be more than a dream, it is fortunate that such a narrow ideological approach continues to be challenged by women in the war torn country. There is no debate in Cuba, at least not publicly. The FMC has maintained its rigid view of how women are to achieve an equal place in Cuban society even in the face of slow progress of political integration.

The FMC's lack of autonomy and unquestioning adherence to a mobilization model of female incorporation has proven ineffective as a strategy for women's proportionate insertion into the power structures. Furthermore, its support of Cuba's militarization in the face of women's absence from the professional armed forces has impeded women's entrance into the political sphere. Similarly, the events in Nicaragua over the past nine years indicate that women's route to political power is blocked by the militarization of the society due to the war.

How significant is women's absence from the military in countries that have made an undeniable commitment toward improving women's access to health care, education, and employment? The militarization of both Cuba and Nicaragua in the face of the constant threat of foreign aggression has had contradictory effects on women's liberation. In both countries the military has consistently relied on the mobilization of women in the defense of the revolution. Women's massive incorporation into the militia represents a significant challenge to traditional roles. Moreover, the large number of men removed from the labour force has meant the increased integration of women. While it can be argued that women's escape from the isolating world of the "casa" represents an important reversal of women's historic political marginalization, the massive resources necessary to support a large military force represents an economic drain that prevents the socialization of the domestic sphere. Obviously, the socialist principles which govern state policy in both Cuba and Nicaragua have resulted in progressive legislation and legal equality, but economic motivations limit progress toward women's liberation. Since the military and its allied institutions receive the largest share of the country's resources, programs meant to ameliorate women's double-shift are slow in coming. If women are to influence the priorities of the state, they must increase their presence in the power-structure. However, the most direct route

into the political sphere is still reserved for the male sector of Cuban and Nicaraguan society.

The restructured guerrilla armies, the FAR and EPS, have gained significant influence in the political sphere as a result of external military threats from counter-revolutionary forces and the United States. The FAR and its guerrilla antecedent have been the most important training ground for leaders within the Cuban political apparatus. The role of the EPS as an important source of male-dominated leadership has yet to be proven. The degree to which the present Nicaraguan government has been influenced by the Cuban model has not been established either. Nevertheless, it must be noted that the FSLN has received political and military training from Cuba during the struggle against Somoza and throughout its battle with the Contras. The number of military and civilian advisors supplied by the Cubans is a matter of debate but all admit to a significant Cuban presence in Nicaragua. Cuban expertise in the literacy campaign and in the development of health schemes has been applauded and there are obvious parallels between the functional aspects of the mass organizations of both countries. Nevertheless, the close relations between the FSLN and the Communist Party of Cuba and superficial similarities among their government institutions does not mean the two share identical power-structures, nor does it mean that women's positions within those power-structures are similar. Nevertheless, the

increasing militarization of both Cuba and Nicaragua clearly hold grave implications for women's struggles for equal status. By ignoring the omnipresence of the Cuban and Nicaraguan military apparatus and focusing solely on Cuba's and Nicaragua's inability to fulfill their commitment to equality, Feminists fail to consider the inescapable exigencies of global conflict. Women either have to wait for peace or reassert their presence within the military struggle. Since peace seems even more ephemeral than the notion of sexual equality, women's struggle for an egalitarian society depends upon their ability to challenge a male-biased military model.

APPENDIX

Table 1³

Women elected to the Cuban House
of Representatives, 1901-1958

1936	María Quintana Carbonell	Habana
	Balbina Remedios Langahenim	Habana
	María A. Quintana Herrera	Las Villas
	Consuelo Vázquez Bello	Las Villas
	Rosa Anders Causse	Camaguey
	Herminia Rodríguez Fernández	Camaguey
	Maria Caro Mas	Oriente
(1937)	Dulce Ofelia Vázquez	Oriente
1938	María Quintana Herrera*	Las Villas
	Consuelo Vázquez Bello*	Las Villas
	Isabel Garcerán del Vall	Camaguey
1940	Adelaida Oliva Robaina	Habana
	Ana Teresa Porro Hernández	Camaguey
	Herminia Rodríguez Fernández*	Camaguey
(1941)	Carmen Tous Salas	Camaguey
1942	María A. Quintana Herrera**	Las Villas
	Isabel Garcerán del Vall*	Camaguey
1944	Adelaida Oliva Robaina*	Habana
	Angélica Rojas Garcés	Oriente
	Esperanza Sanchez Mastrapá	Oriente
1946	Alicia Hernandez de la Barca	Las Villas
	Dolores Soldevilla Nieto	Oriente
1947	Ana C. Rivas Rigores	Oriente
1948	Adelaida Oliva Robaina**	Habana
	Ofelia M. Khouray Baillys	Camaguey
	Angélica Rojas Garcés*	Oriente
	Esperanza Sánchez Mastrapa*	Oriente
1950	Buenaventura Dellundé Payans	Habana
	Alicia Hernandez de la Barca*	Las Villas
	Regla Prió Socarras	Oriente
1954	María A. Quintana Herrera***	Las Villas
	Digna Elías Ríos	Oriente
	Marta Garcia Ochoa	Oriente
(1957)	Isabel Beritán Pérez	Oriente
1958	Blanca Rosa Urquiaga Vento	Pinar del Rio
	María Teresa Madrazo Mata	Las Villas
	Ramona Pérez Molina	Las Villas
	Zoila Leisecca Sánchez	Camaguey

Total Women to hold office from 1902-1958 = 27

³ Table compiled from lists of representatives in Mario Riera Hernandez, Cuba Republicana 1899-1958 (Miami: Editorial AIP, 1974)

Table 2⁴

<u>Women Senators 1902-1958</u>		
1940	María Gómez Charbonell María Teresa Zayas Arrieta	Habana Habana
1944	María Teresa Zayas Arrieta	Habana
1954	María Gómez Charbonell	Habana
1958	Alicia Hernández de la Barca	Las Villas

Table 3⁵FMC Membership 1960-1978

<u>Year</u>	<u>Membership</u>
1960	17,000
1961	40,000
1962	90,000
1967	750,000
1968	981,105
1970	1,324,751
1974	1,932,422
1976	2,167,171
1978	2,248,000

⁴ Table compiled from lists of representatives in Mario Riera Hernandez, Cuba Republicana 1899-1958 (Miami: Editorial AIP, 1974)

⁵ Azricri, p.32

Table 4⁶

Occupations of Cuban Women 1953 and 1973

Occupation	% of Women Employed	
	1953	1973
Education	15.0	30.0
Health	2.0	17.5
White collar, Commerce, retail	20.0	15.0
Agriculture	5.0	12.0
Light Industry (Textiles, etc.)	12.1	7.0
Tobacco	6.0	5.4
Domestic Servants	30.0	0.0
Services and Food-processing	5.4	7.5
Professions	1.5	3.6
Manual Labour	3.0	0.0
Sugar Processing	0.0	2.0
Overall	100.0	100.0

Table 5⁷

Percentage of Women in Total Cuban Workforce by Occupation

Occupation	1953	1973
Education	80.0	55.0
Health	10.0	60.0
Retail Trades	8.0	32.0
Agriculture	2.0	5.0
Light Industry	9.0	40.0
Tobacco Industry	35.0	44.0
Textiles	45.0	75.0
Hotels and Restaurants	30.0	38.0
Communications	15.0	38.0
Plastics	0	75.0
Total Work Force	13.7	24.0

⁶ Barbara Wolf Jancar, Women Under Communism (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1978.) p.249

⁷ Jancar, p.250

Table 6⁸Female Membership in Cuban political Institutions

Cuban Communist Party

	Year	% women	N	P	R	M
	1962	15.5				
	1963	13.2				
	1964	10.9				
	1973	13				
	1974	12.8				
	1975	13	5.5	6.3	4.1	2.9
	1976		6	6	4	2
	1980	18.9	13			
	1981	19.4				
	1982	19.7				
	1983	20.5				
	1984	21				
	1985	21.5				
National Assembly	1976	22.2				
	1981-86	22.7				
Central Committee of the PCC	1965	3				
	1975	8.8				
	1985					
Council of Ministers	1976	4.4				
Council of State	1976	12.9				
People's Power Assembly	1984		22.6		11.5	
CDR	1974	50	19	3	7	
	1976	50	7	15	21	24
UJC	1975		10	7	7	22
	1976	29	10	2		
CTC	1975		7	15	21	24
ANAP	1975		2	1.2	.8	16.4

N = National P = Provincial R = Regional M = Municipal

⁸ Bengelsdorf, p.43; Murray, p.100; Larguia, p.360; Azri-cri, p.45; Communist Party of Cuba, "Thesis on the Full Exercise of Women's Equality" in Women and the Cuban Revolution Edited by Elizabeth Stone (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1981) p.91; Jancar, p.251

Table 7⁹Growth of The Cuban Armed Forces

	Total Armed Forces	Paramilitary	GNP (Billions)	Military Expenditures
1961	32,000			
1964	90,000	200,000		
1965	116,000	200,000		\$213,200,000
1967	121,000	200,000		
1968	194,000	200,000	\$3.3	250,000,000
1970	109,500	213,000	4.5	290,000,000
1972	108,000	213,000	4.5	290,000,000
1973	108,500	213,000	4.5	290,000,000
1974	116,500	213,000	4.5	290,000,000
1975	117,000	113,000	4.5	290,000,000
1976	175,000	113,000	4.5	290,000,000
1977	189,000	113,000	4.5	290,000,000
1978	159,000	113,000	4.5	284,000,000
1979-80	189,000	113,000	12.5	1,170,000,000
1981-82	227,000	118,500	18.4	1,100,000,000
1983	127,500	168,500	18.4	1,129,000,000
1984-5	153,000	748,500		

⁹ International Institute for Strategic Studies, The Military Balance--1964-65. (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1964) p.11; The Military Balance--1965, p.14; The Military Balance--1968, p.12; The Military Balance--1970, p.76; The Military Balance--1972, p.59; The Military Balance--1973, p.62; The Military Balance--1975, p.64; The Military Balance--1976, p.65; The Military Balance--1977, p.69; The Military Balance--1978, p.73-74; The Military Balance--1979-80, p.79; The Military Balance--1981-82, p.95-96; The Military Balance--1982-83, p.103; The Military Balance--1984-85, p.119-120.

Table 8¹⁰

Institutional Representation
in the Cuban Political Elite 1962-1965

	1962 National Directorate N=25	1965 Central Committee N=100
Party Apparatus	16.0%	12.0%
Government Apparatus	40.0	22.0
Military/Police	32.0	57.0
Mass organizations	4.0	6.0
Cultural/Scientific	8.0	3.0

Table 9¹¹

Institutional Representation
in the Cuban Political Elite--1975

	Pre-Congress Central Committee N=90	1975 Central Committee N=124	New Members, 1975 Central Committee N=47
Party Apparatus	24.0%	29.0%	29.8%
Gov. Apparatus	33.3	28.2	19.1
Military/Police	35.6	29.8	27.7
Mass organizations	3.3	7.3	12.8
Cultural/Scientific	3.3	4.8	6.4
Other/unknown	0.0	0.8	4.3

¹⁰ LeoGrande, p.16

¹¹ LeoGrande, p.16

Table 10¹²

<u>Social Indicators for Nicaragua</u>					
	1977	1978	1979	1983	1984
Population (1,000)	2,336	2,387	2,365	3,035	3,304
Illiteracy Rate	42%	42%	38%	12%	12%
% Women in Total					
University Enrollment			31%	47%	
Education (Million US\$)	60	58	45	121	
Teachers (1,000)	13	12	12	19	53.4
Total Students		500,660			1,127,428
Preschool Enrollment		9,000			70,000
Health (Million US\$)	32	30	24	120	
Life Expectancy	55	55	55	60	
Infant Mortality (per 1000 births)	122	122	122	75	
Physicians (1,000)	1.4	1.5	1.5	2.1	

¹² Joseph Collins et al. Nicaragua--What Difference could a Revolution Make? (San Francisco:Institute for Food and Development Policy, 1985) p.249; Ruth Leger Sivard, World Military and Social Expenditures 1980 (Washington D.C.: World Priorities, 1980) p.21, 24-25; Sivard, World Military and Social Expenditures 1981, p.25, 28-29; Sivard, World Military and Social Expenditures 1982, p.27, 30-31; Sivard, World Military and Social Expenditures 1986, p.33, 36-37.

Table 11¹³

<u>The Militarization of Nicaragua</u>					
	1977	1978	1979	1983	1984
GNP (Million US\$)	2,165	2,083	1,517	2,633	2,612
Military Expenditures (Million US\$)	52	68	54	272	
% of GNP spent on Military	2.4	3.26	3.6	10.3	
Armed Forces (1,000)	7	7	8	49	61.8
Public Expenditures per soldier (US\$)	7,429	9,714	6,750	5,551	

¹³ Ruth Leger Sivard, World Military and Social Expenditures 1980 (Washington D.C.: World Priorities, 1980) p.21, 24-25; Sivard, World Military and Social Expenditures 1981, p.25, 28-29; Sivard, World Military and Social Expenditures 1982, p.27, 30-31; Sivard, World Military and Social Expenditures 1986, p.33, 36-37; International Institute for Strategic Studies, Military Balance 1982-83 p.106; International Institute for Strategic Studies, Military Balance 1984-84, p.123-124.

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