

**GLOBAL FEMINISMS
COMPARATIVE CASE STUDIES OF
WOMEN'S ACTIVISM AND SCHOLARSHIP**

SITE: NICARAGUA

**Transcript of Violeta Delgado
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Violeta Delgado was born in the small town of Diriomo, Granada in 1969. She was the second of four children born to a Nicaraguan father and Honduran mother. She participated in the National Literacy Campaign in 1980 when she was just 11 years old. The campaign kicked off a lifetime of political participation and activism. After studying math in college, she became involved in a campaign to end domestic violence. Violeta was the Executive Secretary of the Network of Women Against Violence from 1994 to 2003. She has done consulting, run for the National Assembly, and now works with CINCO—an organization that researches the media's role in society and politics. In 2005, Delgado was part of the group of 1,000 Peacemakers that was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize.

Shelly Grabe is an Assistant Professor in Social Psychology, Feminist Studies, and Latino and Latin American Studies at the University of California, Santa Cruz. Shelly received her degree in clinical psychology with a minor in quantitative statistical methods. After completing her doctorate, she switched course and became a community organizer in Madison, WI involved primarily with CODEPINK and the then Wisconsin Coordinating Council on Nicaragua (WCCN). Through solidarity relationships with the women's social movement in Nicaragua (Movimiento Autónomo de Mujeres), Grabe became learned in women of Color and "Third World" feminisms from a grassroots, decolonial perspective. She has since coupled her interest in structural inequities, gender, and globalization with her academic training to work with transnational women's social organizations in Nicaragua and Tanzania. As a scholar-activist, Shelly partners with women's organizations to test new areas of inquiry that can support positive social change for women. She joined the UCSC faculty in 2008 after a Visiting Position in the Department of Gender and Women's Studies at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. In California Shelly has partnered with the Santa Cruz County Women's Commission on efforts to ratify a local draft of the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Walnut Avenue Women's Center to support youth outreach surrounding sexuality and violence against girls and women.

Julia Baumgartner holds a degree in Spanish and Sociology from the University of Wisconsin, Madison. She works as coordinator of Farmer Relations and Delegations for Just Coffee Cooperative in Madison, WI and is currently living in Nicaragua coordinating a project with Fundación Entre Mujeres, a feminist organization working for the empowerment of rural women in northern Nicaragua.

Interview with Violeta Delgado



[00:48]

Shelly Grabe: Okay Violeta, I'd like to start by thanking you again so much for agreeing to be part of the Global Feminisms Project.

So we're going to spend about an hour and a half today going over various things, starting with your personal history and then building up to some of the work you were doing when you first started to get involved in organizing and then we'll end by talking a little bit about work you're doing now as well as relations you've built with other women's organizations.

So I'd like to start by just asking you to tell me a little bit about your personal history, some of your earliest memories, what your childhood was like, what kind of family you grew up in, those kinds of things.

[02:00]

Violeta Delgado: Very good. All right, I'm from a very small town called Diriomo in the municipality of Granada. I'm the daughter of a Nicaraguan father, a Honduran mother. I'm the second of four brothers and sisters. Okay, so I'm from a small town that is on the edge of the Mombacho Volcano and it is legendary for being linked with esotericism. Yes, to witchcraft.

There were probably sacred areas there, centuries ago, more than 500 years ago. I was born and raised there. I lived in Diriomo when the Revolution was won. When the Revolution was won, I was ten years old.

During that time, just like many other Nicaraguan children, I knew what was going on politically and I took a political position. I lived the war. I was in the refugee area with the rest of my family. I celebrated the victory of the Revolution.

And in November of 1979 when I was ten years old, I began to organize in the Sandinista group. And I think that since that time I've been active in organizations for the last 32 years. I've been part of the political project and I've been part of that collective that tries to transform lives.

[05:15]

Grabe: What was your experience like as a ten year old becoming organized?

Delgado: It was—I think that I could recognize uh, some sense of liberty in this, because at that time, in my family, there weren't any obstacles to my participation. I think Nicaraguan society in general, lived like a—like a tsunami of freedom. I remember a big discussion in those days, there was a big citizen meeting to elect the local mayor. There was no mayor because during that time the mayor had been—he was loyal to Somoza. Nobody talked about having elections during that time. There were no state powers, there wasn't anything, right? Everything was being rebuilt.

And I remember that I voted. [Laughs] And there was a big debate about whether I had a right, a right to vote. Because I still wasn't a citizen or rather, I was a ten year old girl.

Grabe: Because you were so young!

Delgado: Yes, exactly! That is, legally, I didn't have the right but in that moment it became a big debate about my vote, whether I had the right or not, and in the end they decided that yes, because I was there, because I was part of the group. And so I voted for the mayor, at the age of ten.

And the next year, I went to teach people how to read and write. I was eleven years old. It was an essential experience in my life in all the sense of the word because I went to live outside my home for four months in a rural community.

And we lived in a big hut with walls made of sugar cane stalks, dirt floors, and without a bathroom. So, very different from the comforts that I had in my house in Diriomo. And I taught a group of adults and elderly people how to read and write. And I lived with Don Manuel and Doña Simona's family.

[08:44]

Grabe: Did your family travel with you?

Delgado: My mother did. My mom joined the Literacy Crusade because she was a teacher. After a lot of begging they finally let me go. There were a lot of times when my mom had to leave outside of the community and during those times I was with the other brigades that were a lot more, well, they were still young people, but teenagers and youth. And it was, well, it obviously impacted my life; it inspired in me a commitment to change. I think it shaped my character to survive in different conditions. And so uh—I think it obviously developed in me a stronger commitment to the revolution.

And when I came back from teaching how to read and write, I went back to school. I think that I was in fifth grade at school. And I continued being part of my school group but I knew that there was something in me that had changed. I knew that I had this history and experience that was very different from my other friends. And so I continued being involved with the Revolution, and a member of the Sandinista Youth and working to organize other youth.

And this then became more difficult about two or three years later because on one hand my father distanced himself from the Revolution. And the rest of the family didn't. My brothers, my mother and I continued to be very committed.

[11:39]

And this implied uh, violent situations at home. My dad exercising power over us, a lot of control and it was very hard. I think it was a very sad adolescence. Yeah, because I was very, very, very committed to the Revolution.

And in the end I decided to leave home when I was fifteen years old. And even though I had the support of the rest of my family, I couldn't return to my home. It was a very difficult time with a lot of aggression, many clashes and I think that the Revolution was going through a difficult time as well. The war was getting worse. There were a lot of friends and *compañeros* who were being killed in the frontlines. The work that we were doing in the communities was very difficult because we were recruiting youth. It included political work as well, so the people understood why the country was going through the present economic limitations. And yes, it was a very hard period. But also very hopeful. But very difficult for me, personally and politically.

[12:47]

Grabe: What were you doing at that time after you moved out of the house?

Delgado: I stayed in high school and I dedicated the rest of my time to political work. And I lived for a pretty good deal of time with my grandma. And during some time I was involved organizing production batallions, harvesting coffee or cotton with student brigades or political brigades, or receiving political training. It was a very intense period. Very intense.

Yes, I think it was a peculiar adolescence. [Laughs] I don't think it was very different from many of my *compañeras*, some of the women whom you're going to interview. And a lot of the women whom I am now friends with, I met during that time, like Juanita Jimenez.

It was hard because during that time, my mom was diagnosed with breast cancer and that led me to, in a very subtle way, to go back home. The relationship with my dad started to calm down a bit. But I never gave up, I was always very committed, but it's true that my mother's sickness

implied that I had longer stays at home and spent more time with her. And then finally my mother decided to return to—to separate from my father and go back to Honduras. And I had to make a decision. I was 17 or 18. The decision was whether to stay in Nicaragua or go with my mother and my two younger brothers who were 16 and 14 years old. And I decided to stay because I felt like I wasn't going to fit in. I still had a lot of political restlessness.

And so I stayed in Nicaragua, with my father [laughs] with whom I had fought with my entire life since I was a child. And I—I think that little by little we rebuilt our relationship together, because we were alone. And our relationship hasn't broken down in the last 20 years either.

And this is the time when I finished high school. And it was when I had to decide if I was going to go to Honduras with my mom or not because the relationship between my mom and dad obviously had failed a long time ago. And there was violence, it was a situation of domestic violence. And I think the illness was a reason that motivated my mom to finally make decisions in spite of all the fears that she had about the possibility of not being able to support her children, or of returning to Honduras after 20 years. And besides she loved Nicaragua, she loved the people. She loved the lifestyle. But well, she also had to make some decisions.

I decided to stay and enroll in the university. And it's kind of a funny story because after having had an extremely politicized childhood and adolescence, and in spite of having been a good student, I recognized that I had had a fairly irregular high school education because I always had to leave three months before classes were over because I had to go to some type of student batallion or something else. I was never there in the last three years. So I decided to study something that didn't have anything to do with humanities or political sciences and I studied math.

[Laughs]

Grabe: Why?

Delgado: Because I decided to separate from this environment of humanities and political science, right? And I wanted to study something, I had always liked math. And I felt that if I stayed in the Humanities Department, I ran the risk of going back to getting involved and to stop doing—and that would make my college very irregular too.

Grabe: What influenced your decision to step back from that focus and turn to math?

[21:19]

Delgado: I think that some things are like transitional times in your life. So I think I was finishing school and I was going to live outside of my town. I was making a break with the organization I belonged to in my hometown. I came to live in Managua, to attend the university and for me it was an opportunity for a fresh start. And that included that crazy idea to study math and to try to have a more stable higher education experience.

But I was not successful in this endeavour [laughs] because three years after starting college I went back to organizing. [Laughs.] That is, during my third year. I managed to finish my first and second years successfully. And I think that the mathematicians, we weren't like that group that was most politically sought after, right. They looked at us as if we were from another planet.

Eh, but during my third year of college, someone spoke with me, said “Hey look, why not?” Someone found out that I had been a student leader in high school and asked me, why don’t you join UNEN, the National Student Union of Nicaragua. We need someone to be in charge of the cultural affairs within the department. And I said okay, that’s fine. I had very interesting classmates, dancers, choreographers, math—that happened to also be mathematicians. And I decided to do it. So, after that decision I became president elect of the Science Department, which housed the mathematicians, the physicists, the statisticians. And then I was President of the student body. And when that happened I was again [swooshing sound].

Grabe: For the students? President of the students?

Delgado: Of the UNEN. Yes. Yes. And by that point, I was totally involved again.

[24:37]

Grabe: What kind of things were you involved in?

Delgado: There was a political clash at that time because the Sandinista Front lost the elections, they lost the elections and there was a change of government. So the Student Movement became a force of resistance to fight so that they didn’t reduce the budget for the universities.

That is, this historic struggle in defense of the six percent for the universities that happened in the ‘90s, the struggle for the student transportation subsidy. To continue organizing and involving the university students in the political processes. To work to keep the Revolution alive, although it wasn’t—the Sandinista Front was no longer in power. To keep education free of charge, to have need-based scholarships. This obviously required a lot of work, and a lot of organization.

Because there were a lot of student strikes and we were out in the streets for many months showing there was support for adequate budgets, or for budgets to be allocated according to what the law prescribed so that the universities didn’t become privatized. And there were very nice days, you know? And I believe that a lot of us felt like the work we were doing was helping to continue the Revolution. And we slept at the university many times, and we were out in the streets, on strikes. We were doing a lot of work in the *barrios* too. A lot of political work, we rode on the buses to explain to the people why we had to fight for free education, what higher education meant for a country and why we had to invest in education. We went to the *barrios* and went house to house, and we went to the markets and we had cultural evenings, with candles, at night in the *barrios*. And obviously, we also had the first confrontations with the police. For example, I experienced a tear gas bomb for the first time.

Grabe: How did you move from being a student organizer to being an organizer pivotal in the women’s movement?

Delgado: Well, about the middle of 1990, I was part of—through my leadership in the university, I was part of an interesting project that was called “The Constitution of the Youth Council of Nicaragua.” There were representatives from almost all of the youth organizations in the country on that council.

And it was a very beautiful project because for the first time, in the early ‘90s, youth that had been on one side of the trenches met with youth that had been on the other side. We were

Sandinista youth along with Contra youth. And obviously at first it was [pause, assume that she makes a negative gesture] right? “I don’t want to sit close to you.” “I don’t want to.” Right? And we all came with our bandanas to show our alliances so there would be no doubt that either side was ceding. But little by little, we were young and we started to share things. And we began to identify problems we had in common. We began to see that we were the same, we were all youth. And we began to engage in recreational activities too. And a group of women that was there, we decided to make a group of women leaders, a group of women youth leaders.

Grabe: What made you decide that?

Delgado: Because we felt that the way the youth organizations were organized, they weren’t recognizing the leadership nor the contribution of women. We felt that the programs and plans of the youth organizations weren’t incorporating the demands and needs of young women. Some of us needed to have our own space to reflect upon things. So it was very great. This group of women—we came out of the Youth Movement. But some of us started to make connections with the Women’s Movement.

And we started to participate in the forums of the Women’s Movement that was also going through a very nice period, right? It was going through a moment of national diversity meetings; it was the boom of the Women’s Movement in Nicaragua. And we were like, here we come, here come the youth, right? We want our space because it looks like we don’t have it here either. What I mean is that we felt that in the co-ed youth organizations there was resistance to incorporate the demands of women and that in the Women’s Movement there was resistance to recognize the needs of the young.

So we were sort of stuck there, kind of battling within both groups. And there was a point when I broke away from the Sandinista Youth. And I was finishing my studies at the university during that time, and the Women’s Movement called me and told me that they wanted me join them.

I was leaving with—following a very strong break within my organization, which was tied to the rupture, with the first rupture of the Sandinista Front that led to the creation of the Sandinista Renewal Movement. And I think I was already heavily involved with the Women’s Movement. Um, I had already participated in the Latin American Feminist Encounter. I had had the opportunity to go to a meeting of young women leaders in Chile, a women’s political meeting. And that bond with the young Chilean feminists was very important for me. And—uh, I was already heavily involved with the Women’s Movement

And during that time, at the end of ‘94, I was 25 years old. I was finishing my studies, the Network of Women Against Violence chose me to coordinate a national campaign against violence.

Grabe: Wow, so young!

Delgado: Yes, it was a job that I was going to do for three months and I stayed for nine years.

Grabe: Why? Why did you stay so long?

Delgado: I stayed for nine years because—I stayed for nine years because, it was an exer—to organize this national campaign was a marvelous exercise. It taught me so, so, so much. Because

we started to work on the idea to organize a campaign where everyone could—that everyone could be a part of. We started to use colors—use different colors and symbols to show that we’re part of this campaign. We started to use a badge as a way to be part of the campaign. And that helped show that you didn’t have to go to a march, or a meeting, that women could participate even if they weren’t necessarily politically active in the women’s movement or work for a women’s organization. It meant that a secretary could participate, a bank teller, housewife, student, just by wearing the badge on your clothes or on your backpack or purse.

Grabe: Can you tell us very briefly what this campaign was about?

Delgado: The campaign was to demand that the Nicaraguan government ratify the Inter-American Convention Against Violence against Women.

I think that a lot of people didn’t necessarily understand the name, Inter-American Convention. It sounds so grandiose, basically it was about the people signing a paper and wearing a badge that said “I’m in favor of the government getting involved.” And for the government to legislate in favor of women’s right to live without violence. And the campaign was called “I want to live without violence.” And so all this led a lot of people to say I want to be a part of this, I want to organize, how do I do it? And it went from being an initiative where there were approximately 18 organizations, it turned into a network of more than 150 organizations, in addition to having many women participate individually.

And we organized national meetings and we worked very hard so that the government—so the National Assembly would pass a law for the first time in history recognizing and punishing domestic violence, and that was very intense work. We collected more than 40,000 signatures from citizens. We did a lobbying campaign, we went to each of the representatives’ homes, we talked with the representatives’ wives. We were at the National Assembly every day. We made alliances with the representatives’ secretaries. We sent—we asked people to send a fax, to really jam the representatives’ fax machines so they would pass that law. The women in the National Assembly, the secretaries, the cafeteria workers gave us lunch so we could be there all day. I mean, we were persistent, persistent until they finally passed this law in 1996. And I think that this law, which has since had many reforms, I think that it definitely contributed to saving many women’s lives.

We were also part of this project that is called Family Services Division, specialized police stations that focus on domestic violence. It’s a pilot project in Latin America, it probably only exists in Peru, Nicaragua, I think in Ecuador too. And we were part of this project that aimed to open more stations in more places and have the centers that were part of the [women’s] network, have them commit to serving women who reported violence. And, well, I stayed for nine years and as the Network’s Executive Secretary until 2003—until August 2003.

Obviously I lived through many intense events during this period, like Zoilamérica Narvaez’s lawsuit against Daniel Ortega. That was very intense at both the political and personal levels because although I hadn’t been active within the Sandinista Front for a long time, I wasn’t active within the party anymore, I had not been part of the Sandinist Front for many years, but I still had had a very strong history [with them]. And this lawsuit helped me realize that during the time I spent teaching people how to read and write, I had lived through a situation of sexual abuse from another adolescent in the community, and at the time I had not recognized it as such.

I think that it had been traumatic for me. And I had never—well, I had pretty much erased that part of my past. But through Zoilamérica's lawsuit, I was able to recognize that what happened, and that teenager's sexual aggressions towards me, that it had been sexual violence and it had impacted my life during this period, that I had succeeded in getting over it I think that because—because I had left that community. I returned to my house and I found my classmates—I went back to being a girl.

But it had been sexual violence and, just like Zoilamérica, but in a different context. I had never talked about it. I had never talked about it. I didn't even talk about it in that moment, I have never even talked about it, not with my mom, who was there, not with the teachers. I didn't talk to absolutely anyone. So I think that that was obviously a very difficult thing because a lot of women decided to talk, to put the topic of sexual violence in Nicaragua on the table. They questioned us a lot and the Sandinista Front made a very harsh move by creating a protective wall against Ortega. Or, the way it responded, it didn't distance itself from the personal actions of its leader but took actions to protect him. And besides that, the decision to protect him at all costs had meant a transcendental change in the political structure of the country because this created the conditions for the pact between Daniel Ortega and Arnaldo Alemán because what they exchanged was mutual impunity. So that was very tough for us, it was very tough for me, right, because Zoilamérica's lawsuit was a time of mourning for us. We cried, because we felt betrayed because Ortega was, although we didn't all necessarily know him personally, he was an important figure in all our lives.

So it led us to question many things. And it was—and besides a lot of women who were members of the Network refused to acknowledge and take a political position backing the lawsuit—Zoilamérica's lawsuit. They refused to acknowledge and support the victim. And obviously this event created a very big clash within the Network. So it implied putting a lot of energy into many debates, for reflection purposes, right? I think that it required a lot of political maturity among us; a lot of understanding of the process that each of us wanted to take and we couldn't force anyone, it was a personal process, right.

And my departure from the Network—I finally made the decision to leave the coordination of it in 2003. This year the Network was tied to a—we accompanied Rosita, the nine-year old girl who was pregnant and had been sexually abused and we supported her demand to terminate the pregnancy. And it was very, very, very, very, very hard politically, and personally too, because we faced the clerics, the church, with all its power. And we knew that that was a political fight and a right but it was also a matter of life—the risk to the girl [of going through labor]. So, what I mean is we couldn't wait for the Church and the state to make a decision two years later because of the risk, the girl's life was in danger and we had to make decisions, right. And that was very hard for many of us too.

And that year I decided to leave the Network because I had to put some distance, because I had worked for nine years, although not always—well, my job was political, I was a facilitator, I was a political manager. But I also had to deal with and confront and listen to personal stories. And I think that, like for many women who worked in the issue of violence against women, there's a moment when you have to make a break. And I left the Network, and I left to work in the leadership of a much broader coalition of NGOs, that the Network was a part of too, that was called the Civil Coordinator.

[47:23]

Grabe: Violeta, can I ask you, did you experience any personal consequences from your support surrounding Zoila or Rosita?

Delgado: Eh, yes. I think that in the case of Zoilamérica's charges, I think it was in '98, so that was 13 years ago, approximately. And I think that having backed Zoilamérica at that moment, they have described a lot of us as people that we aren't. I mean, as enemies of the Sandinista Party. And that implies, well, enemies of the Sandinist Front, and this meant that we were not seen as a rift [within the movement], but that we were no longer recognized as leaders of a political movement, that public organizations were not allowed to establish any type of relationship with us. And obviously we cannot work in the government.

Grabe: And was there also a governmental response to your support of Rosita?

Delgado: Obviously in Rosita's case, um—at first, there was pressure coming from the Church, they excommunicated us and obviously, well, I have been a Catholic all my life and that was going to have an impact on my family, my father's side of the family. And they talked about my excommunication from the Church in my town and at some point I was scared that there would be a break with my community. For me, I had stopped living in Diriomo a long time ago, but for me it has always been a vital space. But it was interesting because I think that the community was supportive of me, the old ladies, my grandmothers, and they were telling me, "No, that priest is crazy." [Laughs.] Yes, um, that was very good.

But later, after that pressure, which was more emotional, then the government—when the Sandinista Front came to power—it made use of the law and there was a judicial lawsuit, a criminal accusation and that had a much stronger impact on us because we were accused, we were investigated, and we were called to testify. Officials from the Sandinista government treated us like delinquents. They treated us as aggressors. This had an impact on my family because obviously my mom, who was still alive, always worried about me because of what could happen to me in this country. I already had a son who had been born in 2004, and obviously I worried that if I was arrested, what was going to happen to my baby? It obviously impacted my job too because I had to invest a lot of time attending the judicial and political defense. And a lot, a lot of time, a lot of meetings, a lot of debates to try to understand what was happening and what the best strategy was. And a lot of time was invested to not fall prey to the government's strategy to divide us. So, for example, we decided not to go testify individually, and we declared ourselves as politically accused because the government was hoping that I would accuse my friend, to interrogate us, so we would say, "No, I wasn't the one that took the girl, it was her." Or which was—who were the doctors who terminated the pregnancy? Who was there at that time? So they wanted to use our testimonies to pit us against each other and we decided not to do it, not to fall for that strategy and declared ourselves politically accused, right, and to not give any individual testimony. And that lasted three years.

[54:01]

Grabe: So it was all of these pressures that led you to decide to take a step back, you started to tell me a little bit about what you did next. You started to work on issues more in civil society?

Delgado: As the Civil Coordinator, yes, very interesting because I went back to a co-ed space after nine years. And I liked it because I went back to dealing with numbers. I got to lead and monitor issues of economic policies and to work with economists. And I followed the IMF's policies and it was very interesting because the economists looked at me and thought—okay, so at this time I was already 35 years old—34 years old, and I was coming from the Women's Movement and more than one of them was saying, "What are we going to do with this *woman*?" A lot of them didn't know that I was a mathematician, and it ended up working very well. We did very interesting things and we did amazing research on the subject of political economics. We discovered sums of money that the government collected and did not enter in the budget and we demanded that it be used for social programs and that there be better transparency. And we developed very interesting training processes on economic subjects. It was very good for me.

Working there I met a man that, well I had a relationship with him and became pregnant. And I think that it could only happen that way, going back to a co-ed environment [a lot of laughter] because I spent the previous nine years exclusively dealing with my female friends and peers. And my son Diego was born, I was there for three years and decided to leave the [Civil] Coordinator because I decided to become involved in the electoral campaign of the Sandinista Renewal Movement and the 2006 elections. I ran for Congress and that was also very interesting for me.

It seems like there are some key transitional times in my life. I think that the first time of transition was the Literacy Crusade—teaching people how to read and write—the triumph of the Revolution and the Crusade. After that I think it was the decision to study math [laughs] and go to college. And then it was the clash with the Sandinistas and the beginning of my work—well, not with the Sandinista movement, but with the FSLN, and the beginning of my work in the Network.

And then it was the decision to resign from my work at the Civil Coordinator to go to the electoral campaign because on one hand I went back to being part of a partisan political project. It had been 12 years—since '94 and I had some desire to do it because I had spent a lot of time being a political manager, right? Meaning that I had a lot of ties with the Women's Movement leadership and with the community leaders. But to go back to an electoral campaign was to go back to the communities, go back to "Good morning, I'm Violeta Delgado and I'm a candidate for Congress and I want you to vote for me because I'm a woman committed to women's rights." It was going back to looking people directly in the eyes, those personal ties, without intermediaries. So I went all over the country for six months together with Azahalea, the other friend who was my runningmate. And going back to a partisan life after so many years. It was great, it was very nice. It was a decision that I made almost like "I want to live this," right? Like plugging your nose and jumping into the pool. You understand? Because this obviously has a cost; a lot of people question whether to give you a job or not because the majority of the organizations will say, "But she has a—a partisan bias, that isn't convenient," right.

And then I also started to work as an independent consultant and I was running a risk because a lot of Sandinista organizations or ones that are close to the liberals won't give me work because of my political affiliation. Besides, after being recognized as a partisan civil society leader, as a social leader, to then go and wear a party's t-shirt. That meant a hundred thousand risks, but I decided to do it. I decided to plug my nose and jump into the pool because I wanted to live this electoral campaign.

Grabe: And how did you end up at the Center for Media and Democracy where you are now?

Delgado: Okay, why did I come to CINCO? I came to work at CINCO because after the electoral campaign, which ended with a victory for Ortega for president, I wasn't elected. We didn't receive an important number of votes. This little party had five candidates but we didn't get enough votes for me to be elected. So the moment came where I decided to separate my life—my active participation in the Womens' Movement—from my work life. Because for many years I had been a political manager with a salary, right, paid for by the organizations where I worked. So I decided to use my mathematical education, I mean to dig into the closet and refresh my academic training and suddenly many of my friends said good, you're good at doing numbers. So Sofia told me, you know the majority—many of the employees from CINCO are humanists, journalists, communications specialists, sociologists—but when it comes to numbers and matrices and those things, they just don't want to have anything to do with it. So I said okay and Sofia told me—Sofia offered me a job as project manager to deal with all the numbers and to continue my active involvement with the women's movement on the side. And I got involved with MAM, the Womens' Autonomous Movement. I'm part of its political coordination but I like it a lot because I'm not a paid staff member. So to be able to separate my work life from my—although we have to put that in quotes, right? Because at CINCO we do engage in a lot of political debate, a lot of debate about what's happening. It's an organization that takes a political position. I like that part of this project a lot. And I'm also very happy, satisfied with my involvement in the Womens' Autonomous Movement.

And that's where I am right now. Well, I separated from my son's father about a year after he was born. We're very good friends. I don't have a partner right now. I really, really, really enjoy my son. He will soon be seven years old and he's a lovely boy. He's in the first grade, he plays soccer, he loves food, he's a super loving person. We love each other very much.

Grabe: Well, I'd like to ask—switch gears and ask you, throughout your work as a woman, how have you made sense of or how do you define feminism?

Delgado: Well, you know that I always reference the fact that once at the start of the '90s when I was involved with the Youth Movement, I flirted with the Womens' Movement. One time I heard Marcela Lagarde, this feminist—fabulous, fabulous Mexican feminist anthropologist. And she said a phrase, a phrase that went like this—and it made me think, *that's it, that's where I want to be*—she said, "Feminism is a proposal for humanity." That is, it is a proposal from women for humanity and when we say for humanity, for all of us. And because of that I then understood why the feminist current, why as feminists, we had a proposition for sustainable development, right? We had like a vision, we questioned spirituality and we proposed the idea of fair and equal relationships with respect to men. For me, feminism obviously transcends my participation in a women's organization—that's where I advocate for it. Others have other ways to advocate for it. I think that for me feminism is a proposal that comes from women but it's a proposal for change in men and in humanity, it's all connected.

Grabe: Do you call yourself a feminist?

Delgado: Yes, I'm definitely a feminist.

Grabe: And do you see a relationship between feminist activism and scholarship or work from the university?

[1:07:01]

Delgado: I think that in Nicaragua like in no other country, maybe in Central America, but I would say like in no other region of the world because, well, personally, I was able to be part of a very interesting case where the results from one investigation were then used as material to create an impact, by women, on the issue of violence against women. I was able to be part of a very interesting formative process where female academics engaged in many debates with women in the community. I think that in Nicaragua, like in no other country, there is recognition for these women's wisdom, community leaders who have never been to college but whose life experiences are of vital importance. And I think that in—I think that theorists feed a lot from these vital life experiences. Even myself, although I could be identified as a feminist who hasn't worked directly with women to create transformations in their lives, I am not a quote-unquote intellectual, like those that—um, well I studied math, sure, but I think that I have incorporated into my life methods to analyze reality. I think that throughout my 42 years I have learned techniques to do political synthesis and identify lessons learned. I think that—and not just me, I think that Nicaraguans, Nicaraguan feminists, even though so many of them haven't set foot in a university, they have developed the ability for political abstraction; in other words, an ability to synthesize their life history and their experiences in order to gain knowledge. I think that what we've lacked are the resources to write it. Yeah.

Grabe: You've also talked about your experience working with women's organizations from other countries. Can you tell me about some of your international experience working on women's issues?

[01:10:17]

Delgado: Yes, well it's been in a variety of ways. On the one hand, I have been part of the process to form feminist regional alliances and this has been, super, super, super great. I think that if it weren't for this a lot of us would have been in a situation of greater risk. For example, all of the supportive campaigns organized by feminists from Central America and Latin America to support Nicaraguan feminists. During 2008 and 2009 when Ortega's policy was very aggressive towards us, many feminists organized outside the entrance to the [Nicaraguan] embassies and also at the airports, visibly showing their opposition to Ortega's visit to their country. I think that was very strong. So yes, I have been involved in creating projects and processes, and very strong alliances between us in Mesoamerica and in Latin America.

It was also interesting because during the period when I worked and I was in the leadership of the Women's Network Against Violence, I could also identify the differences in what we were doing with what other organizations were developing, particularly in the north. I mean I was able to visit, um, I visited homeless shelters in the United States—in Wisconsin, and in Europe. But the difference is that we were—we had a feminist vision and we were a very politicized social movement, non-partisan but very much politicized. Politicized in terms of not just—what I mean is that we took in the victims, we supported them in the process of transforming their lives, but in addition, we were a political organization with certain demands. We demanded changes in legislation, we monitored public policies and later on we also had an official position on what we

thought of the course the country was taking. When we found out about how women's access to justice was being impacted by the government structure becoming partisan—the fact that party representatives now held high offices. For example, if women were going to a Sandinista judge, and the judge and the aggressor were both Sandinistas, there was no possibility that he would go to jail. This happened after the pact between Ortega and Alemán in '98. So this forced us to take a political position. So when we made trips abroad, we would say, “Yes, we do that, but we also have a position about what goes on in the country. And we are a political movement that demands changes. We don't just take care of victims.”

Grabe: Violeta, in addition to your regional organizing, have you made use of international treaties or meetings like the United Nations, for example?

[01:14:21]

Delgado: Yes, right, I was in Beijing. I was at the conference in Beijing. Yes, and then I participated in subsequent meetings every five years where we revised the platform. And well, like many of my peers, I got to face off with the delegates from the government of Nicaragua: Look for them in the hallways, pressure them so they didn't sign with the Vatican, lobby the delegates from other countries. And in recent years, I have been able—together with other peers—to go to the UN Human Rights courts and go to the Inter-American Human Rights courts of the OAS, to denounce the state of human rights for the women in Nicaragua.

Let me say that I don't tell this very often. I should have brought the book. I forgot that in 2004 I was selected, along with five other Nicaraguan women, to be part of this group called 1,000 PeaceWomen. In 2004 a Swiss organization nominated one thousand women from all over the world to be candidates for the Nobel Peace Prize. Um, this Swiss organization proposed to the Nobel Committee that they give the prize to one thousand women of the world as a symbol of women in peace. They didn't give us the Nobel Prize. But—

Grabe: But what an honor to be nominated!

Delgado: Yes, I was nominated along with Vilma Núñez and four other Nicaraguan women. And I think we have been nominated every year of the last few years. I just came back from Argentina last week, from a meeting with other women who we were also nominated from Ecuador and Mexico, because we try to communicate amongst ourselves and keep in touch.

Grabe: And do you use—some of the strategizing that you're doing across these regional networks, has part of that involved using this international discourse on human rights?

Delgado: Definitely, in the first place, it's been very difficult to get recognition for this work. Well, it's work that I think has a precedent in Vienna, from the Vienna Conference of 1994, for women's rights to be acknowledged as human rights. I mean that it's a—um, in Nicaragua the places to—the ways in which one can press charges are very limited for various reasons. Because the government has bought almost all of the mass media outlets, you know that it has bought almost all of the television channels and radio stations? And there is very little possibility of engaging in public demonstrations because groups that are close to the government come and hit you, they follow you.

So, obviously the international sphere is one of the few places we still have to condemn what is happening. And the spaces, the human rights forums are the spaces that we've used the most. One of our friends, Azahalea, Azahalea worked on a document that I think made a big contribution. It's going to contribute greatly, in the near future, to support human rights because she made a document of a report made to the Committee of the Rights of the Child, regarding the ban, the penalization of abortion in Nicaragua as a violation of children's rights. Clearly, many pregnant teenagers who cannot terminate a pregnancy, many of them are minors—they're still girls. And it's obviously a situation of violation of human rights.

Grabe: Violeta, can you talk a little bit about how—give me some concrete examples of how the women's movement has made advances in women's health?

Delgado: In terms of health. [pause] Okay okay, I think that—I think that one main contribution has been—I think that there are two main contributions. One, all the work that the women's organizations have done to have violence against women recognized as a major health problem. You know, there is a government survey from 1995 that says that out of every ten Nicaraguan women, sorry, ten women who live with violence, only three talk about their situation. This was the 1995 survey. The last survey, I think that it's from 2007, says that six out of every ten talk about it.

Grabe: How did the women's movement contribute to that change?

[01:21:29]

Delgado: One hundred percent. Okay, so the first people who started to bring this up, building on all the other things that I told you—about the badge campaign, the law, the signatures, right, were the women's organizations. And, first of all I think that this was a transcendental cultural and political contribution. When I was a girl, I never realized that my dad's aggressions, his emotional aggressions towards my mom, were violent and that they were a crime. I never realized it. Never. I knew that it was, that it hurt me, that it made me very sad, and my mom never even considered reporting it. Never. Because it wasn't recognized as a crime either, you know, not in my family, not in my community. No one was going to report an incident of domestic violence. It didn't mean—it meant that sometimes there was some level of restriction from the community. But in most cases not even that, it was just something that happened. It happened. Period.

Grabe: So women will report it now?

Delgado: So—so many years later it's recognized as something that isn't right and that is an offense. So we contributed so that the rates of reporting, um, for them to really have a 180-degree transformation, I think. I also think that to bring up abortion—when, before the whole debate surrounding Rosita's pregnancy and the termination of that pregnancy, nobody was even talking about abortion in Nicaragua. Only some groups—not even all feminists and not even the women's movement as a whole, it didn't have a position on the issue and it didn't even talk about the right to abortion. Abortion is a word, a friend of mine says, that people mentioned quietly and with their mouths covered. So now, many years later, this subject has been put up for debate. And now people talk about it, either in favor or against it. Whether it's through different social networks or television programs, or whatever, but they talk and debate the issue of

abortion and that, I think, is an extremely important contribution. If this subject isn't brought up and it continues being taboo, the life stories of women who secretly terminate their pregnancies and die from it are going to remain hidden. Many of them are teenagers, some of the many teenagers commit suicide because of an unwanted pregnancy and because they don't want to confront their family. Also stories of the many women who now can't terminate their pregnancy because of the criminalization of therapeutic abortion and so they die or their lives are at risk, right. This is all the work, all the reports and denunciations that the women's movement has done.

And on the other hand, there's the painstaking task from hundreds of women's organizations that have a clinic, provide healthcare services, hand out fliers, do trainings, and put together communication campaigns about sexual and reproductive rights that no one else does in the country. That the government doesn't do, that the churches don't do, that no one else does. I think that, yes, there's been a transcendental contribution.

Grabe: Violeta, you've also talked about some international issues. I'm interested in your opinion of whether or not you think neo-liberal policies or this idea of globalization has any unique consequences for women in Nicaragua.

Delgado: Obviously the model in itself had awful consequences. I mean that from the late '80s, when the Sandinista Front was still in power, we started to see a reduction of the government. The government started to become smaller. And a lot of people took to the street, there was unemployment, or what the Sandinista government called compression. And from '90 and on, with Violeta Chamorro's victory, the model settled in aggressively: privatization, and the privatization of social services, the reduction of the state, the decrease of social spending, and the Nicaraguan government just got rid of the majority of the social programs. So all the children's programs had to be taken on by the hundreds of NGOs that were created at that time. Sexual and reproductive health services for women stopped being the responsibility of the state, and were basically taken on mostly by the women's organizations. Besides, keep in mind that [Chamorro's] government had a big—her government was greatly influenced by the top-level hierarchy of the Catholic Church. So politics got in the way—the refusal to have a policy designed to provide comprehensive sexual and reproductive health programs. We ended up doing all of that ourselves.

At the moment, almost 100% of all services for victims of violence are still in the hands of women's organizations. The Government of Nicaragua doesn't even have a shelter, not even a protection center, not even a center to serve female victims because evidently this isn't allowed because the government, according to the liberal model, was just—or could not be a service provider, but just a manager, right, a policy manager. And all the rest was privatized, including everything that is related to the protection of rights, particularly of women's rights. So, obviously yes. Yes, the neo-liberal policies that Ortega's government continues to implement continue falling on the shoulders of women.

Grabe: Well, Violeta, I want to thank you very much for your time today but before we end, I want to make sure there isn't any other topic that you'd like to talk about that I haven't asked you about. [pause] It isn't necessary.

[01:30:17]

Delgado: No, I don't think so.

Grabe: Thank you very much. Thank you.

Well, thank you for talking to us for so long. It's an honor that we get to speak with somebody who was nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize.

Delgado: Or also—can I still say something, just in case you need it.

Grabe: Yes, please!

Delgado: With the camera, or did you already turn it off?

Grabe: It's still on.

Delgado: Okay, because maybe you'll use it or maybe it will be edited, I just thought about it. No, well, I just want to say in the end that I have to pay homage to the women in my family. Yes, I think that certainly the liberating example of my mother and of many other women who didn't doubt letting me spread my wings. I think that they marked the course of my life. I wanted to say that.

Grabe: It's very important. Thank you for sharing that.

Well, you've been so busy in your life organizing around so many political issues, what do you think about your upcoming election?

Delgado: Well, we always—perhaps because of Sofia's influence, we always have an apocalyptic discourse. And we Nicaraguans always have an apocalyptic discourse. You know, these are things that happen, that are going to mark a dramatic change in the country. And I think—

Grabe: What do you want to see happen?

[01:32:02]

Delgado: One, that people participate because I believe that the biggest—I believe that the biggest adversary of democracy is that skepticism and incredulity prevail in the community and that people don't participate. I think that that is the biggest enemy, more so than the results.

Grabe: In the past, Nicaragua—a high percentage of Nicaraguans used to vote and that's changed, what happened?

Delgado: Well, on the one hand, there is the partisanship of the Supreme Election Council because there isn't much confidence that your vote is going to be respected, because the Supreme Election Council is in the hands of the Sandinista Front. Ortega has total control. Ortega's children live in the home of the president of the Supreme Election Council in Costa Rica. The president of the Supreme Election Council has a house in Costa Rica, and Ortega's children who study in Costa Rica live in his house. So there is a relationship, a very strong personal and political alliance. So I think that a lot of people feel—they don't feel they want to be duped by going to vote and for their decision not to be respected. I think that the one, the main enemy is abstention. Not going to vote.

Grabe: The people have become disillusioned with democracy.

Delgado: The disenchantment of democracy, yes and of the political class. But—

Grabe: Why does Ortega send his kids to study in Costa Rica?

Delgado: As I understand it, he sent them to study film and television and I think that there is a school in Costa Rica, or a department. So now those children that used to live there, they are the directors of the television channels that Ortega has bought. Ortega has bought three television channels in just one year, meaning he has four channels: Channel 4, Channel 11, Channel 13, and Channel 8. He bought three last year.

Grabe: How many channels are there?

Delgado: I mentioned those four and then there's CNN, 100%, Channel 12, Channel 2, and Channel 10. There are nine channels.

Grabe: There are nine and he owns four.

Delgado: Of those nine, four are Ortega's. Excuse me, five, because channel 10 isn't his, but he owns half and the other half belongs to Carlos Slim, the Mexican millionaire. Of ten, five belong to Ortega.

Grabe: And which stations are the major news programs on?

[01:38:09]

Delgado: These five channels are propaganda channels for Ortega and each channel—Channel 8 is directed by Ortega's son, and Channel 13 is directed by a daughter—so his children are directing the television channels. I think that only Channel 12 is doing some type of independent journalism. The rest that Ortega hasn't bought try not to talk about politics for fear that they might pull the publicity funding and suffer retaliations. Yes, I think that at this time the population isn't completely aware of the risks that this country is going through. Because, okay, obviously we don't have the Sandinismo of the '80s which was committed to specific ethics, and still made mistakes, right, but—this is a family, it's Ortega, his wife and his children who make the decisions. It's a dynasty, you know, like the one in Tunisia, and we run the risk of not even having elections in a few years, or having pantomime elections.

Grabe: Do you think if he loses the electoral vote that he'll actually step down?

Delgado: I think that it's a complicated situation. I think, on the one hand, if this happens—I hope we would have to go back and restart things through a gigantic process of national reconciliation. Because I think that all these things that I told you about, that we achieved twenty years ago, do you understand? That the Sandinista youth, we sat down with the Contra youth, we talked and realized, ah, it isn't that bad. So in the last five years we've regressed. What I mean is that there are friends of mine who are in the government, with whom I have been friends since childhood, who today don't speak to me. Or neighbors who go head to head with their neighbors, so it's become more polarized. In five years, the steps we had taken forward, we took backwards. I think it's necessary to ensure that the Sandistas, including those who support Ortega right now, feel that they will continue being part of this nation. I think that, I hope that the loss finally leads

to changes inside the party to really make it a democratic party. I think that it had a terrible regression in the past couple years. And on the other hand, that this leads to a new, a different leadership for the Sandinista party in the country, a more democratic one and one that ostracizes Ortega's *caudillo* attitude. I hope that if he loses the elections he goes to Venezuela or Cuba and he goes into exile with whomever. [Laughs]

Grabe: Well, we've kept you longer, I know we're all probably hungry for lunch.

Delgado: Yes, okay.