

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

SITE: NICARAGUA

**Transcript of Diana Martínez
Interviewer: Shelly Grabe
Interpreter: Julia Baumgartner**

**Location: La Fem, Estelí, Nicaragua
Date: June 27, 2011**

**University of Michigan
Institute for Research on Women and Gender
1136 Lane Hall Ann Arbor, MI 48109-1290
Tel: (734) 764-9537**

**E-mail: um.gfp@umich.edu
Website: <http://www.umich.edu/~glblfem>**

© Regents of the University of Michigan, 2017

Diana Martínez was born in 1958, the second daughter of an upper middle-class family. When she was very young she and her family lived in Managua but later moved to Estelí. She attended private school in Estelí where the majority of her classmates were wealthy and children of Somoza supporters. From a young age she felt a sense of injustice regarding the inequality she witnessed, particularly noting the difference in quality of life between the workers and the property owners at her grandfather's coffee farm. At age 8 she saw her father attempt to sexually abuse a domestic worker, which was only avoided because entered the room. At 14, she organized a group of domestic workers for a literacy groups. She became active in the Sandinista movement as a student, but when the front intensified in 1975, her parents sent her to Guatemala to finish high school against her will. She attended the University of San Carlos, studying political science and sociology and became a Marxist. After the Sandinista Revolution, Diana was able to return to Nicaragua and began working in the textile industry based on her belief in the importance of laborers and in an effort to rid herself of her bourgeois past. She has been involved with feminist research in Nicaragua, and is currently a director at La Fem, a coffee cooperative for women in Estelí.

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.



Key Words: rural, land, religion, abortion, academia

Shelly Grabe: Diana, I wanted to start by thanking you for being willing to participate in the Global Feminisms Project.

Diana Martínez: Thank you, it is my honor.

SG: Like I mentioned, we’re going to talk for about an hour today, and I’ll start by asking you questions about your personal story and your life and the work that you’ve done. And any insights you might have about your work in the context of the women’s movement. And then we’ll end with me asking you some questions about you work in relationship to other women organizations in Nicaragua. Diana, I know you’re probably more accustomed to talking about the history of your organization. But I’d like to ask you to start by telling me some of your personal history. Your early years, a little bit about your childhood. Your family. What are some of your earliest memories?

DM: Well, I was born in 1958. I am close to turning 53. I am the second daughter of an upper middle-class family. When I was born my father and mother, who were from Matagalpa and Estelí respectively, were living in Managua. During my early years I went to the Colegio Pureza de María, a private school run by nuns in Managua. Later, my family moved to Estelí because my dad was a banker.

SG: What was the name of the school?

DM: Colegio Pureza de María, a private school that was run by nuns, only for girls, only for women, and when we came to Estelí I went to another private school ran by nuns called Colegio Nuestra Señora del Rosario. They were both religious private schools, conservative, at that time only for girls, for women, and only for people from the Nicaraguan dominant class. For example, in my secondary school, my schoolmates were the daughters of Cubans that had arrived here after the fall of Batista,¹ the daughters of land owners, and people with ties to the Somoza government.² In the nun's school there was... it was a private school that only serviced the dominant classes and to which very few people had access to. And I, well, since I was a little girl I felt I had some sense, some sensibilities towards inequality that I figured out since I was little, for example, how the domestic workers in my house were treated, about some of the abuses that my father committed on them. One time I found a woman, who was a domestic worker, that my father was attempting to rape, and the act did not occur because I arrived, but that was the norm those days.

SG: How old were you when you are remembering this?

DM: I was 8 years old. Yes, and I also used to go to my grandparents' farm in Matagalpa, they had a large coffee plantation, and I figured out, around the ages of 8 or 9, the enormous gap between how the workers lived, and how the family in the house lived. I became friends with the cooks, I spent time where they slept, which were some sort of drawers³ in, well, they were some drawers that went all the way up, right, and in very bad houses, and all their food was beans and enormous tortillas, which we called in those days "lonplay," in reference to vinyl discs. At that age I also saw my grandma working on the payroll, because there was a general store for the workers. And the workers, when she did the payroll and payed them, much of their salary was deducted to pay for items indebted to the general store, such as cigarettes, they owed for soap, sugar, and other things for their houses. And me, I was always asking about that stuff, and I understood how people were feeling on Saturdays when they got payed, if they were happy, if they were unhappy, if they liked working there. And sometimes I gave them my stuff I brought, my clothes, my watch, my rings, to some girls I met there, and always made friends there. I always told them I would come back the next year, and there were lots of cousins there during vacations, cousins, but I was the only one who got close to the worker's world. So, that was when I was pretty young. When we came to live in Estelí my father was a bank manager, and my mother came back to her family circle, where my grandfather on her side of the family had 1,200 apple trees in lands to the north. So, I entered that private school, but when I was about 13 or 14 years old I organized for the first time a group of domestic workers to teach them to read and write.

SG: You did this when you were 13?

¹ Fulgencio Batista y Zaldívar was the elected President of Cuba (1940-1944) and United States backed dictator of Cuba (1952-1959) before the triumph of the Cuban Revolution. (*Fidel: The Untold Story*, 2001).

² Anastasio Somoza García took power of Nicaragua in 1933 after betraying the peace agreements. He was succeeded by his sons and the Somoza dynasty ruled Nicaragua until the triumph of the Sandinista Revolution in 1979. (Vanden, Harry E. & Prevost, Gary. *Politics of Latin America: The Power Game*. Oxford University Press.)

³ "Drawers" in this context is a translation for bunks or sleeping quarters.

DM: Maybe 14.

SG: You remember what year it was?

DM: I came to Estelí in '71, a year before the earthquake,⁴ and studied my first year of secondary school at Nuestra Señora del Rosario, and was 13 years old then. So, it was in '72 that I organized the circle of study with my mother's domestic workers, one of them, from two of my aunts and from another neighbor. It was a group of five women, and we had a small book, a primer, titled "Coquito," to learn how to read. But the people responsible for them, the "Dueñas de casas" (ladies of the house) only let them attend the class because of me.

SG: And what did your parents think of you doing this?

DM: Well, they always felt that I was a bit weird, because when I was 15 years old I stopped going to the mass at the cathedral they went to, because I started to connect with the Christian revolutionary movement⁵ at El Calvario Church, in Estelí, where there was a priest that became a very important person in the revolution, his name was father Julio César López, a Colombian, he's still alive, and he helped many young people involved in the revolutionary Christianity movement to become involved in the revolutionary movement. But what happened is that after the revolution he became very reactionary, but during those times he played a very important role, because I was able to go to masses with him, and he brought the word of Christianity to rural communities, for example in Santa Cruz, a place where I frequently went to spread the word, that also denounced the dictatorship and that was an important way to create consciousness and give another perspective to the word of Christianity that included the poor, different from the discourse at Estelí's Cathedral. I went on Sundays, sometimes with my parents' permission, sometimes without it, to these communities, and we walked a lot with my friends, but, when I was at secondary school, things became more intense by the year of '73, '74, '75, things became more organized by the Frente.⁶ By '76 I was very involved, very involved with people in the Frente, then my parents decided I needed to leave Nicaragua, and sent me with my sister in Guatemala. So, I had to finish school at another private school for girls in Guatemala, in '77, it was called the Colegio de Señoritas del Sagrado Corazón, also for women. And I was really hurt by this decision, imposition from my parents, because I had ... all of my friends were going underground.⁷ And there was

⁴ The 1972 Earthquake in Managua, Nicaragua killed nearly 10,000 people and left 250,000 people homeless. This event is characterized by the extensive destruction caused by the quake, lack of government aid under the Somoza regime, and severe economic consequences. ("Earthquake Rocks Managua," History.com, 2009, 24 May 2017.)

⁵ The Catholic Church had a major presence in the Nicaraguan Revolution and supported the FSLN only after the Somoza Regime began to fall. The Catholic Church's position before, during, and after the revolutionary period in Nicaragua, however, has historically favored the government and demonstrates the complex relationship between the Church and social structure in Nicaragua. (Sawchuk, Dana. "The Catholic Church in the Nicaraguan Revolution: A Gramscian Analysis." *Sociology of Religion*, vol. 58, no. 1, 1997, pp. 39–51. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/3712105.)

⁶ The FSLN (Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional or The Sandinista Front for National Liberation), became in 1979 the only guerrilla movement to overthrow a Latin American government since the Cuban Revolution. The FSLN maintained control of the government until 1990. (Wright, Thomas C. *State Terrorism in Latin America: Chile, Argentina, and International Human Rights*, 2007, pp. 31.)

⁷ The Sandinistas practiced guerilla warfare and fighters went underground, or hid in the mountains, to train and hide from the Somoza regime.

already a strong awareness among many young people of the need to oppose the dictatorship, and we were ready to give our lives to liberate Nicaragua from Somoza. So, I left because I had no choice at that time, so I finished my schooling there. Then my parents decided I would go next year to the Universidad Rafael Aldívar, which is sort of a Jesuit university in Guatemala. So, they went there to sign me up, but I only remained there for about three months, because I decided to study at the Universidad San Carlos, the state's university, where I majored in political science and sociology. And I changed at that university, because of the version of Christianity I learned with father Julio, because of the revolutionary Christianity movement, and because of Marxism,⁸ I actually became an atheist, I became a Marxist. Afterwards, in '78, when there was a large insurrection movement in Estelí, I really wanted to come back. But I was unable to come; then, in January of '79 I was able to come from Guatemala. I left the university, and flew to Costa Rica to work clandestinely at the Liberia Hospital, where there were people from the Southern Front, and that served all of the guerrillas from the Southern Front in the city of Liberia, where I remained until July when I went back to Managua. Yes, on July 19th⁹ I couldn't be at the Plaza, I arrived the next day. And my parents came from Guatemala, they had left because of the war in Guatemala, and when I went to meet with them, they told me they did not want to see me again, because I had lost my virginity, because I could no longer get married like they wanted me to, because I had set aside the values they had taught me, and had made my life the way I wanted to. So, they did not want to see me back home. I went back with my fatigues and boots to Managua because I had to fend for myself. So, at that time of my life and even with my participation in the revolution, I was not really inside the main structures of the Frente, but anyway, I went back to Managua, and I found people, a place to live temporarily, and for example, by the end of November of that year the School of Sociology at the UCA was inaugurated, and then I decided to get my school papers from Guatemala to apply to continue studying Sociology in Managua. And at that moment I also thought that sincerely only workers and peasants would get to the end. Like Sandino says, only their organizing force will achieve the future. And I really wanted to become a worker. So, then I became involved in a former Somoza factory, which during his time was called Empresa El Provenir (The Future Company), and the Revolutionary Government began to rebuild it. It was then called Texnix, and it was a textile factory, where I learned to be a worker, a textile worker, and I was, I worked on a big machine that made cones, cones that then were made into a form of silk used to make large drapes, and during those years I also wanted to get rid of all of the petit bourgeois¹⁰ traces from my past, and become a worker to be part of God's kingdom, which was a contradiction.

SG: And what years were these that you were getting trained in textiles?

DM: In '82, '82, yes, at the end of '81 and '82. And by 1984, towards the end of the year, I was able to combine the work at the textile factory and the university, but it was really tough because there were no workers at the university, and there were no students at the

⁸ Marxist theories are political and economic theories from Marx and Engels that were later developed to form the basis for the theory and practice of communism.

⁹ July 19th, 1979 marks the overthrow of the Somoza regime by the FSLN, followed by a rally in Nicaragua's Plaza de la Fe/ Plaza de la Revolución ("Sandinista Revolution", Vianica.com, accessed 24 May 2017.)

¹⁰ The bourgeoisie, in Marxist theory, is the capitalist class who owns most of society's wealth and the means of production.

textile factory. So, I had to combine those two, very different worlds, and there were time conflicts, because one week I had to show up for work at 6:00 am and left at 2:00 pm, then the next week started work at 2:00 pm, until 9:30 in the evening, and then the next week had to show up to work at 9:30 pm and left at 6:00 in the morning. So, there was one week I could not attend classes, but I had a talk with the dean about the situation. And since they were also Marxists, they told me they would evaluate me, told me to do research in Texnix about topics such as capital gains, about the labor movement, for example. To compensate for my absences, I wrote many papers about how a factory functioned, and about how wealth was produced there, for example. Those were for courses on political economy, and I was able to combine everything that way. So that was a special concession from the university, also, because to be absent for an entire week was quite a lot, but when I was at my fifth year at the university in the Sociology school, some friends invited me to participate doing research, and I became an assistant to their very important research project, the first feminist research project in Nicaragua, but I wasn't really an assistant, I was really a part of the research group, and the title of the study is "Mujeres y agro-exportación en Nicaragua" (Women and Agricultural Exportation in Nicaragua), with Clara Mulgialday, Ana Qriquillou, with women researchers from the Centro de Investigaciones de la Reforma Agraria (Agrarian Reform Research Center). We were eight researchers that for the period of two years studied female workers' conditions in different agro-exportation sectors. And the research was published by the Sandinista government's INIM, the Instituto de la Mujer (Women's Institute). And that's when I turned my life towards research activities, and it was very innovative, because we finished in 1985, and it was the first feminist research done in Nicaragua, at the ATC, Asociación de Trabajadores del Campo (Rural Workers Association).

SG: And when did you start working for la FEM?

DM: Well, after I was part of that research project, I also went to the Sandinista government's Instituto del Estudio de la Mujer (Women's Research Institute) to do research on the women textile workers, at the place I had worked on.¹¹ And there we had a gender perspective that we developed with a Nicaraguan woman that had always lived in the United States, her name is Paola Pérez, I think she worked at the University of Berkeley. And she, well, we did that work on the situation of the female industrial workers, and it is titled "Industria, género y mujer en Nicaragua" (Industry, Gender, and Women in Nicaragua), we finished it in '87. It was of great satisfaction to me, to be able to do research about something I myself had worked on before as a textile worker, and I, also, the research about female rural workers had political influence in organizing women as rural workers inside the ATC. And then during the last years of the revolution I was able to work with the "Secretaría de la Mujer de ATC" (ATC's Women's Office).

SG: Can you very briefly explain the ATC for us?

DM: The ATC is, was the rural worker's organization, which led one of the biggest historic vindications for the rural world and the poorest people in Nicaragua, because capitalism and the dictatorship oppressed the workers in the countryside and in the cities. And, for

¹¹One of the goals of the Sandinista government was to improve the legal rights of women and attempt to eliminate systematic discrimination against women. Under the Somoza regime, women were much less educated and often restricted to social roles where they were subservient to men. (Zaremba, Laura M., "Nicaragua: Before and After the Revolution" (1992) 25 May 2017).

example, in these farms, my grandma, and other farm owners, had people working in conditions of absolute exploitation and vulnerability, without any rights. In almost feudal conditions of exploitation, without labor laws, with no contracts or social security, where people were less than people. Only the Sandinista Revolution and the ATC were able to change those conditions for rural workers, organizing unions, in agricultural and cattle industries. For the first time, workers in the coffee plantations had a union, the same with workers in the banana plantations, the workers in the sugar fields, the workers in the tobacco plantations, the workers in the cotton fields, in every single agricultural sector in Nicaragua.

SG: Were there other women involved in the ATC at the time?

DM: Oh, yes. There were lots of women, and all of us share being thrown out of the ATC.¹² For example, there's Olga María Espinosa, who is a real women workers' organizer, who was a leader since the times of land seizing actions after the triumph of the revolution, together with Edgardo García, and also María Teresa Blandón. In that mixed organization, our beloved brothers in the struggle, although we women also gave everything for the revolution and for the ATC, but men did not develop a compromise with the gendered demands of women. So, the best thing for them was to throw us out, and there were many ruptures, especially during the '90s, the year before '90, and then later on. I was thrown out of Estelí's ATC in 1993, when I was director of the Flor de Pino Women's Health Program. It was a clinic that served women workers in the tobacco industry, and, well, they tarnished my reputation, they really hurt me a lot, and accused me of many things that were not true, only so they could throw me out of the ATC, and they did it.

SG: What reasons did they give you for kicking you out?

DM: Well, there was a leader named Imelda González, she was in charge of the Secretaría de la Mujer (Ministry of Women) and I was in charge of the health program. The men made sure to pit us against each other, to confront each other on our own leadership capabilities, so they could ignore us, because they claim I wanted to take over, that I was not interested in serving the interests of women workers, that I was not transparent in my management of the clinic, everything had to do with money. And it was their tactic to keep saying this so women would lose their respect for me, they said many falsehoods about me, such as that, that I stole money, that I did not respect the structures of the Ministry of Women, and that I was a woman from the petit bourgeoisie. They said things that were not true, because I had my years, I had gone through that purge.

SG: What do you think the real reason was they kicked you out?

DM: I think they expelled me because my way of thinking was linked to feminism inside the ATC, with women such as Olga María, María Teresa, we were women who had the moral authority to demand from the leader's commitments for women's issues. And the national and regional leadership did not want to hear anything that came out of my mouth. I had too much influence among the women in the tobacco industry, I had a lot of

¹² The ATC and women of Nicaragua had a very contentious relationship. Although the Sandinista government purportedly aimed to integrate women into this new society, women still faced many challenges in asserting their positions alongside men. The women of Nicaragua persisted and changed the vision of the ATC, which eventually became characterized by its feminist positions (Disney, Jennifer Leigh, *Women's Activism and Feminist Agency in Mozambique and Nicaragua*, 2010).

respect among them, I had influence. So then, they could not bear that, and I believe that they acted in contradiction of their principles. And I believe that with everything they did, people understood what they had done, because all of the women workers were very sad to see me leave. And they went to my house to see me, and I had gotten backing for the project from some organizations in Austria, and all of those organizations sent letters to the ATC to protest my expulsion, and it had a political cost for the national government and for the ATC, and for the people in Managua and here in the region. But it was very hurtful, because it was, it is those moments in which, during the worst crisis of my life, and because of that a group of women in Austria also supported me, so that I could have some time, three, two months in Austria to think about the next project, something I wanted to do. And it was then that the idea for the creation of the “Fundación Entre Mujeres” (Between Women Foundation) came up. The lesson learned was that it was impossible to work on a real project for gender equality inside those mixed gender spaces. That we needed legitimate organizations, transparent, with women that took control of their own processes. And that without autonomy we could not achieve anything either, autonomy from the state, from the party, from the mixed gender organizations, from the leaders, and that only we women could do something for ourselves, so we had to create the FEM.

SG: And what year was that?

DM: The FEM was in 1995.

SG: And can you tell me briefly about what some of the strategies or the aims were of the FEM when you first started?

DM: We thought that the FEM is only a historical continuity of the ATC and the revolutionary process, and that the circumstances between '90 and '95 had worsened the living conditions in Nicaragua, because of privatizing efforts and structural changes brought by Violeta Barrios.¹³

SG: Can you explain those structural changes for us, briefly? What was it like during the Sandinistas and how did Chamorro change those policies?

DM: Yes, of course, we had a great revolutionary state, we had free education, a free health system, scholarships, social programs, production projects, a great state that helped cooperatives, and there were children services in rural areas, there were collective bargaining agreements between workers and the institutions or companies that guaranteed rights that had never been recognized by the state.¹⁴ But when doña Violeta came to power, the state was dismantled, it was completely weakened, it left the population out in the open. For example, the government began to privatize the health system, privatized education, we started to feel we had no roof on top of us. The state began to give back lands to people from the Somoza regime, to new people, that claimed lands, and other capitalists that emerged to take advantage of the privatization efforts in

¹³ After successfully tumbling the Somoza regime in 1980, the FSLN held on to power until the 1990 elections when they lost the presidency to Violeta Barrios de Chamorro. This is often referred to as the fall of the Revolution.

¹⁴ Cooperatives functioned as a part of the agricultural reform under the Sandinista government. These structures allowed economic growth and improved food security (Gies, Heather. "Nicaragua Booming Cooperative Sector Tied to Sandinista Legacy." TeleSUR, Web. 25 May 2017).

Nicaragua. And, of course, people in the countryside were worst off. And amid those circumstances, and needing to create an alternative for resistance was that FEM was born, to do something, but since the experience in the ATC had been so hard, we decided that this organization would not have professional women from the classes, well, professional women as the leaders, we wanted women from the communities to be the highest authority on the board of directors. So, FEM was born led by rural women, I am the only one not from the rural areas, I already told you where I was born, but my heart is from the countryside. The FEM's board of directors today is the same one from when it started, but now we are entering a transitioning process until 2013. What the 12 women of the development committee and I have built has been quite intense, we at the FEM have developed a political proposal that included as a priority buying land for women, thinking that without that land we could not achieve the structural changes to alter our subordinate condition. Because we also thought that to alter that condition of subordination it was essential to have gender consciousness, both complement each other. If there is no gender consciousness, there's no point in giving women land, because men end up deciding what to do with it, and she can't imagine any other option of what it means to be a woman. But there's also no point in working with rural women on creating gender consciousness if they do not have land and means of production. That is why as part of our strategy we began linking the act of buying land with a feminist reflection, creating awareness of our identity, thinking about the ways in which womanhood has been constructed, so we can deconstruct that model, which was the main impediment for women to leave the kitchen, and work the land, to stop taking care of the house and begin to do work that was more visible and recognized outside of the home. And all of that was a long process that we experienced, to work on creating consciousness and to work to buy land. And we have also developed other strategies such as educational programs, for adult women, and at the same time, the health and body care program, women gaining power in the FEM, their bodies, their own bodies, taking charge of their sexual relations, of their reproductive lives.¹⁵ And also, new now after 15 years, the possibility for some women to recognize other sexual options. In the rural work it is very rare that women openly declare themselves as lesbians, for example, but in the communities where we work we have couples that openly live their lives, and that makes us very happy too, because in the rural world this is very rare, it is for us almost a utopia.

SG: Have your strategies working with women changed over these 15 years?

DM: So, we have maintained very stable strategic lines, from a discourse and a theoretical concept based on women's interests, such as the struggle for land, education with a gendered perspective, the topics of sexual and reproductive health, the struggle against violence, and organizing possibilities for their economic self-empowerment, that's the reason for the cooperatives and for Café La Diosa in the fair-trade markets. Those have been our strategic lines, we have walked all of them in these 15 years, almost 16 years, we have progressed on some more than others. But achieving what we have has been possible because we have been persistent on those strategic lines. These changes are not part of a short breath, they are part of a larger breath, and they are profound processes,

¹⁵ One of the major feminist issues in Nicaragua involved the right to abortion and freedom over a woman's body. Before 2006, Nicaragua allowed abortions if doctors determined that a woman was at risk by carrying the child. FLSN leader Daniel Ortega had previously been in favor of abortion rights but his stance changed after influence from the Roman Catholic Church. (Frazier, Joseph. "Nicaraguan Leader Signs Abortion Law." The Guardian. Guardian News and Media, 19 Nov. 2006. Web. 25 May 2017.)

that will not change overnight. But we have to become better at some things: for example, the topic of sexual diversity is becoming more and more important in our communities, something we never conceived 15 years ago, it was, to think about that... And there are some things we have been working on very hard, such as the struggle against violence, and working much better in coordination with state institutions, in the Ministry of the Interior, the Women's Commission, we are now one of the strongest organizations here in Estelí to deal with cases of women murdered, to deal with trials against rapists, against sexual abuse, and all of this was not part of the plan when we started, but it is part of the same journey, the same strategy for fighting for rural women's equality. We consider ourselves feminists, and there are around 18 organizations from all over the country, all of them very diverse, based on the interests of the people, which means that these women are not so much intellectuals, they are women, organizations that bring together common women in the barrios and communities, and from there do the everyday work against violence, for women's empowerment. Other groups are becoming part of our feminist movement, such as the lesbian group Artemisa, many trans people that are waking up and joining our movement.¹⁶ And the FEM feels very comfortable to share our space with the Red Afro-descendiente de la Costa Caribe (Caribbean Coast's Afro-Descendants Network), we feel as black as they are, and we feel as Indigenous as the women that are part of the Red Afro-descendientes, and they feel a great closeness towards us, also with the women of 8 de Marzo (March 8),¹⁷ la Red de Mujeres (Women's Network), well, the women of 8 de Marzo, from Mazaia,¹⁸ and all of these new groups such as Pantera Rosa (Pink Panther), we are looking at the face of a new feminism, much diverse, a rural feminism, one we could not imagine before, we could only imagine that feminism from the upper, urban middle-class, with commitments to the upper class, that is the only one considered possible before. But this feminism that we fight for, that we believe in is possible, it is a feminism embodied in the reality of women's lives.

SG: Can you define feminism for me, the way that you meant it?

DM: For me, well, feminism is a political project, an alternative for change to gain equality for women, and it is also a conceptual project, concerning gender inequality. We can't conceive of a feminist against the right of abortion, against violence, against sexual and reproductive rights and women's freedom.

SG: And can you tell me a bit about the importance of rural feminism?

DM: Well, as I say this, I think this very recent, just as since the beginnings of feminism, or say inside feminism, there has always been what we call feminism of difference, where, for example, black women share a commonality with white women in the northern countries. It is also through this feminism of difference and in these other new organizations for rural women, that have done the work to create a feminist perspective,

¹⁶ Many people in the LGBTQ+ community participated in the Sandinista Revolution yet their rights were not made a priority. In 1989, activists in Nicaragua led a movement that resulted in the creation of many community centers focused on LGBTQ+ rights. However, the LGBTQ+ community faced a major setback when Violeta Chamorro signed Article 205 into law that imposed a sentence of up to three years in prison for "anyone who induces, promotes, propagandizes, or practices sex among persons of the same sex in a scandalous manner." (Rapp, Linda. "Nicaragua." GLBTQ Archives. 2014. Web. 25 May 2017.)

¹⁷ March 8th is the United Nation's International Women's Day.

¹⁸ Nicaragua is divided into fifteen departments and two autonomous regions. This could be a misspelling of either "Masaya" the city or the Masaya Department in Nicaragua.

that women have been finding their way towards feminism. Then, there are women that say they identify themselves with feminism, especially because they are learning to take charge of their lives, especially because they are learning about being independent, especially because they are demanding equality from their partners, and equality and respect in their sexual relationships, and some have other sexual options, still undisclosed, are conflicted over their sexual identities, and they find in feminism answers to those questions. In a couple of days, we are having a forum about this, with all of the women, in the communities where FEM works there are at least 3 trans women, that are part of the FEM, and are from the countryside. And there are at least two couples made up of lesbian women, that could not have blossomed if not for the FEM, because they feel the FEM is a place where they are respected. But this is only starting to develop, and I think that is the true rural feminism: it is not only producing coffee, it is not only owning farms, it is not only about education. Because there are many women that in 2013 will earn their high school degrees from the FEM, women that began to be educated in the FEM, in 2013 they will have their degrees. But also, our fight for rights has to be based on a rural feminist movement, and a movement, it is a NGO that also becomes a movement when we bring together 1,500 women in Estelí to protest the murder of a woman, for example. On May the 9th we mobilized 1,500 women from Estelí, and we are a movement, and the ability we have to convene women is enormous. And the respect we are gaining in the communities where we share our struggle with them is very big.

SG: You offered a really complete definition of feminism. Are you a feminist?

DM: Yes.

SG: I'd also like to ask your opinion about the relationship between scholarship or research and activism or the organizing you are doing with all that?

DM: The research work I participated in? Which do you mean?

SG: No, in general, just scholarship or research that might occur at the university and activism. Is there a way they come together?

DM: Well, that connection only began since 2008. For the first time, in Nicaragua we had a master's program on gender and development at the UCA. The feminist movement that we are a part of fought for that, and I had the privilege of being one of the students. I was chosen as one of the women to attend the master's program, and it was something wonderful for me, because I had not gone to school for a long time, since I left the UCA in 1984, and I never went back. And I had been away so long working and organizing, I had no academic connections, so then, at the beginning I was very scared to enter the program, because I thought I could not compete with all of the young people. But it was a very enriching experience, because I was able to organize my ideas in an academic sense, to be able to synthesize my thoughts, to be able to analyze, and I profoundly thought about the things I had done before, and those I would like to pursue in the future. We now have research, the body of research is still underdeveloped, but know we there are new graduates, others in the master's program, and in the future, I would like to participate in some feminist research projects, since it was my starting point when I began my journey.

SG: You also mentioned that during the revolution the state was responsible for health care, but can you tell me in recent years what is the role of women organizations in meeting women's health needs?

DM: None at all. The state has a very androcentric conception of women's health; the predominant concept is that of the binomial mother-child equation. So, the priority is women's prenatal health, care for newborns, for pregnancies. There are many women, the government wants, at all costs, to be recognized for the objectives of the new millennium, and for working on the country's high number of maternity deaths, and it is there their efforts have gone to. But that limits the possibilities of women being understood as complete subjects, where not only their reproductive lives matter. In a contradictory act, the state worries about maternity deaths, but suspended Article 165 of the Penal Code, which now makes therapeutic abortion illegal, and since 2006 the feminist movement and women have led an arduous fight to bring back the right to therapeutic abortion in Nicaragua, because it is one of the most dangerous things working against women's health and lives. Also, eliminating that right was a concession that the Sandinista government made to the Catholic Church in the context of the 2006 elections.¹⁹ After all of these years, the government has not been interested in the thousands of women that die because of the illegality of therapeutic abortions. So, health conditions are not at all favorable, and we have no short term possibilities of things getting better. That is why the restitution of the right to therapeutic abortion is a large part of our agenda, of our fundamental vindications. And as feminists, we are not only fighting for the right to therapeutic abortions, but also for the right to choose, but it has been fundamental to include the right to therapeutic abortions as part of our agenda in recent times. The country is, well, violence is a very serious problem, right, there are so many abused women, suffering all sorts of violence, which is also a public health problem. We have increasing numbers of cases of AIDS, of HIV, many women, stay at home women, infected. And there are no clear state prevention policies, or the idea of understanding women as protagonists in our own lives and health, because the state sees us as beggars and not as citizens, only as beggars, and not as citizens.

SG: Switching gears, I also want to ask you if in your opinion if you think any of the current international policies or neoliberal policies are impacting rural women in Nicaragua today?

DM: Of course. Unfortunately, Nicaragua's destiny is still decided by the WTO, the IMF, and the World Bank, and there's no clear divide between the state and these multinational institutions.²⁰ For example, Nicaragua's agriculture, we still see the use of transgenics,²¹ the use, there's no development of organic agriculture, there is a dependency on technology, and we see that the priority for the state in rural areas is to link agriculture to the economic interests of the rich, to the top layers of the country's dominant class.

SG: Are there ways that those policies impact women in particular?

¹⁹ The FSLN held power in Nicaragua from 1979 to 1990, where it lost to the Unión Nacional Opositora (UNO- National Opposition Union) in 1990. After losing the next two elections, the leader of the FSLN, Daniel Ortega, was re-elected as President in 2006 ("Constitutional Reform and Women's Rights in Nicaragua." AWID, 24 June 2015. Web. 25 May 2017).

²⁰ (WTO) World Trade Organization, (IMF) International Monetary Fund.

²¹ Transgenics are organisms created by a type of genetic modification where genetic material is introduced into a new organism.

DM: Yes, because, for example, resources and products that receive subsidies from the United States' government are brought into the country, people don't want to produce anything, it becomes too expensive for women to produce beans and corn, and the problem is that there is a destruction of the ways the countryside was configured. The people of the countryside are migrating because the quality of the fields has decreased, because of environmental damages, because of water shortages, lack of natural resources. And all of this has to do with a series of global policies, I mean, climate change, its effects in Nicaragua, it's the effects of the damages and gas emissions produced by the richer countries, not by the people cutting trees out here. I mean, there are policies that affect the living conditions of people in the rural areas, in the northern part of Nicaragua, where I believe that nobody has taken the mantle to foment and support rural economies, and food security and sovereignty. There are laws, this government has passed laws for food sovereignty, for food security, but the mechanisms to put them in place are not visible, and we still have not seen any real proposals for rural, sustainable development.

SG: You mentioned that you have some relationships with women organizations in Nicaragua, but do you also have relationships with organizations in other countries that work with you in solidarity?

DM: Yes, right, we here in Nicaragua have with the women, like I said before, from the feminist movement, here locally we have links with other women groups to share our strengths to deal with what happens locally that affects women's lives. Outside of Nicaragua, we have relationships with women struggling in Honduras, that are also from the countryside. The name of the group is Cooperativa Guadalupe Carney (Guadalupe Carney Cooperative), our relationship is a priority to us, they are rural women fighting against Lobo's dictatorship, but also fighting for land, which is something very important in Honduras right now. Because there is a process... they are another group of solidarity that began in 1980, and we also have a close relationship with them, and also groups that share solidarity with us in Austria, the women of ELSA that were originally part of the old volunteer brigades that came in the '80s to pick coffee and cotton, to help with the revolution, we still maintain those ties. And also, connections with NGOs that have been consistent with us, for example Paz con Dignidad (Peace with Dignity), a Spanish organization, which is a Spanish NGO, that has important positions about equality, and that is very respectful to our processes, and is financially helping us in projects to economically empower women, and in all our ideological projects. We have, also, alliances with individual people, which makes the FEM also an international space, we should create a FEM passport [laugh] because it has become more and more a multicultural organization, and a place where people from many countries share ideas, and we feel very happy for that.

SG: Diana, I wanted to thank you, you've shared so much about your own life and the work that I know is really personal to you. We really appreciate your time and your work.

DM: Many thanks.

SG: Thank you.

DM: Wow, time flew by!