

“Construyendo la Mujer Nueva: The Image and Reality of the Revolutionary ‘New Woman’”

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Late in 1985, the Nicaraguan Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (FSLN) produced a comic in *Barricada*, one of the daily newspapers that circulated at the time of the Nicaraguan revolution and into the decade of Sandinista control, which commented upon the status of women’s liberation five years following the Sandinista victory. The cartoon, entitled “Unite and Fight,” depicts a man and a woman examining the ball and chain that is attached to each of their ankles.¹ The woman helps the man break his chain before indicating that he should help with her chain as well. In his exuberance over being liberated, the man leaves the woman with her leg extended. She remains shackled.

This cartoon conveys the attitude many women held in Latin America during the era of the Cold War. Despite the FSLN’s insistence that they stood for gender equality, the experiences of Nicaraguan women convey another story. Women in Nicaragua integrated themselves fully into the struggle for national liberation from corruption, often putting their own needs aside in favor of the needs of the larger population. Women’s efforts, however, were not always rewarded with the promised attention to equality.² Much like the woman in the

¹ “Unite and Fight,” *Barricada*, November/December 1985; the comic can be most easily seen in Maxine Molyneux, “The Politics of Abortion in Nicaragua: Revolutionary Pragmatism, or Feminism in the Realm of Necessity?” in *Feminist Review* no. 29 (Summer 1988): 128. *Barricada* was the official FSLN circular; the contemporary *La Prensa* was more anti-Sandinista during the 1970s. Archives of both newspapers can be found at Stanford University’s Hoover Institute and the University of Kansas’s Watson Library.

² As will be discussed later, the Mexican student movement did not list gender equality among its aims. Those participating believed gender equality would occur as a result of establishing parity in other areas. Similar mentality existed in other revolutionary movements

Barricada cartoon, they remained chained to the concepts of masculinity and femininity left over from decades past.

Key to the shared experiences of those in Latin America are the concepts of *machismo* and *marianismo*, the constructions of masculinity and femininity. *Machismo* and *marianismo*, firmly rooted within the Catholic traditions of Latin America, enforce a gendered hierarchy that has dominated the region for centuries. Such a structure influenced the way in which men and women interacted with one another and with members of their own gender.

The hierarchically superior member of the gendered binary, the *macho* established the ultimate ideal of manliness as an honorable and valorous individual, reliant only upon himself. Writing in the 1950s, the Mexican writer Octavio Paz explains the *macho* becomes hermetically sealed from those around him, enclosed in himself. *Hombría* is thus rooted in invulnerability and stoicism, crafting a careful repression of men's emotions.³ The concept of *hombría*, especially as Paz sees it, becomes something less concerned with actual dominance over other men and more concerned with demonstration and performance *for* other men; men must prove to other men that they are capable

globally that sought to free themselves from oppression. Notable examples include the Chinese and Russian Revolutions in the twentieth century.

³ Despite the fact that Paz was focused on Mexican man, he illuminates concepts of gender that are applicable to Latin America as a whole as *machismo* was not a phenomenon unique to Mexico. In addition to this, he also gives an indication through his writing as to the progressive attitude that some male members of the various Latin American social movements would adopt in later years. This progressive attitude and reflective awareness won him the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1990. "El 'macho' es un ser hermético, encerrado en sí mismo, capaz de guardarse y guardar lo que se le confía. La hombría se mide por la invulnerabilidad ante las armas enemigas o ante los impactos del mundo exterior. El estoicismo es la más alta de nuestras virtudes guerreras y políticas." Octavio Paz, *El laberinto de la soledad y otras obras* (New York: Penguin Books, 1997), 52.

of meeting societal expectations and this is demonstrated through control of those deemed socially inferior.

As the subordinate component of the dichotomy, women operate chiefly as an “other” against which men can contrast themselves. *Marianismo*, firmly rooted in the Catholic tradition of Latin America, urges women to take up the example of the Virgin Mary. Mary embodies both the expectation of motherhood and suffering; even the images of the Madonna and child carry a degree of foresight to the pain the crucifixion would cause. Mary is also a source of shelter, as is apparent with images of Madonna della Misericordia; images like the one included here show Mary protecting devout Catholics from evil forces.⁴ Other versions of Mary are more aggressive. Diego de la Cruz portrayed Mary with arrows in her hands, yet her attention is concentrated on sheltering those in her care. Domenico di Zanobi’s altarpiece entitled *Madonna del Soccorso* (*Madonna of Rescue or Refuge*) is much more active in her defense of her child from Satan; within the piece, Mary brandishes what appears to be a stick, prepared to defend her own with violence.⁵ These two depictions of Mary represent the basis for the expectations placed upon Latin American women through *marianismo*.

⁴ Diego de la Cruz, *The Virgin of Mercy with the Catholic Monarchs and their family*, c. 1486-1499, painting, 149cm by 127cm, Wikipedia Commons, accessed April 5, 2018, https://gl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ficheiro:Diego_de_la_Cruz,_La_Virgen_de_la_Misericordia_con_los_Reyes_Cat%C3%B3licos_y_su_familia._Monasterio_de_las_Huelgas,_Burgos.png.

⁵ Domenico di Zanobi, *Madonna del Soccorso*, c. 1450-1485, painting, accessed April 5, 2018, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Domenico_di_zanobi_\(maestro_della_nativit%C3%A0_johnson\),_madonna_del_soccorso,_1450-1485_ca..JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Domenico_di_zanobi_(maestro_della_nativit%C3%A0_johnson),_madonna_del_soccorso,_1450-1485_ca..JPG).



Domenico di Zanobi, *Madonna del Soccorso* (c.1450-1485). Photo by Sailko, used under CC-BY 3.0 license.



Diego de la Cruz. *The Virgin of Mercy with the Catholic Monarchs and their family* (c.1486-1499). Public domain.

I have been two women and I have lived two lives. One of these women wanted to do everything according to the classic feminine code: get married, have children, be supportive, docile, and nurturing. The other woman yearned for the privileges men enjoyed: independence, self-reliance, a public life, mobility, lovers. I have spent the greater part of my life trying to balance and blend these two identities, to avoid being torn apart by their opposing forces. In the end I believe I have found a way that allows both women to live together beneath the same skin.⁶

⁶ “He sido dos mujeres y vivido dos vidas. Una de mis mujeres quería hacerlo todo según los anales clásicos de la feminidad: casarse, tener hijos, ser complaciente, dócil y nutricia. La otra quería los privilegios masculinos: independencia, valerse por sí misma, tener vida pública, movilidad, amantes. Aprender a balancearlas y unificar sus fuerzas para que no me desgarran sus luchas a mordiscos y jaladas de pelos me ha tomado gran parte de la vida. Creo que al fin he logrado que ambas coexistan bajo la misma piel.” Gioconda Belli, *El país bajo mi piel* (New York: Vintage Español, 2003), 12; Gioconda Belli, *The Country Under My Skin*, trans. Kristina Cordero and Gioconda Belli (New York: Anchor Books, 2003), ix-x.

The two lives described by Nicaraguan poet, activist, and intellectual, Gioconda Belli serve as an example of the struggle many Latin American women faced during the Global Sixties. Belli, like those women around her, struggled to reconcile expectations of femininity with their own desires, which could be highly incompatible with what their families demanded of them. Women like Belli witnessed their male counterparts taking up arms, journeying to the mountains to escape the corruption that ran rampant in the cities, penning intricate and nuanced inquiries into the status quo of their society, and suggesting change. The increased reflection on social life allowed for the development of an intellectual dialogue on inequality in its many forms, which drove many Latin Americans to political activism of one type or another. Latin American women prior to the mid-twentieth century struggled against the patriarchy in order to bring notions of social justice into the public light. The women who came after them championed their efforts and followed in their footsteps where public actions were concerned. Given the progression of women's presence in the public sphere as laborers, women in the 1960s and 1970s exceeded the boundaries set by their predecessors and reached new heights as revolutionaries and rebels; this does not mean, however, that they were free of their more traditional duties within the house or the movement.

Within Nicaragua, women actively participated in education, not just of their own children but of those around them or even those they traveled long distances to help. Women engaged in the teaching profession, long referred to as *normalistas*, became the first waves of highly educated females. As they

remained in constant contact with one another in order to discuss the problems they faced as *normalistas* and suggest solutions, they became the first waves of feminist thought in Latin America, questioning the education they handed down and what it meant for themselves and the children they instructed.⁷

The October 1979 national census in Nicaragua included questions on literacy in order to determine the need for a literacy campaign and the accessibility to those who needed education; in a span of ten days, the census found that of the 50.34% illiterate Nicaraguans, the majority lived within the central mountain and Atlantic regions.⁸ Many Nicaraguan women credited their own education with instilling in them a need to pursue social justice and change. Many of the women included within this research attended La Asunción and received schooling focused on making them more benevolent and worldly

⁷ Education for girls often stopped around the age of thirteen or whenever her parents deemed her of a marriageable age. Francesca Miller, *Latin American Women and the Search for Social Justice*, Hanover: University Press of New England, 36.

⁸ The 1980 campaign lasted March 3-August 23, 1980. The national census that took place beforehand surveyed citizens above the age of ten to gauge their level of literacy, the accessibility of the illiterate, and their willingness to engage in schooling. The results demonstrated that 28.4% of those in urban areas were illiterate while rural rates were much higher, falling at 75.44%. Females had lower illiteracy rates than males, with the census reporting 49.28% and 51.50%, respectively. The teachers entering the field were members of the People's Literacy Army (*Ejército Popular de Alfabetización*, EPA) or the Citizen's Literacy Promoters (*Alfabetizadores Populares*, AP); the EPA sent 52,180 *brigadistas* while the AP sent 95,582 *alfabetizadores*. Ulrike Hanemann, *Nicaragua's Literacy Campaign* (Hamburg, Ger.: UNESCO Institute for Education, 2005); Juan B. Arrien, *Literacy in Nicaragua: Paper commissioned for the EFA Global Monitoring Report 2006, Literacy for Life* (UNESCO, 2006), 6. UNESCO places these statistics in helpful world contexts in their September 2017 Fact Sheets, "More Than One-Half of Children and Adolescents Are Not Learning Worldwide," (UNESCO-UIS, 2017), <http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/fs46-more-than-half-children-not-learning-en-2017.pdf> and "Literacy Rates Continue to Rise from One Generation to the Next" http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/fs45-literacy-rates-continue-rise-generation-to-next-en-2017_0.pdf. Though these UNESCO sources present statistics for the twenty-first century, they demonstrate the lasting effects of literacy campaigns and struggles to include more of the populace in the political process and how literacy rates compare across the globe.

citizens. The women activists from La Asunción understood that providing a better education to their fellow country people would not only increase their quality of life but improve the situation of those around them in the countryside. Women involved in the Sandinista Revolution or government in Nicaragua were encouraged to take part in literacy campaigns; at least half of those involved as teachers and nearly half as students in such literacy campaigns were women.⁹ In subsequent years, the Sandinista government conducted other literacy campaigns in indigenous languages, which reached approximately 12,000 people.

In their capacity as revered wives and mothers within Latin American society, women involved in social movements often found themselves employed providing care to other rebels as well as their children. Many women were entrusted with mountain encampments and provisioning the guerrillas with food and supplies. Nicaraguan women operated safe houses for those comrades on the run, which additionally operated as training grounds, expanding educational parameters to revolutionary theory and weapons training.¹⁰ This level of involvement could be used as an entry into the revolution for women in

⁹ Randall, *Sandinista's Daughters Revisited*, 25.

¹⁰ Women did not necessarily have to run safe houses on their own. Vidaluz Meneses and her husband ran safe houses together, as he was equally idealistic. Edmundo Meneses, Vidaluz's father and Tachito Somoza's ambassador to Guatemala, warned Vidaluz's husband that her "poetic and romantic nature" would lead to her being manipulated by revolutionaries; Edmundo cautioned Vidaluz's husband not to allow her to participate in such activities. Luckily for Vidaluz, her husband shared in her revolutionary leanings, which she says gave her "a certain leeway in that respect." When Edmundo pressed the issue, Vidaluz confronted him via letter, explaining, "I was nothing more than the product of the education that they themselves gave me—by sending me to religious schools, by wanting me to have values such as justice and morality, and so forth." Margaret Randall, *Risking a Somersault in the Air: Conversations with Nicaraguan Writers*, trans. Christina Mills, ed. Floyce Alexander (San Francisco: Curbstone Press, 1984), 45-6.

Nicaragua. Women could leverage their positions as individuals already involved to be included in other forms of rebellious activity.

In the aftermath of the 1972 earthquake in Managua, women engaged directly in humanitarian work. In addition to drawing attention to widespread suffering, the humanitarian efforts demonstrated the level of corruption present within the Nicaraguan government. The greed which drove Somoza to sell Red Cross blankets highlighted the extent to which the Nicaraguan people needed assistance and women rose to the challenge of aiding their impoverished neighbors.¹¹ Gioconda Belli recalls spending days with Ángela Saballos, a journalist for *El Nuevo Diario* and fellow Sandinista, following the earthquake. Detailing their efforts, she recalls the political undertones to their humanitarian work as the two women recruited earthquake survivors to reclaim aid from the corrupt government.¹²

Despite their roles as caretakers, women in Nicaragua were able to exploit their unique place in society as revered wives and mothers to avoid suspicion as they recruited discontented individuals and helped give them the tools which would help them change not only their lot in life but the state of the country they would leave to those who came after them.

¹¹ See Walter LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1993), 227.

¹² “Las dos fingíamos ocuparnos en brindar ayuda humanitaria a los damnificados del terremoto, pero en realidad se trataba de un trabajo político. En el colegio Centroamérica reclutábamos nuevos miembros para el sandinismo entre los refugiados y los organizábamos para que reclamaran al gobierno la ayuda que Somoza se estaba robando a la vista y paciencia de todo el mundo.” Gioconda Belli, *El país bajo mi piel* (New York: Vintage Español, Random House, Inc., 2002), 80.

In addition to providing aid to rebels and those they wished to help, women operated as messengers for the social movements in which they were involved. They transported comrades without drawing the attention of soldiers or enemy sympathizers between safe houses and clandestine meetings, ensuring their *compañeros*' safety by throwing off suspicion and using the ideals of *machismo* against the male soldiers. Other women procured information themselves through whatever positions they held at the time they joined the social movement or gained after they had become involved. Women's ability to pass along such information to their comrades—male and female alike—helped show the rebels how and where to apply pressure in order to affect the greatest amount of change.

In addition to continuing those duties carried out by the women that preceded them, the female activists of Nicaragua developed new avenues of involvement, including the ability to act as emissaries and ambassadors. This engagement perhaps stemmed from women's roles as messengers but provided them with a greater degree of agency than merely delivering missives or individuals. Women like Sofia Montenegro combined their duties as messengers with other newfound duties. In an interview with Margaret Randall wherein she discussed her role as a Sandinista, Montenegro recalled fulfilling messenger duties alongside her responsibilities to move individuals and leak information to the press, deriving credibility from the Somoza regime from her family name.¹³ Montenegro's summation of her duties as a revolutionary helps to illustrate the

¹³ Randall, *Sandinista's Daughters Revisited*, 294.

complexities Nicaraguan women faced as they strove to oust Somoza as well as the number of responsibilities they balanced out of necessity. As the daughter and sister of prominent National Guardsmen, Montenegro suffered a degree of distrust from her fellow Sandinistas yet was able to act in a variety of capacities which lent her more freedom than compliance with her family's conservative stance would have; her prominence in Nicaraguan society allowed her to feed misinformation to the Somoza-supporting media or to sympathetic foreign networks, thus positioning her as a representative of the Sandinista cause.

Women were able to exercise power as emissaries on a multitude of levels, which included and moved beyond their own communities. On local levels, women constructed secret networks of conspirators "who offered money, housing for those in hiding, and ceded their cars to transport *compañeros*."¹⁴ Belli notes that they still participated in their traditional efforts of collecting funds and securing safety and transportation for their comrades; this work, however, provided opportunities that demonstrated the women's capability for leadership, which translated into them being appointed to positions beyond their own homes and communities. In the late 1970s, Belli and Malena de Montis operated as a team, embarking on a month-long tour of various European countries to gain support for the Sandinistas.¹⁵ Nora Astorga worked as a lawyer, providing

¹⁴ "En los barrios se organizaban redes secretas y en todos los estratos sociales lográbamos hacernos de nuevos colaboradores que ofrecían dinero, albergue para cuadros clandestinas y cedían sus automóviles para movilizar compañeros." Belli, *El país bajo mi piel*, 89-90.

¹⁵ "Malena [de Montis] y yo recorrimos no sé cuántos países en el mes de mayo. La simpatía que despertaba aquella lucha desigual de muchachos jovencitos y desarraigados contra un ejército armado hasta los dientes, nos abría las puertas por doquier. Agotadas por las reuniones incesantes donde repetíamos la misma historia. Malena y yo andábamos, sin

information on her clients to the FSLN. After the Sandinista victory in 1979, she served as special attorney general, prosecuting around 7,500 members of Somoza's National Guard. In 1984, Astorga was appointed Nicaragua's Ambassador to the United States. Her appointment was refused by President Ronald Regan due to her participation in the assassination of known torturer General Reynaldo Pérez Vega, a man on the CIA's payroll.¹⁶

Despite the fact that women were able to participate in the Nicaraguan social movements, they did not necessarily do so without experiencing discrimination. Prejudice came from a variety of sources, including their fellow rebels and those they were working against. They were conscious of the fact that many of the men around them viewed them as nonthreatening, as is evinced by the opinions that women would lessen suspicion if they accompanied *compañeros* on their missions. Gioconda Belli recognized that her non-Sandinista coworkers and superiors viewed her as nothing more than a bourgeois woman dressed as a hippie, and utilized their assumption to throw off suspicion.¹⁷

embargo, posesionadas de nuestra misión, estimuladas por la repuesta y la acogida que teníamos. No importaba el cansancio. Todavía encontrábamos fuerzas para ir a parques, comer apfelstrudel en Viena, recorrer los canales en Amsterdam, pequeñas diversiones que nos daban gran felicidad." Belli, *El país bajo mi piel*, 308. Malena de Montis went on to become a renowned human rights activist and founder of the Center for Democratic Participation and Development and the Women's Development Fund, which worked to support Nicaraguan women. She founded the Women's Coalition in Nicaragua and remains active with the Autonomous Women's Movement. A profile on de Montis can be found at the following location: Siobhán Hayes, "Malena de Montis, Nicaragua: Fodem/Cenzontle's Economic Empowerment Programs for Women," Women's Learning Partnership for Rights, Development, and Peace, December 5, 2007, <http://www.learningpartnership.org/lib/malena-de-montis-nicaragua-fodemcenzontle%E2%80%99s-economic-empowerment-programs-women>.

¹⁶ Randall, *Sandinista's Daughters Revisited*, 22. Astorga later became the ambassador to the United Nations.

¹⁷ "Sabía que me verían como lo que parecía: una muchachita burguesa vestida a lo hippie." *Ibid.*, 104.

Other women who associated with the social movements noticed they were given tasks typically associated with women, such as laundry or cooking. When asked later about such sexism, Belli noted, “I recall someone showing me a document in 1970 in which some of the women questioned the fact that they were largely being assigned ‘womanly tasks,’ like cooking for the comrades, managing safehouses, that sort of thing. But I can’t say that I noticed any gender discrimination at the time.”¹⁸ Women certainly had varying degrees of awareness of the sexism they encountered, and some experienced it in intervals rather than consistently.

Sexism for these women existed in a number of forms, including a lack of confidence in their abilities. Women may have been elevated to positions of authority or given responsibilities they would not have normally had, but this did not mean that they were given complete trust. Doris Tijerino experienced sexism throughout her job as a police chief.

During a conversation with coworkers and superiors, she encountered one man who went on and on listing my many talents. And then he said they’d brought me into the police and discovered I was an excellent chief! I’ll never forget how I felt that day. I asked that man, right there in front of all those people, if after twenty years of revolutionary militancy they’d just discovered that I can think. It made people extremely uncomfortable. They said I was ‘difficult,’ that it was hard to work with me because I came out and said things like that. But, I can tell you, I felt continually attacked and offended. I had to make a huge effort, always, not to let bitterness get the best of me. My Party history won me authority and respect at the Ministry of the Interior, but I had problems the whole time, serious problems with the male leadership. All the women comrades did.¹⁹

¹⁸ Randall, *Sandino’s Daughters Revisited*, 175.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 218.

During an interview with Margaret Randall, Tijerino gave examples of the sexism she experienced in her recounting of various meetings she attended with other members in her department. She began to notice that her ideas were not being taken seriously when she made suggestions for improvements or new programs for the department. Tijerino started crediting her subordinates—male subordinates—or other departments for coming up with ideas to implement. She confessed, “I had the complicity of a whole series of subordinates in this... they understood as well as I did that it was the only way we were going to get anything done.”²⁰ The willingness of her male subordinates to cooperate in such a plan while accepting the ingenuity of Tijerino’s designs suggests that the male attitude was changing as the men seemed inclined to accept Tijerino’s ideas rather than challenging her with their own, which might have been more readily accepted by their superiors.

Women were also disparaged for their emotions and their relationships. Most women who attained high ranks within social movements were expected to attain the levels of stoicism practiced by their male counterparts.²¹ Rather than becoming genuine equals, they became assimilated into *macho* culture instead of breaking down the harmful stereotypes that came to effect more of the Latin American population than just the men.²² Recounting an experience in which she

²⁰ Randall, *Sandino’s Daughters Revisited*, 175.

²¹ This concept is present within Octavio Paz’s work as well as the testaments of revolutionary women: “Circalás al sufrimiento, y a su capacidad para resistirlo sin protesta, la mujer trasciende su condición y adquiere los mismos atributos del hombre.” Paz, *El laberinto de la soledad*, 60.

²² In the introduction to *Sandino’s Daughters Revisited*, Margaret Randall notes, “female combatants who were able to most completely assume a style of analysis and conduct

informed Bayardo Arce and René Núñez that she was leaving her position as the director of several television networks in post-1979 Nicaragua in order to serve in a secretarial position under Modesto, a man with whom she had a romantic relationship, Gioconda Belli provides an excellent example of such sexism. Both Sandinista leaders told her, “You’re acting like a woman. You’re leaving a job that’s perfect for you in order to follow the man you love. It doesn’t make sense;” despite Arce’s and Núñez’s criticism, Belli took the secretarial position; her reflections upon the choice are full of regret, especially as she remarks, “that mistake really cost me. It really never stopped costing me, because things were never the same after that. I never again received the same kind of respect.”²³ Other women, such as Daisy Zamora, were punished in similar manners for not giving into their emotions—or emotions the men felt they *should* have. Rather than sacrificing her position to follow the man she loved, Zamora tactfully declined the advances of one of her male superiors; seeing himself as deeply scorned, the superior exercised his masculine privilege to prevent Zamora from being hired by United Nations Representative Jaime Balcázar. When she later discovered the reason for not attaining such a prestigious and promising appointment in the United Nations delegation, Zamora reflected that “there was

considered to be ‘male’ rose to the highest levels of power permitted them within a structure controlled by the men.” Randall, *Sandinista’s Daughters Revisited*, 24. Similar issues arose in contemporary China with the emergence of Iron Girls. Critics of these masculinized women voiced a succinct and direct critique that does not appear in the case of Latin America, yet still applies: “The appearance of ‘fake boys’ and ‘iron women’ is a disguised form of discrimination against women; it belittles them. Its basic point still is that men are better than women, and that therefore when women are strong they should resemble men.” Emily Honig and Gail Hershatter, *Personal Voices: Chinese Women in the 1980’s* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), 26.

²³ Randall, *Sandinista’s Daughters Revisited*, 177.

a gap between what the revolution offered its women and what we women found in our day to day relationship with ‘Comandante X,’ a man still very much formed in the old ideas.”²⁴

Women found themselves in impossible situations, unable to choose between emotionality and stoicism, their perceived options. Belli recalls asking herself if she was looking to be happy or be a revolutionary, to be an emotional woman or a “new man” as described by Che Guevara and other cultural expectations.²⁵ The descriptors appear to always be diametrically opposed rather than potential pairings, a solution which would be more appropriate for a progressive revolutionary state. Women thus become de-sexed in a manner akin to Lady Macbeth, unable or unwilling to fulfill either the performed masculinity or femininity as defined by cultural standards.²⁶

Even if some women did not experience sexism themselves, it did not go unnoticed by their *compañeras*, who, especially in Nicaragua, became quite vocal about their disappointment in and distrust of the revolutionary movement; many of them, in retrospect, came to realize the degree of misogyny they experienced during their revolutionary years was much higher than they initially perceived it to be. Despite being criticized for their interest or disinterest in

²⁴ Ibid., 111.

²⁵ “¿Qué escoge usted? ¿Es feliz o es revolucionaria? ¿Se portará como mujer emotiva, o escogerá ser <<hombre nuevo>>, ese constructo utópico, paradigma de nuestros sueños, capaz de sacrificar cosa por la patria?” Belli, *El país bajo mi piel*, 119.

²⁶ William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, in *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare* (New York: Avenel Books), 1049. The essence of Lady Macbeth’s struggle can be found within Act 1, Scene 5, Lines 30-37: “Come, you spirits / That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here, / And fill me from the crown to the toe top-full / Of direst cruelty. Make thick my blood. / Stop up the access and passage to remorse, / That no compunctious visitings of nature / Shake my fell purpose, / nor keep peace between / The effect and it!”

romantic relationships, they watched their *compañeros* carry out numerous affairs with fellow revolutionaries and women from outside the country coming to observe the very same types of relationships for which the *compañeras* were being chastised even after numerous years of distinguished service to the movement.²⁷ Gioconda Belli, despite arguing that she did not personally experience sexism, remembers participating in a meeting in which,

[f]or the first time, someone insinuated that maybe women should not be a part of the active army units. It seemed absurd to me, and I said, ‘How can you even think that when women have demonstrated that they are equally as good soldiers as the men during the insurrection?’ I don’t know how many months later, nevertheless, army command—with Humberto Ortega at the head—decided that women would only occupy administrative posts.²⁸

Such instances of implicitly felt—yet explicitly acted upon—misogyny deepened women’s distrust of the FSLN as an entity that only paid lip service to the issue of women’s equality. They watched their leaders, the Ortega brothers in particular, proclaim the progressive nature of the Sandinistas while issuing

²⁷ Gioconda Belli remarks upon this, upon being reprimanded for beginning a relationship with an American, a man who later became her husband: “¿Cómo aceptaba yo con mansedumbre esos argumentos? ¿Acaso no me había percatado de que a ningún compañero le ponían trabas sobre sus compañías femininas? ¿No me daba cuenta que ellos se permitían acostarse con extranjeras, con periodistas, con quienes se les venía a la gana, aun teniendo cargos más sensibles que el mío? ¿Qué acaso el jefe de no sé qué organismo de inteligencia no estaba casado con una gringa, y fulanita, y zutanito? ¿Me vas a decir que después de tantos años de andar en esto, vas a aceptar mansamente que desconfíen de vos, que crean que porque sois mujer no podéis la cola de la cabeza? Le que pasa es que son unas machistas empedernidos. Ellos pueden guardar si nos atrevamos a hacer lo mismo.” Belli, *El país bajo mi piel*, 136.

²⁸ “Por primera vez alguien insinuó que quizá las mujeres no debían formar parte de las filas activas del ejército. Me pareció absurdo y lo dije. ¿Cómo podían siquiera pensarlo cuando las mujeres habían demostrado ser tan buenas combatientes como batientes como los hombres durante la insurrección? No sé cuántos meses después, sin embargo, los mandos del ejército—con Humberto Ortega a la cabeza—decidieron que las mujeres sólo ocuparon puestos administrativos.” Belli, *El país bajo mi piel*, 342.

commands and making statements that betrayed their adherence to traditional ideas of *machismo*.²⁹

²⁹ The Ortega family came under fire in recent years not only for their dictatorial trends when it comes to presidential term limits but also for their treatment of Daniel Ortega's stepdaughter Zoilamérica Narváez Murillo. In 1998, Narváez publically accused her stepfather of sexually abusing her from the age of eleven until twenty-two, with verbal abuse continuing up until the time of her public accusation. Ortega himself did not deny the accusations, but Narváez's mother, Rosario Murillo, denounced her daughter and assured Nicaraguans that Narváez was a liar. Shunned and scorned by the Ortega-Murillo family and Ortega-supporting Nicaraguans, Narváez was forced into exile in Costa Rica and remains there. She spoke out in support of Elvia Junieth Flores Castillo and Patricia Jeannette Ortega Prado, two women who also accused Ortega of abuse and rape when they were 15 and 12, respectively. For Narváez's interview shortly following her public accusation, see: Mirta Ojito, "Conversations/ Zoilamérica Narváez; A Victim of Sexual Abuse in a Prison of Political Ideals," *New York Times*, March 29, 1998, <http://www.nytimes.com/1998/03/29/weekinreview/conversations-zoilamerica-narvaez-victim-sexual-abuse-prison-political-ideals.html>. For Narváez's comments regarding Castillo and Prado, see: Judith Flores, "Zoilamérica Ortega: 'No girl close to Daniel Ortega is out of harm's reach,'" *Havana Times*, November 18, 2015, <https://www.havanatimes.org/?p=115034>. Narváez also expressed concern when her stepfather and mother ran a joint presidential campaign; the article also includes the criticism of Dora María Tellez, who, like others, draws attention to the Somoza-like dynasty the Ortega-Murillo family is establishing. See: Jonathan Watts, "As Nicaragua's first couple consolidates power, a daughter fears for her country," *The Guardian*, November 4, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/nov/04/nicaraguas-first-couple-daniel-ortega-tighten-grip-power-election-win>.