Abortion, Antifeminism, and the Return of Daniel Ortega

In Nicaragua, Leftist Politics?

by
Karen Kampwirth

In Nicaragua, the convergence of two regional trends—the resurgence of the electoral left and the emergence of significant antifeminist movements—has important implications for our understanding of left-wing parties and gender politics. An alliance between the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (Sandinista Front for National Liberation—FSLN) in the days before the 2006 election banned abortion even to save the woman's life. This can only be explained though the relationship of four long-term processes: (1) the FSLN's becoming a less ideological party, advocating reconciliation rather than revolution (2) nearly a decade of pact making with the right (3) the alienation of the feminist movement from the FSLN and divisions within it, and (4) the increasing sophistication of the antifeminist movement. The events of this period demonstrate the importance of examining gender politics in terms of the dynamic and sometimes unpredictable relationship between state, party, and civil society.

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After 16 years out of power, Daniel Ortega, the historic candidate of the party of the revolution, the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (Sandinista Front for National Liberation—FSLN), was reelected president in November 2006. Thus Nicaragua joined a regional trend to the left, what has sometimes been called Latin America's "pink tide" (e.g., Castañeda, 2006; Cleary, 2006; NACLA, 2007; Panizza, 2005 **[QQ: 2004?]**; but see Zovatto, 2007 **[QQ: 2006?]**: 24–26). In some Latin American countries, the pink tide has

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brought with it a limited expansion of reproductive freedom (Lehman, 2007; McKinley, 2007), but not in Nicaragua. Quite the opposite, the 2006 election illustrated another regional trend: the rise of politically sophisticated antifeminist movements in response to feminism's second wave (Buss and Herman, 2002; Druelle, 2000; González Ruiz, 2005, 2001; Htun, 2003: 143, 151–156; Kampwirth, 2006). In the Nicaraguan case, these two trends are related.

In October 2006, days before the presidential election, there was a convergence of long-simmering conflicts between Daniel Ortega's FSLN, the organized feminist movement, and opponents of those feminists. The result was the abolition of what Nicaraguans call therapeutic abortion, that is, legal abortion under very limited circumstances, especially to save the life of the pregnant woman.[1] The unanimous votes of FSLN congressmen were critical. Without them the exception to save the life of the woman, a reform that dated to the late nineteenth century Liberal revolution of José Santos Zelaya, would not have been overturned.

In this article I will argue that the abolition of therapeutic abortion is the logical outcome of four processes in the years since the end of the revolution in 1990: (1) the FSLN's becoming a less ideological party, advocating reconciliation rather than revolution, (2) nearly a decade of pact making with the right, (3) the alienation of the feminist movement from the FSLN and divisions within it, and (4) the increasing sophistication of the antifeminist movement.

The emergence of Nicaraguan antifeminism can be explained in terms of both domestic and global politics. From a domestic perspective, the movement is a reaction against the Sandinista revolution, especially against its mobilization of women and young people, and against the feminist movement that was an indirect consequence of the revolution. From a global perspective, it is a response to what antifeminists see as the challenges of globalization, among them feminist influence in international development agencies and the loss of sovereignty due to neoliberalism. It is also a response to the opportunities provided by globalization such as the emergence of a global antifeminist movement with strong links to like-minded organizations in other countries, especially organizations affiliated with the Catholic Church. Though the analysis of antifeminist politics in this article necessarily focuses on abortion (because that was the major gender issue of the 2006 election), the antifeminist agenda regarding family life is far broader than abortion, encompassing a wide range of efforts to restore what many antifeminists would call traditional family values (see Kampwirth, 2006). Similarly, though the feminist movement focused its efforts on defending therapeutic-abortion rights in late 2006, its pro-gender-equality agenda goes well beyond the issue of abortion.

The most public battle between feminist and antifeminist forces in Nicaragua prior to the 2006 battle over therapeutic abortion revolved around a nine-year-old rape victim who was called Rosa. Feminists ultimately won that one, in two ways: first, after months of public conflict, Rosa had a therapeutic abortion, in the dead of the night, and second, most Nicaraguans (64 percent according to one poll) thought that a nine-year-old should not be forced to carry a pregnancy to term (Villegas, 2003). But the next time the issue of therapeutic abortion became a matter of public debate, feminists would lose, and in 2006 the battle was not about the life of one little girl but about the lives of the hundreds of girls and women who faced life threatening pregnancies every year.[2]

THE ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN

In 2006 the FSLN seemed to reimagine the legacy of the revolution, and the new vision of what it meant to be a revolutionary was traditional Catholic rather than liberation theology Catholic, antifeminist rather than feminist. One could question in what sense this legacy of the revolution was revolutionary. On the billboards that sprang up everywhere in Nicaraguan cities in the months leading up to the November election, the FSLN's traditional red and black was replaced with an array of brilliant colors, especially hot pink. Daniel Ortega, the Marxist-Leninist in military uniform, was replaced by Daniel the practicing Catholic in white shirt and jeans. The rhetoric of anti-imperialism and class struggle was replaced by the rhetoric of peace and reconciliation. In fact, many historic enemies of the FSLN were incorporated into the Sandinistas' electoral coalition, most prominently the vice-presidential candidate and former Contra commander Jaime Morales Carazo.[3]

Weeks after the election that returned Daniel Ortega to the presidency, Sandinista supporters in Managua's Altagracia neighborhood consistently praised the new Daniel who, in the spirit of forgiveness, silently turned the other cheek. "Today we can see a Daniel who is different from the one at the time of the triumph of the revolution. . . . He showed it throughout the campaign, he was attacked so hard but he did not respond to those offenses. Instead he spoke of peace, of reconciliation" (Orlando, interview, December 2, 2006). "The propaganda against Daniel was dirty, dirty . . . [but] he did not respond to the attempts to provoke him" (don Manuel, interview, November 26, 2006). Ortega himself (quoted in González Siles, 2006) spoke of the dirtiness of the campaign against him in religious terms, indirectly comparing himself to Christ.

> They defamed Christ, they slandered him, they whipped him . . . and finally, when he was being crucified, that was when He said: 'Forgive them Father, for they know not what they do.' And it is those people who carry the weight of those grudges and those dirty campaigns, for that reason we should forgive them for they do not know the harm that they themselves are doing in their hearts.

One of many signs that Daniel had changed was his marriage to Rosario Murillo, his partner of 27 years, in a Catholic ceremony presided over by former Archbishop Obando y Bravo, a little over a year before the 2006 election (Ríos, 2007). Not only did he marry Murillo, mother of six of his eight children, but he often allowed her to speak for him. Daniel was silent when his wife—who also headed his electoral campaign—advocated the abolition of therapeutic abortion, firmly allying herself with the Catholic Church.

In an interview on Radio Ya, Murillo (2006) was asked about the position of the coalition Gran Unidad Nicaragua Triunfa (Great Nicaragua Unified Triumphs, the electoral coalition to which the FSLN belonged) with respect to therapeutic abortion:

> Precisely because we have faith, because we have religion; because we are believers, because we love God above all things. . . . For those reasons we also defend, and we agree completely with the Church and the churches that abortion is something that affects women fundamentally, because we never get over

> the pain and the trauma that an abortion leaves us! When people have had, or have had to resort to that, they never get over it. And this pain is something that we don't want for anyone. . . . The [Sandinista] Front, the Great Nicaragua Unified Triumphs, says "No to abortion, yes to life!

And so Murillo cemented the pact with the Catholic Church and with former Archbishop Miguel Obando y Bravo (whom she praised elsewhere in the interview) in particular.

These words represented a real shift in the position of the Sandinista party, which had not legalized abortion when it was in power but had never before opposed therapeutic abortion (Wessel, 1991: 541–544). And in fact the Sandinista revolution (1979–1990) itself had been directly responsible for mobilizing women, and indirectly set the stage for the emergence of a significant feminist movement. This feminist organizing was possible in large part because of the mass mobilization by the Sandinista government of men and women, especially young women, in the early 1980s: to teach others to read, to immunize children, to harvest coffee, and to guard their neighborhoods at night. Those campaigns played a critical role in the challenge to traditional authority that was the revolution (Kampwirth, 2004: 26–28).

In the early years of the revolution, the Sandinista-affiliated Asociación de Mujeres Nicaragüenses Luisa Amanda Espinoza (Luisa Amanda Espinoza Association of Nicaraguan Women—AMNLAE) played an important role in challenging traditional authority. Founded in 1977 as the Asociación de Mujeres Ante la Problematica Nacional (Association of Women Confronting the National Problem—AMPRONAC), it was one member of the Sandinista coalition that helped bring down Somoza. With the revolution it changed its name without changing its mission significantly. The most significant changes in it were due to the change in the FSLN itself from a guerrilla movement to a political party.

AMNLAE's work included advocating legal changes to help women and providing services through casas de la mujer (women's houses), which numbered over 50 nation-wide by the end of the revolutionary decade. These centers provided services in the areas of health, psychological counseling and legal counseling, and offered workshops on topics such as sexuality, contraception, and job training. Yet despite all the important work it did, AMNLAE's role as support for the male-dominated FSLN impeded its ability to challenge sexual inequality. With time, even women who stayed with AMNLAE began to question the relationship between the association and the party (see Criquillón, 1995; Kampwirth, 2004: 28–36, 54–57; Murguialday, 1990: 101–148).

AMNLAE's work in promoting reforms in gender-related laws and internal pressures suggest that it would have evolved into a more independent and more feminist organization had the revolution continued on its original course, but there is no way to know for sure. The relatively easy years of the revolution came to an end with Ronald Reagan's inauguration as president of the United States in 1981 and his funding of the Contras shortly thereafter. With the onset of the war, gender politics in Nicaragua entered a new phase. Within the evolving women's movement, there were at least two different responses to the war, that of what Nicaraguans call "the sectors" (labor unions or other economically organized groups) and that of AMNLAE. Women's secretariats

were founded in all the major labor unions in the early to mid-1980s. The first women's secretariat, that of the farm laborers' union, the Asociación de Trabajadores del Campo (Rural Workers' Union—ATC), in 1983. The women of this secretariat successfully made the case that the key to increasing rural women's productivity—and therefore raising funds necessary for the war effort—was to address gender inequality. Perhaps because of the power associated with their important role in the national economy, the women of the ATC succeeded in pressuring the FSLN to open hundreds of day care centers, collective corn mills, and laundry facilities, and to address issues such as sexual harassment and access to contraception. At the same time as the women of the secretariats were insisting that the war could never be won without more gender equality, the women of AMNLAE were accepting an ever more subservient relationship with the FSLN on the grounds that the war could never be won without softening demands for gender equality at least temporarily (see Criquillón, 1995: 215–225; Murguialday, 1990: 155–188).

The final years of the 1980s were a time when the elements of the revolution were being institutionalized; they were also the years when another sort of women's organizing began to emerge. Joining the Sandinista-affiliated women's movement AMNLAE, whose roots could be traced to the guerrilla period, and the women's secretariats that grew up in response to the Contra war was a third branch: independent or autonomous feminism. This third way, which explicitly rejected links to parties and unions, was a response to the debates that led up to the 1987 Constitution, and the 1987 Encuentro Feminista Latinoamericana (Latin American Feminist Conference), which was held close enough, in Taxco Mexico, to allow 40–50 Nicaraguan women to attend.

One of the earliest autonomous feminist groups, the Colectivo de Mujeres de Matagalpa (Matagalpa Women's Collective), was formed in 1987. Initially it broadcast over the radio and performed feminist theater on topics such as abortion, and soon it added classes in literacy, midwifery, and the law. The Centro de Mujeres de Masaya (Masaya Women's Center), founded in 1988, and the Centro de Mujeres IXCHEN (IXCHEN Women's Center), founded in 1989, provided a range of legal, health, and psychological services at the same time as they advocated for gender equality. They were in many ways like AMNLAE's women's houses, except that they operated independently from the FSLN. A very different model of women's organizing—an autonomous feminist organization that sought to change state policy rather than providing services—was founded by women who had participated in the Feminist Conference. Upon their return from Mexico in 1987, they founded the Partido de la Izquierda Erótica (Party of the Erotic Left—PIE).

The PIE was a lobbying group that succeeded in promoting gender equality as a constitutional principle. In the 1987 Constitution, at least 10 articles make specific mention of women's rights (compared with none in the 1974 Constitution). Couples in common-law marriages (which are more common than legal marriages among Nicaragua's poor majority) were protected from discrimination, and no-fault divorce was permitted. The PIE did not last into the 1990s, but it left its mark on the constitution and on the women's movement. After the FSLN lost the 1990 election, all 20-some members of the PIE became founding members of the autonomous feminist organizations that emerged in the early 1990s (see Kampwirth, 1998 **[QQ: PLS PROVIDE REF]**; Stephens, 1990; 1988).

When Daniel Ortega and his party lost the 1990 election, Nicaraguan feminists faced a moment of crisis and opportunity. It was a crisis in the sense that nearly all of them had identified with the revolution and had first been politicized during the guerrilla struggle or the revolution itself. It was also a crisis in that the winner of the 1990 election—Violeta Barrios de Chamorro—had promised to overturn the revolutionary policies that had challenged traditional gender roles. Indeed, during her administration many day care centers were closed, programs against domestic violence were eliminated, grade-school textbooks promoted Catholicism and traditional gender relations, and macroeconomic policies encouraged women to return to their rightful places at home. But the Sandinista loss was also an opportunity. Cut free from their ties to the Sandinista Front, feminists were free to organize as they chose and organize they did (Kampwirth, 2004: 48–73).

In the years following 1990, the women's movement became increasingly alienated from the FSLN in general and from Daniel Ortega in particular, partly in response to allegations that Ortega had sexually abused his stepdaughter Zoilámerica Narvaez from the time she was 11 years old. These tensions manifested themselves in a 2006 agreement between a faction of the women's movement (calling itself the Movimiento Autónomo de Mujeres) and the FSLN's rival, the Movimiento de Renovación Sandinista (Sandinista Renewal Movement—MRS).

Despite tensions, I think it is highly unlikely that the FSLN would have voted to abolish the life-of-the-mother exception to the abortion ban the election had not been days away. In other words, the FSLN's new found opposition to therapeutic abortion does not indicate an ideological shift to the right. What it does show is that, after a decade and a half out of power, and close to a decade of political pacts with the right—with Arnoldo Alemán's Partido Liberal Constitucionalista (Liberal Constitutionalist Party—PLC) and with Obando y Bravo's faction within the Catholic Church (Hoyt, 2004; Kampwirth, 2003 **[QQ: PLS PROVIDE REF]**: 135, 147–148; Torres-Rivas, 2007: 6–7)—the FSLN was quite willing to oppose its former base in the women's movement, to say nothing of the vast majority of Nicaragua's medical establishment, if that is what it took to return to power. Rather than a shift to the right, it was a shift to cynicism.[4] It was part and parcel of the FSLN's long-term evolution from a revolutionary party to one that was often a personal vehicle for Daniel Ortega and his family.[5]

GENDER POLITICS AND CIVIL SOCIETY

The vote to abolish therapeutic abortion tells us much about the evolution of the FSLN, but it may tell us even more about the evolution of civil society, both feminist and antifeminist, in the years following the Sandinista revolution. By 2006, the feminist movement, one of Nicaragua's largest and most effective social movements (Babb, 2001; Criquillón, 1995; Kampwirth, 2004), was divided. There was no disagreement over the need to defend therapeutic abortion, but the movement was damaged by personality clashes and disagreements regarding language and symbolism. One position, promoted by activists in the feminist organization Puntos de Encuentro, among others, was

that therapeutic abortion should be defended using "positive messages." They participated in various vigils dressed in white and carrying candles (Evelyn Flores, interview, November 29, 2006):

> From the perspective of Puntos it was very worrisome that other women [from the MAM, Movimiento Autonomo de Mujeres] were calling for a carnaval style march [i.e. dressing up in costumes] a week after the Church's march. . . . Later the MAM began to have a public presence with a message that was quite full of negativity: "murderers," "killers of women," "you don't know your own laws," "don't vote for a rapist."[6]

Ana María Pizarro, director of the women's clinic Sí Mujer and a member of the MAM, was on the other side of this disagreement over tactics, but she also saw the divide as being over whether radical or moderate strategies were the more effective. In her opinion, the cause had been hurt by the moderation of many members of the women's movement, who over the years had taken the position that "therapeutic abortion is the maximum demand, and don't even talk about legalizing abortion" (Ana Maria Pizarro, interview, December 1, 2006). The problem from her perspective was not that the tactics were too forceful but that they were not forceful enough and that organized women would never be a successful lobby if they continued to forgive and vote for the Sandinista party no matter what it did.

I suggested that the dilemma was that a vote for the dissident Sandinista party, the MRS, was a wasted vote, because it was too small to win. In effect, not voting for the Sandinista Front was giving a vote to the right. But she objected, "Your starting point is the idea that the Sandinista Front is a leftist party. . . . We keep on forgiving the Front because we think they are the same revolutionaries that they have always been, and they are not." Whether women's movement activists were too radical or not radical enough in 2006, there is no question that the movement was more divided and less effective in lobbying than it had been in previous years.

In contrast, the antifeminist movement had never been so united and sophisticated as it was in 2006. This movement, which is an indirect legacy of the revolution, reacting against the autonomous feminist movement that traces its roots to the revolution, first became identifiable in the 1990s (Kampwirth, 2006: 80–87). It was a group of organizations with strong ties to the state, especially to the state ministries that dealt most directly with personal politics: the ministries of health, education, and the family. In the years following the Sandinista revolution, one major goal of the antifeminists was to abolish Article 165 of the penal code, the article that gave doctors the right to perform therapeutic abortions.

Rafael Cabrera, president of the Asociación Nicaragüense Provida (Nicaraguan Pro-life Association—ANPROVIDA), told me that Article 165 was an anachronism. Before the invention of antibiotics, before tuberculosis had been brought under control, before cardiac problems could be treated, Nicaragua was characterized by what he called "a hostile environment" (interview, November 28, 2006). In the nineteenth century pregnancy could threaten a woman's life, and so therapeutic abortion was permitted to allow doctors to try to save patients who might otherwise die. In the twentieth century, the medical environment became less hostile, to the point that,

according to Cabrera, all pregnancies could be safely carried to term. I brought up the case of a Nicaraguan woman I knew who had died at the age of 27 after her first pregnancy caused irreparable heart damage. He dismissed that example, telling me that because she died months after the baby had been delivered by cesarean, her death could not be attributed to the pregnancy. Cabrera's position—that therapeutic abortion was never medically necessary and so article 165 was just a loophole to permit abortion for social reasons—was the most common position among the activists that I interviewed, although it was not the only position.[7]

Cabrera and like-minded Nicaraguans had opposed therapeutic abortion for many years prior to 2006. That they succeeded in abolishing that nineteenth century medical reform in 2006 cannot be understood outside the electoral context. Perhaps more critically, while there were both Catholic and Evangelical opponents of abortion, they had rarely worked together before the late 1990s. Elizabeth de Rojas, a minister with the Alianza Evangélica (Evangelical Alliance), explained that her work first came to the attention of traditional Catholic leaders in December of 1998 when she helped organize what she called a "crusade" and "campaign" called "Festinavidad." This festival, which involved giving Nicaraguan children more than 300,000 gifts that had been provided by supporters of the U.S.-based Evangelical minister Franklin Graham. Festinavidad culminated in a two-day cultural event in the Dennis Martínez National Stadium (Tórrez, 1998). Rojas told me that through the event in the stadium they hoped "to introduce [the children] to the word of God [and] to strengthen family values" (interview, December 4, 2006). Mobilized by local Evangelical networks, an estimated 160,000 children attended.

That massive event attracted press coverage, and according to Rojas, "Max Padilla, the minister of the family at that time, saw the great gathering of children on TV" (interview, December 4, 2006). Believing that the Evangelical organizers of this event shared values with traditional Catholic opponents of feminism, he invited Rojas to a meeting at his office in the Ministry of the Family. It was there that she met Elida de Solórzano, adviser to Padilla and founder of the Asociación Nicaragüense de la Mujer (Nicaraguan Women's Association—ANIMU), Evangelina de Guirola of ANIMU and founder of Sí a la Vida (Yes to Life) and Rafael Cabrera of ANPROVIDA (see Kampwirth, 2006: 83–86, 88–92).[8] That was the beginning of the alliance between Catholic and Evangelical abortion opponents that culminated in a mass march against therapeutic abortion on October 6, 2006, and the vote in the National Assembly a few days later to abolish the life-of-the-mother exception to the civil code. During the march, a team from Puntos de Encuentro interviewed some of the approximately 200,000 participants. Many agreed with a young woman who explained that, in case of threat to a pregnant women's life, "That would have to be left to God. The mother or the child. If it is put in God's hands, He will decide if the two of them will live or not."

Of course, the purpose of the march was to pressure the National Assembly to abolish therapeutic abortion, and so it was surprising that many marchers were uncomfortable with the reality of abolishing therapeutic abortion; some women facing high-risk pregnancies would die. When asked if a doctor should let a woman die rather than perform a therapeutic abortion, one young man simply said, "That is hard, I can't give an explanation." A young woman

who recommended that the pregnant woman die rather than have a therapeutic abortion was un-sure what to recommend if she already had children. One teenaged girl proposed the pro-choice position (though she did not call it that): "If it is a situation like that it would depend on the person. In my case I would prefer to have my child with the risk, like a personal decision." And a 54-year-old woman explained that she had joined the march, "as the Catholic that I am, to support the ideas of our priests," but if the pregnant woman would die along with her unborn baby, then, "Yes, [the abortion] would be just." The interviewer clarified, "Should they save one of the two?" and she answered "Yes, that would be just."

I also found some confusion over the meaning of "therapeutic abortion" in interviews I did with people who had voted for Daniel Ortega. A few weeks after the election, I interviewed 16 voters in Managua's Altagracia neighborhood, 5 men and 11 women ranging in age from 19 to 83. When I introduced the topic of therapeutic abortion, I asked them to tell me what it was. Eleven out of 16 (including all the men) offered examples distinguishing therapeutic abortion from abortion in general (usually cases of rape or risk to the woman's life), and all of these people thought it was a mistake for the National Assembly to have abolished it, generally attributing that vote to pressures from the Catholic Church during the electoral campaign. Five described therapeutic abortion in ways that were identical with abortion in general and all of them thought it was a good thing that the National Assembly had abolished it. "That is when doctors take babies out and for me it is wrong. God made man and woman to multiply, to reproduce. We are like the tree, the tree of the Bible" (doña Elena, interview, December 2, 2006).

I conducted all of these interviews in people's houses, three of them with members of the same family on a small covered porch decorated with a flyer from two months earlier that read: "The Catholic Church invites you to participate in the Great March against abortion October 6, 9:00, from the Metropolitan Cathedral to the National Assembly." It was illustrated with a drawing of a crying Jesus holding a fetus in the palm of his hand.[9] As happens occasionally when interviewing working-class Nicaraguans in their always crowded houses, I asked 55-year-old Esperanza to tell me what therapeutic abortion was and was answered by her 33-year-old daughter Jasmín: "When the life of a woman is in danger, because they have to remove it, if not she will die." Her mother looked displeased at that answer, saying "To be perfectly honest I don't understand therapeutic because abortion is killing a life." Jasmín, who spoke of the importance of her Catholic faith, also told me that "[therapeutic abortion] should be accepted. I think so when there is a real risk." Jasmín's cousin Margarita told me she would have liked to have participated in the October march. When I asked her to define therapeutic abortion she said: "With me it is not okay, I do not agree with abortion. It is killing an innocent of one's own blood." But when I asked her what should be done if a pregnant woman's life were in danger, she said, "Better to take it [the fetus] out" (interviews, December 3, 2006).

My findings (interviewing Sandinista supporters) and those of the Puntos de Encuentro team (interviewing participants in the march against therapeutic abortion) were similar. Many who said they opposed therapeutic abortion were actually against abortion for social reasons, sometimes favoring therapeutic abortion. A poll conducted by CID-Gallop **[QQ: GALLUP?]** (2007)

similarly found a large majority of Nicaraguans opposed to abortion (79 percent against, 12 percent in favor, 9 percent didn't know or didn't respond), but a significant percentage of those who opposed abortion favored it to save the life of the mother (55 percent in favor [43.45 percent of the total], 33 percent against, 12 percent didn't say or didn't answer). So combined with the 12 percent who said they favored therapeutic abortion, 55.45 percent favored abortion to save the life of the woman.

WOMEN AND THE SANDINISTAS

The day after the FSLN representatives to the National Assembly joined their right-wing colleagues in voting to eliminate therapeutic abortion, a cartoon was published in the newspaper El Nuevo Diario. Two women chat over coffee. One of them, apparently exhausted and wearing a "Women's Vote" T-shirt, tells her friend: "He used me, he humiliated me, he abused me, he hit me, he ignored me . . . he pushed me to the side . . . and still he very cynically asks me to be faithful to him." Her friend responds. "Idiot! What did you say his name is?" The answer: "FSLN."

As of October 2006, Nicaragua is one of a handful of countries (Chile, El Salvador, and Malta being the others) in which abortion is illegal without exception (Relea, 2007). Six months after therapeutic abortion was abolished, 42 women had died as a result of that legal change (Brenes, 2007). Most of these cases were not women who might have otherwise sought a therapeutic abortion but rather women like 22-year-old Francis Zamora, who died as a result of a miscarriage, leaving behind three children. Zamora's mother (quoted in Sirias, 2007) explained:

> They let my daughter die, the doctors at Alemán [Hospital] told me that they could not do the curettage [*legrado*] until she expelled the fetus. She suffered from when we arrived on the January 25 in the morning, until four in the afternoon the next day when she expelled the fetus. . . . They told me they could not do anything, that the laws in the country had changed and that they had to wait until the fetus came out on its own. Maybe if they had done the curettage earlier, she would not have died.

The Sandinista representatives to the National Assembly, who had upheld therapeutic abortion in previous years, voted against it in 2006 out of fear that the party would otherwise lose the election. But there is little reason to believe that their votes affected the electoral outcome. Most of the Sandinistas I interviewed disagreed with the abolition of therapeutic abortion but voted for the FSLN anyway and none of the antiabortion activists gave me reason to believe they had voted for the FSLN. Quite the contrary, many suggested that the FSLN's anti-therapeutic-abortion vote was only a response to the election and so of course they voted for one of the two right-wing parties,[10] which better represented their values. Nationwide, none of the FSLN's strategies—expensive advertising, the rhetoric of love and reconciliation, the electoral alliances with Contras and Somocistas, the alliance with the Catholic Church and various Evangelical leaders, the vote against therapeutic abortion—seem to have made any difference. As analysts from the journal Envio noted, the

FSLN "won without growing" that is, it won with the votes of its traditionally loyal voters and few others, and it would have lost had the right not been divided in two.[11] "Ortega won this time with 38 percent of the votes. In the three previous elections he obtained similar or greater percentages: in 1990 against doña Violeta de Chamorro, 41 percent; in 1996 against Arnoldo Alemán, 38 percent; and in 2001, against Enrique Bola?os, 42 percent" (*Envio*, 2006: 4).

But whether or not they win votes, electoral strategies have consequences. They set the stage for the government that is to follow and they may reset the balance of power among different groups in society. The gendered components of Daniel Ortega's 2006 electoral strategy certainly had the effect of weakening feminists, who had formed part of the base of support of the FSLN, and strengthening the hand of antifeminists. They also had the consequence of making life more precarious for pregnant women who depended on public health services.

It is worth noting that for many antifeminist activists or their supporters, abolishing therapeutic abortion is not the final goal. Instead, it could be seen as part of a broader project of restoring or imposing a particular model of gender relations. Asked about the poor care that pregnant women generally receive in the public health care system, which makes the abolition of therapeutic abortion more dangerous than it would be in a country with good prenatal care, Noel Pereira Majano, a PLC congressman and president of the National Assembly's Justice Commission responded: "One has to keep one's cool in making statements about the effects of abortion. We have to study the causes; there has to be a coordination of governments and state agencies to avoid prostitution and free love. We must unite against the liberated woman, who thinks she can control all parts of her body" (quoted in Arróliga, 2006).

Perhaps it is not surprising that a congressman from the right-wing Liberal party should take this position, although the Liberal party itself has changed significantly from the days of the Somoza dictatorship, when it was considerably more secular and liberal regarding women than its main rival, the Conservative party (González-Rivera, 2000). What is surprising is that this agenda has been furthered with the active support of the party of the revolution. Some have even suggested that it may be time to talk of a "Sandinismo of the right" (Torres-Rivas, 2007: 8). But that may go too far. Seen from the grassroots, Sandinismo is still a left-wing project. Seen from the perspective of Daniel Ortega and Rosario Murillo, it may be a left-wing project drained of principle or, to put it more kindly, a flexible left-wing project. This is something that arguably has happened to the left across the region (Panizza, 2005 **[QQ: 2004?]**: 717). But whether flexible or cynical, the return to the left in Nicaragua does not look very left-wing, at least not from a feminist perspective.

NOTES

1. Article 165 was often interpreted to allow three exceptions to the ban on abortion: in the case of a documented rape, danger to the pregnant woman's life, or severe damage to the fetus. Danger to the pregnant woman or damage to the fetus was determined by a team of at least three doctors (Juarez Ordoñez, 2003 **[QQ: PLS PROVIDE REF]**).

2. "Every year the Health Ministry records about 600 ectopic pregnancies (when the fetus is implanted outside the womb)," said Matilde Jirón, a doctor specializing in reproductive health.

"To that number, you have to add about 400 molar pregnancies (when the placenta grows tumors). In both these cases, therapeutic abortion is absolutely necessary to save the mother's life" (Nicaragua Network Hotline, 2006). Twenty-two medical associations opposed eliminating Article 165. A spokesperson for those organizations, Freddy Meynard, said, "With this measure we are encouraging doctors and medical students to deny care to women who arrive with vaginal bleeding, for they could be imprisoned for four years" (quoted in Sirias, 2006b).

3. Daniel Ortega and Jaime Morales Carazo were historic enemies, and not only for having been on opposite sides of the Contra war: Morales's house was expropriated early in the revolution and given to Ortega, who lives there to this day (but who has since apparently paid for it). Many other former Contras and even members of the Somoza family's national guard joined the Sandinista electoral coalition in 2006 (see, e.g., EFEa, 2006 **[QQ: EFE, 2006A?]**; Pantoja, 2006; Silva, 2006; Vanegas, 2006 **[QQ: 2005?]**). Loyal Sandinistas often had difficulty justifying such alliances to themselves. Riding in a car with a Sandinista friend in June 2006, I asked what he thought of one of the many billboards promoting "Jaime." When he responded with something vaguely positive, I asked, "But isn't he a Contra?" He corrected me: "Oh, no, he was part of the opposition but he was never a Contra." But Morales Carazo's background was not hidden. In his acceptance speech at the FSLN congress in May, Morales Carazo told the crowd how he had first met "Commander Ortega" when he had been "chief negotiator for the Contras" during the Sapoa negotiations in 1988 (Morales Carazo, 2006). It is quite possible that my friend was aware of this but found it painful to admit that he planned to vote for a Contra leader.

4. A number of feminist activists told me that they had been assured that FSLN leaders did not oppose therapeutic abortion but felt they had to vote against it for electoral reasons, to avoid the danger of the Catholic Church's campaigning against the party. One male Sandinista activist with contacts within the top leadership told me the same thing, the only difference being that he assumed that the FSLN would find the votes to restore therapeutic abortion. This is evidence that the FSLN's sudden opposition to therapeutic abortion is an indication of cynicism rather than of a principled right-wing stand. From a different perspective, Delia Arellano, representative of the ALN in the National Assembly and a long-time opponent of therapeutic abortion, made a similar point. She told me that the FSLN would have never voted the way it did had the election not been approaching. The vote had to happen during the campaign because otherwise "it would have come out the same, no, no." I asked why the vote would have been "no"and she answered, "Because the Sandinista Front is leftist" (interview, December 5, 2006).

5. Certainly Daniel Ortega and his family were not the only Sandinistas who believed that voting against therapeutic abortion would increase the party's chance of winning the election. But the FSLN is a highly disciplined party, and the fact that 9 National Assembly representatives abstained from voting and 29 others failed to attend the legislative session (Alemán **[QQ: ALEMAN?]**, 2006) does indicate some level of embarrassment or reluctance to embrace the party line. In September 2007, the prohibition of therapeutic abortion was formally ratified in the penal code at a time when there was no election immediately looming; 13 of the 38 FSLN representatives to the National Assembly either did not show up to vote, left the voting chamber during the debate, or refrained from voting (Córdoba and Pantoja, 2007).

6. The opponents of therapeutic abortion were able to take advantage of these images. When I interviewed Reverend Roberto Rojas of the Asamblea de Dios (Assembly of God) in his crowded office on November 28, 2006, he gave me a four-page flyer from the three-foot-tall pile next to his desk. He told me that the flyers were produced with help from the newspaper *La Prensa*, which covered printing costs (others later told me that they were included with all copies of *La Prensa* over a period of many days). The cover of the flyer read, "Their business is coming to an end! That is why they lie. Don't let yourself be fooled! Abortion is murder." The cover showed four medical professionals whose pale eyes and European features were partially disguised by surgical masks. Behind them were images of floating córdobas (the national currency). On the inside two pages debate points were presented, and there the words "therapeutic abortion" (as opposed to just "abortion") were used. On the back cover, readers were asked, "Who are you going to believe? Those who PROFIT from the bloody business of abortion? Those who lie, deceive, and manipulate?" Those questions were illustrated with images from the MAM march in favor of therapeutic-abortion rights (including a person in a distorted witch mask wearing a pointed black hat and three women in burqas holding large biological signs for women, along with the ominous doctors from the cover and the floating córdobas). The final question—"Or a people that loves and defends life?"—was illustrated with a photo of crowds at the October march against abortion.

7. One of the abortion opponents I interviewed said that if a pregnant woman's life were in danger, the best thing would be to let her die, noting that "God permits the things that are going to happen" (José Bayardo Morales, interview, December 7, 2006). Yet most admitted that there could be cases when a woman's life was threatened by a pregnancy did not take that position. For them, the abolition of Article 165 was still a good thing since Article 134 of the new civil code allowed a doctor to commit acts that would otherwise be crimes if necessary to save a patient's life. But the feminist lawyer Juanita Jiménez of the Red de Mujeres Contra la Violencia (Women's Network Against Violence) and the MAM noted that Article 134 does not really replace Article 165 since it requires that a doctor be confident that he or she will be able to prove in court, beyond a reasonable doubt, that the woman's life had been in immediate danger. "There are not many doctors who would be brave enough to face a trial" (interview, December 6, 2006).

8. Evangelicals are a significant and growing minority: "At the end of the 1970s, only five percent of Nicaraguans were evangelicals. Now they account for more than 20 percent—some say more than 30 percent—of the population" (Miller Llana, 2006; also see EFE, 2006b; Chamorro, 2007). But Evangelicals (which in Nicaragua is a synonym for "Protestants") were divided. Many Evangelicals, especially those belonging to the Consejo de Iglesias Pro-Alianza Denominacional (Interdenominational Church Council—CEPAD), an alliance of 33 denominations, favored protecting the right to therapeutic abortion (Ramona López, interview, November 30, 2006; William González, interview, December 5, 2006; Sirias, 2006a).

9. In this case, Catholics were invited to a march against abortion, not against therapeutic abortion. In much of the material distributed in the campaign, either the word "therapeutic" was not included or it was in small print.

10. The two major right-wing parties that contested the 2006 election were the PLC and the Alianza Liberal Nicaragüense (Nicaraguan Liberal Alliance—ALN).

11. In addition to the fact that the right was divided, election laws had changed because of the pact between Daniel Ortega and Arnoldo Alemán. Under the new rules, a candidate could win on the first round with 40 percent or only 35 percent as long as the runner-up was at least five points behind. In exchange for the electoral rules that he wanted, Ortega arranged for Alemán's release from prison (where he was serving 20 years for embezzlement) to house arrest, later extended to "arrest" within the boundaries of the country (Torres-Rivas, 2007: 7).

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