

## To Dora María Téllez: The sky that must not be touched

Ortega has vindictively kept Dora Maria in solitary confinement and now intends to sentence her to prison.

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In the vastness of the Nicaraguan sky, Dora María is undoubtedly one of its brightest stars. Her trajectory in the struggle against the Somoza dictatorship was relatively short but intense, decisive, and historic compared to leaders of long trajectory who never did anything noteworthy in the heroic battle. There started - from the incompetence of Ortega and also Murillo- the hatred, the distrust, the pettiness that degrades everything, and that today deals a new and cowardly blow, uselessly attempting to judge, humiliate, and sentence her when Dora María is the sky that must not be touched.<sup>1</sup>

This is part of her biography, constructed together with her testimony to the author on November 13, 1999.

Dora María Téllez was born in Matagalpa on November 21, 1955. After graduating from high school there, she moved to León to study medicine. I remember her in the corridors of Basic Sciences, with her hippie, carefree, artist look, and her sharp sense of humor, making fun of everything, especially herself. She didn't seem, then, like someone who would engage in the struggle. She explained it this way:

*I got involved in the Front and the revolutionary fight for various reasons: the dictatorship had aspects that were intolerable for people with a certain awareness: political repression, corruption, repression of any attempt at social organization or demonstration, concentration of political power, nepotism and extreme poverty; were the reasons that made me join the revolutionary struggle. In fact, I got started with the student struggle.*

*I continue to have the same characteristics as I did then. Before they used to say a little hippie and now a little oblivious, I mean, a little naive. It was also the style, now you don't see people with caites<sup>2</sup>. I think that one of the problems is to take oneself too seriously. The people that take themselves seriously are in general unbearable people because they don't have a lot of meaning in their lives.*

*We were a generation more willing to break away, more willing to debate, more willing to challenge, more willing to look for new things (...) We had an advantage: to have a great ideal,*

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<sup>1</sup> Reference to a poem by Ruben Dario "Margartia Debayle" which speaks of a girl cutting a star from the immense blue sky after which the king declares that no one must touch the sky.

<sup>2</sup> Leather sandals

*great ideals; I feel that today young people are very skeptical. It is a different generation than the one we belonged to.*

She participated in the student struggles of 1973 and in 1974 she joined the FSLN (Sandinista National Liberation Front). In 1975 she went underground, being part of a group of medical students chosen by the guerrilla organization to receive a course of Field Medicine in Cuba.

*It was quite an intense course (...) We also received military training for four months.*

In Cuba she worked in the Guerra Popular Prolongada (Prolonged People's War) movement, whose responsible at that time was José Benito Escobar, since Carlos Fonseca had just left for Nicaragua. At that time they were not given much information about the split of the FSLN.

In 1976, she accompanied José Benito Escobar on a journey that began and ended in Cuba. They traveled with false passports and identities.

*...I still have my passport with my Ecuadorian identity. And for it, I had to learn the names of all the streets of Guayaquil, the cinemas, the public monuments, the history and geography of Ecuador.*

Passing through Mexico, she learned of the split of the FSLN. During that trip, José Benito shared with her the vision of the necessity to get through the offensive and promote insurrections. Thus, upon arriving in Honduras, Dora María got into contact with the leaders of the Tercerista movement and got involved in the training of fighters by teaching classes about battlefield medicine.

*... I got in contact with the leaders of Tercerismo: there were Daniel Ortega and Víctor Tirado. Germán Pomares -El Danto- was training one of the groups that would participate in the October offensive, and while José Benito was doing his thing, they put me on to help with the training.*

*The time came to go back to Cuba. I had to go back. José Benito had made a commitment to the Cubans not to involve us in the split. José Benito explained to me that the October offensive was a matter of life or death: "If there is no offensive now against the dictatorship, Sandinismo will die and the dictatorship will be consolidated for life," he told me. Under that consideration, I begged him to let me stay, because in the group that was going to fight, which was about forty men, there were no health workers. I insisted and insisted until José Benito agreed. It was the group that trained with Francisco Rivera -El Zorro-.*

On October 12, 1977, she was part of the Columna del Frente Norte (Northern Front Column) whose mission was to attack the Guardia Nacional (National Guard or G.N.) regiment in Ocotol, an operation that was unsuccessful because they first collided with a patrol, which alerted the barracked forces that arrived as reinforcements. The guerrillas placed an ambush in San

Fabián, with which they surprised the National Guard and caused twelve casualties, including dead and wounded.

Later, the Column was divided into two groups: one formed a camp on the border with Honduras; the other, under the leadership of Germán Pomares, carried out offensive actions against the G.N. regiments in several municipalities and Somoza ranches.

Dora María was part of the latter and, in the following days, they were responsible for attacks on: Mozonte (October 15), San Fernando (October 25), Hacienda El Volcán (November 11), Mi Ilusión (November 20), El Amparo (November 30), the capture of Santa Clara (December 5), the capture of the watchtower Las Manos (December 8) and the successful ambush of the Lisupo Bridge, led by Joaquín Cuadra (December 19). They also carried out armed propaganda actions on the ranches of Las Camelias and El Limón (January 8, 1978). During all these months, Dora María lived in guerrilla conditions with the forces of Germán Pomares in the mountain range of Dipilto and Jalapa.

In March 1978, in a reorganization of forces carried out by the Tercerista movement, Dora María was sent to reinforce the Frente Interno (Internal Front). She worked for a while in Managua as part of the Comisión de Formación Ideológica (Ideological Formation Commission), with Óscar Perezcassar -*El Gordo Pin*-.

In August 1978, she was politically responsible for the *Rigoberto López Pérez* regiment that took over the National Palace. As a political leader, *Comandante Dos*, she was in charge of the negotiations that led to the release of 60 political prisoners held by the Somoza dictatorship.

She re-entered the country, worked for a time in Managua, and was responsible for the organizational taskforce of the Juventud Democrática Nicaragüense (Nicaraguan Democratic Youth), which worked in the universities among doing other tasks.

In April 1979, when Roger Deshón, Óscar Perezcassar, Aracely Pérez Darias, Idania Fernández, Carlos Jarquín and Edgard Lang -almost the entire General Staff of León's insurreccional movement- fell, Dora María assumed the leadership of that Front for Tercerismo, and later became head of the General Staff of the *Rigoberto López Pérez* Western Front, made up of the three movements of the FSLN.

The Western Front included Chinandega and León. A day before the beginning of the insurrection, an important setback occurred in Chinandega and the city itself could not be liberated until July 18. However, Leon was the first important city that managed to get the National Guard out of the regiment.

*The city of León was cleared from June 20, but the National Guard took the Fort of Acosasco. Perhaps that is why it is considered that León was not the first city liberated in the whole country, but rather Diriamba.*

*The post of León was led by a ruthless officer named Gonzalo Evertz "Vulcano". Getting him out was quite difficult. It took us seventeen days to get him out of the Fort, between June 20 and July 7.*

After the triumph of the revolution, Dora María was distinguished with the honorary rank of Guerrilla Commander. In the 80s she was Minister of Health and coordinator of the Comité de Dirección Departamental de Managua (Departmental Management Committee of Managua) and, undoubtedly, one of the important figures of the Revolution.

In 1990 she was elected representative for the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (Sandinista National Liberation Front, FSLN); in 1995 she split from the FSLN and organized the Partido Movimiento Renovador Sandinista (Sandinista Renovation Movement Party, MRS), of which she was president for several years.

The members of the MRS had disputed within the FSLN to push it, from the ideological point of view, to center-left positions, somewhat in the style of the third way in Europe. Later, they would specify in declarations to *Envío* magazine: *"In this third way the example is programmatic, not ideological (...) The population understands the approach of the third way, because it sends a different message, of balance, of moving away from polarization"*, they openly condemned the ways of fighting that Ortega promoted against the government of Violeta Chamorro in the street fights, barricades and violence, and also demanded greater democratization in the ranks of the FSLN.

The response of the FSLN -already under Ortega's control- was a hateful campaign of disqualification, particularly against Dora María, shutting down the possibilities of internal debate.

In 2008, Dora María began a hunger strike on her own, criticizing the arbitrary and illegal cancellation of the legal status of the MRS Party, after it obtained 8% of the votes in alliance with the Rescate del Sandinismo. The strike did not produce results, but the mobilization of its voters and the acknowledgement it aroused showed that it had increased its support, which was unacceptable for Ortegaismo, already determined to be enthroned in power at any price. Authoritarianism was *in crescendo*, until it clearly showed itself to be a dictatorship.

Dora María's positions at the head of this political grouping left no room for doubt about her commitment to the democratization of Nicaragua and the imperative of putting an end to the new dictatorship, all of which became evident in the days of April 2018, which the dictatorship stubbornly continued to narrate as *an attempted coup d'état*.

Therefore, under the cover of spurious laws unilaterally approved in December 2020, they carried out the raids of 2021, capturing her among other leaders of UNAMOS (formerly MRS).

In a vindictive and despicable manner, the regime has kept Dora Maria in special conditions of isolation and now she is one of the first to be subjected to an unscrupulous judicial process that is completely flawed and void of any nullity.

Dora María Téllez deserves to be respected and accompanied by all honest citizens of Nicaragua. She is one of the most outstanding women in the struggle against the Somoza dictatorship, and today she continues to be against the dictatorship of Ortega and Murillo.

In 1999 when we interviewed her on the radio program *Entre todos*, we asked her for her final thoughts and her words are still very relevant today:

*I have a reflection now, which has to do with young people. The country is entering into conditions that are different from those we had when we were young. We find a country with 85% poverty, almost half of the population earns a dollar and a half a day, there are between 800,000 and a million Nicaraguans working outside Nicaragua. We are in a country whose main characteristic is to deny opportunities to young people, that is to say, what is left for a young person who finishes primary school if he/she cannot find a job? They can't find a place to go, they participate in criminal networks or become desperate.*

*And this is exactly what I want to address: we have contributed or tried to do what we believe is fair to guide this country in a different direction than the one it is heading in now; unfortunately, the political path seems to be like a roulette wheel, which turns backward and is looking to set up a dictatorship again; and from the economic point of view, poverty is now completely intolerable.*

*I believe that young people, now more than ever, together with us, are obliged to create the conditions for the country to provide the conditions for youth, that is to say, that young people themselves have to fight for their opportunities.*

*This political model we have now, and the one we are in the process of having with the constitutional reforms and the Electoral Law, is a political model of concentration of power in the hands of the President of the Republic, who has control of the Judicial System, has control of everything. The concentration of power leads to intolerance, to political repression, it alienates citizen participation. I believe that young people and us, in general, should be demanding, not citizen participation through representation, but direct citizen decision-making on the country's key issues, not through representation but directly.*

*I believe that this is the same as what happened to us years ago, a situation that calls the attention of young people. The youth is in a fundamental dilemma, they have to act now, they have to mobilize, to defend the democratic spaces; because if not, then we are going to have to resort to a conclusion that is already difficult, that is to say: when the democratic spaces are closed, the option of armed struggle is reopened. And I believe that we, those who participated in the armed struggle, the last thing we would want is for it to be reopened again; because the*

*war cut short or diverted or pushed aside our normal life as young people, a part of being young that we didn't get to experience.*

Freedom for the 170 political prisoners!

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The complete interview with Dora María Téllez can be found at [memoriasdelaluchasandinista.org](http://memoriasdelaluchasandinista.org).

*Translated by Megan Bloem and Stefan Mendes for the Global Feminisms Project*