

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

SITE: NICARAGUA

Transcript of Ana Margarita Vijil

Location: Ann Arbor, Michigan

Date: April 10th, 2024

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

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

© Regents of the University of Michigan, 2024

Ana Margarita Vijil Gurdián is a Nicaraguan lawyer, politician, and human rights advocate. She holds a Law Degree from Universidad Centroamericana in Managua and a master's degree in Political Science with an emphasis in Women's Studies from Arizona State University as a Fulbright recipient.

For the last twenty years, Vijil has worked in academia and has been an active participant in political activism and social justice advocacy. From 2012 to 2017, she was the former president of the political party MRS (Sandinista Renovation Movement), becoming the youngest woman to serve as head of a major political party in the history of Central America. She is a current member of the opposition political party *Unamos* (previously MRS).

As an academic, Vijil has been a visiting university professor at different institutions and a researcher in the fields of Law, Gender Studies, and Human Rights. Under her coordination, several academic programs for young people have been developed with the support of international organizations such as the Latin American College for Social Sciences (FLACSO-Guatemala). Since 2013, she has been a Central American Leadership Initiative Fellow at the Aspen Global Leadership Network and, since 2023, Vijil is currently a Senior Fellow at the George Washington University Global Women's Institute.

A longstanding human rights advocate, Vijil has led numerous protests and demonstrations around the country against police brutality and other human rights violations, as well as the state's violation of the presidential term limits established by Nicaragua's constitution. She suffered increased persecution after the state repression of student-led mass protests in 2018, which included more than 500 assassinations at the hands of the police and paramilitary groups. On June 13, 2021, Vijil was arrested at her home. For denouncing the authoritarian nature of the government and its human rights violation, she was imprisoned without due process and held in solitary confinement for twenty months. On February 9, 2023, she was banished and expatriated from Nicaragua to the United States as part of a group of 222 political prisoners who were also illegally stripped of their Nicaraguan nationality.

Keywords: Academia and Women's Studies, Imprisonment, and Politics and the Law

Interviewer¹: Thank you so much, Ana Margarita, for participating in the Global Feminisms Project. We will be speaking for about an hour. We will start by talking a bit about your life, your experience, the issues that interest you and your points of view about your work, especially regarding the women's movement or topics that have to do with feminine participation.

First of all, considering the position you find yourself in today, I would like to begin asking you about your personal history. What was your childhood like? What brought you to this moment of your life?

Ana Margarita Vijil: It's quite long, yes, this response, because I am already 46 years old, so plenty of time has passed. I am Nicaraguan, I was born in the midst of a very special and volcanic context in Nicaragua. I arrived in December '77, in the middle of the fight against the dictatorship of the Somoza² family.

My childhood was permeated by the revolution during the 80s³ in Nicaragua and my adolescence alongside the first steps toward democracy and toward liberty in the 90s. My life has been really mixed, my own activism in these struggles and throughout these times, without a doubt.

I am the sixth daughter from a Catholic marriage which found its vocation for work via its religious activism, from their own faith, very influenced by liberation theology. I sucked from the teat of this liberation theology⁴ that taught me from a young age that we had a role here on this earth, a role to make of this space we were in a better place for other beings that were here, that I had a responsibility toward them.

This marked my life, my decision to study law, my activism in social struggles, in political struggles and my consciousness, that I have a voice, a role to take on and an undertaking in this world that had been assigned for me to carry out.

Interviewer: Is there any anecdote or certain special memory that says something, that explains the commitment that you have today to your country, to your career, to your aspirations or a certain environment from your childhood or your infancy?

¹ The interviewer's name has been redacted throughout this transcript for privacy purposes.

² The Somoza dictatorship included the presidencies of Anastasio Somoza García and his sons, Luis Somoza Debayle and Anastasio Somoza Debayle, between 1936-1979. "(Somoza Family." Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Somoza_family. Accessed 7 September, 2024).

³ The Nicaraguan Revolution (1960s-1990) was a prolonged liberation struggle against the Somoza regime and US imperial influence, which ultimately succeeded in ending the dictatorship. ("The Nicaraguan Revolution: History and Impact." ThoughtCo. <https://www.thoughtco.com/nicaraguan-revolution-4777782>. Accessed 7 September, 2024).

⁴ Liberation Theology was a movement led by Roman Catholics in Latin America in the late primarily in the 1960s-1970s. It employed religious principles to argue for economic reform as a solution to inequalities. ("Liberation Theology." Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/liberation-theology>. Accessed 7 September, 2024).

AMV: Well, I don't know, since I was young, I always dreamed of participating in the political life of my country. I saw the action of other women. I remember entering adolescence and seeing how there was a historic moment in Nicaragua where we had a woman president in the country,⁵ a woman president⁶ in the National Assembly,⁷ a woman president⁸ in the Supreme Court of Justice⁹ and I saw leaders in civil society, including, in addition, in human rights organizations, like Ms. Vilma Nuñez.¹⁰

So for me, that made a mark on my life also that example of women in distinct ideologies, many of them were not feminists, but were in places of decision making where it made me say, "I want to be there. They are my models." Similarly, in my own family, my mother, who was not in any of those public positions. She never was and never wanted to be, but she was the engine of my home, which from that arena she did everything, she helped everybody, she had a web of collaboration, of work, she was my other example.

My example in public life and my example of life behind the scenes, right? From this work of solidarity that is so important to make others' lives better. I think that if there is anything I would like to speak on it is how these images of strong women impacted me, from the different spaces that they did, they constructed a better country and my resolve that, "I also want, I also want to leave my mark" and to know that I could do it, because I had those examples.

Interviewer: Now, also thinking about when the work starts, let's say later on, what were your first steps to get involved in the area of your work? What has your trajectory been? What have you done?

AMV: I think I always have been an activist, since I was young, I had this idea in my head that my voice mattered, that, at least, I could use my voice and speak about any cause that I considered a just cause.

⁵ Violeta Chamorro became the first female head of state in the Americas in 1990 after defeating Daniel Ortega, and served as president until 1997. ("Violeta Chamorro." Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Violeta_Chamorro. Accessed 7 September, 2024).

⁶ Miriam Argüello became the first female president of the Nicaraguan National Assembly in 1990, serving until 1991. ("Miriam Argüello." Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Miriam_Arg%C3%BCello. Accessed 7 September, 2024).

⁷ The National Assembly of Nicaragua is a legislative body composed of 92 members. It was founded to replace the National Congress after the Revolution, and took effect in 1985. ("National Assembly (Nicaragua)." Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Assembly_\(Nicaragua\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Assembly_(Nicaragua)). Accessed 7 September, 2024).

⁸ Alba Luz Ramos is a Nicaraguan lawyer and judge who served as vice president of the Supreme Court of Justice from 1996 to 1998, as president from 2002-2003, and again as president since 2010. ("Alba Luz Ramos." Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alba_Luz_Ramos. Accessed 4 October, 2024.)

⁹ The Supreme Court of Justice is Nicaragua's highest court and is composed of 16 elected justices who serve 5-year terms. ("Legal Research in Nicaragua." NYU Law Global. https://www.nyuulawglobal.org/globalex/nicaragua1.html#_3.3.The_Judicial_Branch. Accessed 7 September, 2024).

¹⁰ Vilma Nuñez is a lawyer and advocate who founded the Nicaraguan Center for Human Rights, an NGO, in 1990. ("Vilma Nuñez." Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vilma_N%C3%BA%C3%B1ez. Accessed 8 September, 2024).

I remember from a young age being in the street for one reason or another, initially for issues related to the student movement, for example, in grade school, in university, that moment of opening up, of liberty, from the start of the 90s also, the flourishing of different organizations in civil society and of struggles and of pressure for legislative changes, also very influenced by that, by the protests in the street to reform a project of law.

I remember perfectly, above all, the protest led by the women's movements¹¹ and the budding sexual diversity in the country in that time with the derogation of article 205¹² of the penal code, which was at the beginning of the 90s, mid-90s and that article was repealed.

So there was also this conviction that pressure from the street, that your voice mattered, that if there is a just cause, you fight for that just cause, because that pressure works, that pressure creates consciousness and that sometimes, well, in other cases, you don't see the results as quickly and years can pass fighting for something, but that perseverance pays off. So, yes, my development started from there, from social struggles.

Eventually also a conviction that I have had throughout my partisan political participation that great transformations in the country can be achieved, not only in isolated issues that I care about, but also to be able to contribute to the resolution of greater problems in the life of Nicaraguans.

You know? That feeling of me being a high middle class woman, Nicaraguan, privileged, in a sea of misery, in the second poorest country in Latin America, in one of the most unequal, with a high grade of racism, even though we don't want to see it, with a huge level of violence against woman, which is why there was an extremely high statistic of femicides.¹³ All that to say, in this country of so many contradictions, so many problems.

I also arrived at the decision that I wanted to be in politics, because I wanted to contribute to the macro, to change this situation and I became involved in politics and I arrived at a party that opened its doors to me. I quit my job, I remember in 2005, because there was a

¹¹ Nicaragua's most prominent women's movement, Movimiento Autonomo de Mujeres (MAM) began in the 1990s as part of an effort to develop a platform specific to women's issues, separate from any one political party. ("Nicaragua Women's Social Movement." Shelly Grabe.

<https://shellygrabe.sites.ucsc.edu/2015/07/04/nicaragua-womens-social-movement/>. Accessed 8 September, 2024).

¹² Article 205 in Nicaragua's penal code was established in 1992 and enhanced the existing criminalization of homosexuality. ("Newest Storm in Nicaragua: Anti-Gay Law." New York Times.

<https://www.nytimes.com/1992/07/10/world/newest-storm-in-nicaragua-anti-gay-law.html>. Accessed 8 September, 2024).

¹³ Femicide refers to the intentional murder of women and/or girls motivated by gender. ("Five Essential Facts to Know About Femicide." UN Women. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/feature-story/2022/11/five-essential-facts-to-know-about-femicide>. Accessed 12 September, 2024).

candidate that looked to me like he could make those changes, and I wanted to contribute, that was Herty Lewites.¹⁴

I went to work as a volunteer in this campaign and I fell in love with the party and it opened the doors to Herty also, which was the Renewed Sandinista Movement (MRS)¹⁵ [*Movimiento Renovador Sandinista*]. And I felt that when I knew the project and program of this party, that it was my home. That this is what I wanted for Nicaragua. A country of liberty, democracy, but with social justice.

With a State that cared about its people, that invested in its health, in education, it was clear that there were groups in conditions of so much vulnerability, that there was a need for special politicians for these groups.

I already knew the MRS, because my dad had been a founder of it in '95. In that time, it didn't catch my attention. It was in 2006 that I felt this-- it was my sense of belonging. I can tell you, in a certain way, the group of women within the party was, for me, key. I related in the party to women of many ages that shared this feeling of commitment to liberty, to social justice. Who also had that very clear focus and that is, "Women have to support each other" because we are living in a society that does not make it easy for us. Which has been difficult. Which consistently tells us, "No, you can't. No, your role is in the home." So to find myself among this group of women helped me so much to be able to understand and to put into words, things that I had felt, but had never been clear about and it helped me, moreover, to reposition myself as a feminist.

I believe that, since I was young, I would say, "I am a feminist" but I wasn't very clear about it. It wasn't until I was in these more collective spaces with the Network of Women [*Red de Mujeres*]¹⁶ of MRS, in that time. Now, the party changed its name. It is called *Unamos* [Unite], in which I found myself again very proud of being a woman, very proud of the changes that we were able to make and also, even more powerful to be able to understand that I could make a difference to improve the condition of life of other women.

Interviewer: Could you tell us a little more about the Network of Women, in that moment, in MRS, and now *Unamos*?

AMV: Now *Unamos*.

¹⁴ Herty Lewites was a presidential candidate who left the Sandinistas to challenge Daniel Ortega, although he died in 2006 before the election took place. ("Herty Lewites." The Independent. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/obituaries/herty-lewites-6096246.html>. Accessed 16 September, 2024).

¹⁵ MRS (now *Unamos*) is a political party which was established as an alternative to the Sandinistas under Daniel Ortega. ("Sandinista Renovation Movement." Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sandinista_Renovation_Movement. Accessed 21 September, 2024).

¹⁶ Red de Mujeres is one of *Unamos*'s internal subgroups, and advocates for equity and human rights in Nicaragua, with a particular focus on women's issues. ("Unamos. Red de Mujeres." Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/unamos.redmujeres>. Accessed 21 September, 2024).

Interviewer: I mean, what activities, or what were the principles by which the group, let's say, how did it function? Did it also function like a group of formation, of studying, understanding feminist theory? I don't know, because maybe it is important to hear how a group, with concrete opposition, is also within a partisan structure, in a country like Nicaragua.

[laughter]

AMV: Yes, you see, first, let me start by telling you that it is in the very nature of the party, meaning, when the party was created in '95, there had also been an extremely strong understanding that women founded this party. It was a party formed by men and women. The women who founded it had a lot of clarity about the things that they did not want to have happen again in their lives. They were people who had already belonged to another political party, in most cases, among the founders.

Where this other political party, which was the Sandinista Front,¹⁷ had told them, "No, your problems will have to wait, because there are more important ones. No, no, no here we are all equal, men and women." It did not allow you to dig into those tremendous structural barriers that women have suffered against in the whole world.

So I believe that they arrived with a lot of conviction to the party that -- never again. Never again was anybody going to silence them. That never again would their demands be demands that would remain delayed. There was a lot of clarity about that, and of course, you know, I don't know if you remember, because now the issue is parity but at the start of the 90s, the big issue was quotas. Like, "What do you mean? You know there are serious difficulties! So we need to establish a minimum so that there is representation of all genders, and more than that of all ages in the party."

Since the birth of the party, in '95, 40% of the positions of decision-making were established to be women and 40% would be women. The other 20% was free and at least 30% had to be younger than 35 years old. Understanding that we needed that diversity of voices in positions of decision-making, which was correct. So we were, in fact, the first that established quotas, were the founders, the first.

The women of the party have always been very belligerent and actually, I think that there have been more women presidents than men. Now, I think we will end up equaling out with our newest election, which is, of course, a young man who is 34 years old, who won the party elections. So now there have been three and three of the six presidents that have been in *Unamos*, three women and three men.

¹⁷ The Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) is a Nicaraguan socialist party which successfully overthrew and repaced the Somoza regime as part of the 1979 Revolution. They maintain significant control in government, having abolished presidential term limits in 2009. ("Sandinista National Liberation Front." Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sandinista_National_Liberation_Front. Accessed 21 September, 2024).

There was a lot of clarity about that. I think that, throughout the years and above all, I also understood that the party was, despite being a progressive party, despite being a party that had a proposition of liberty, of justice, that the program understood itself, well, wow!, the great barriers that women had suffered, we were a party in Nicaragua, with vices, with the deficits of the Nicaraguan society.

Therefore, we were chauvinist, ageist, homophobic, in the background. Which we had to work to eradicate. Which is not only done by decree, it is not just establishing a program. But rather you have to open spaces for reflection, for discussion, for understanding those problems.

So the Network of Women played a role, especially in those years, of party growth, very important in the process of formation of women, and of men too. So yes, the role of formation, above all, of accompaniment for women candidacies. I feel, for example, I decided. I was president. I am one of the ex-female presidents of the party, but I feel that I don't know if I would have been able to make that decision alone, if I had not had the push of the other women. This role of accompaniment was also fundamental.

You know for me, it was also very interesting, because the Network of Women of MRS is not a network that defines itself as feminist. I think that, in practice we have the same functions, but it is not defined that way. There are some who yes, we identify ourselves as feminists, but not all. There are others who are not, definitely not and we are very diverse among ourselves and there is a lot of respect.

This is also very beautiful, because it helps us to be able to listen to other points of view also. To be able to give space for debate and freedom, which ultimately is what we want for the country. There is a group, with which I have never crossed paths, even farther back than my mother's friends who were women, who called themselves feminists, and were even Catholics, or religious, in general, in some way.

For me, this has been a very important theme in my life. Because, as I told you, I was born during the age of liberation theology. This, for me, has always been the most spiritual, religious part of me, and has also been important. I have never seen it as contradictory to my feminism. I also hadn't met other women in the same situation, and I met them there, in the party. Because there was also. [laughs] Nothing, well, I mean, I feel very proud of this space within the party of the Network of Women.

Sometimes, the men like to joke with us. Sometimes, some of them say, "The all-powerful Network of Women." Because we would organize ourselves for the internal elections. Because of this there has always been a lot of respect for institutionality. Elections are really a civic celebration.

There was not, especially after 2006, the possibility to vote freely, it was over in the country and the issue of elections was a real issue. It was so wonderful to have those spaces in the party and we would organize ourselves. We would build each other up. We would motivate candidacies. We achieved – Actually it is very difficult.

I feel that one of the barriers I have realized exists in the partisan-political world for women is the barrier that we have in our heads. It is that interior voice that sometimes tells us, “No, you are not sufficiently capable, Ana. Don’t get involved because you are not enough-

Interviewer: “You are not ready.”

AMV: -you are not ready.” It is in our head. So to have other women telling you, “Of course, girl, you can run circles around whatever men they throw at you. Get in there.” It helps, more than anything at the local level and with young women or with adult women who have not necessarily had these opportunities, etcetera. The process of the network of women has also been very important to motivate these candidacies.

So much so that I believe in the history of the party only once have we needed to apply the quota in national elections. It has never been necessary because we have had enough candidacies and enough votes. In contrast, I think it was only one time. We began in ’95 and we are in 2024 and the last elections were last year. Incidentally, it did not apply last year, there were sufficient candidates. So that is how my activism has gone and that is also how my most important support group works.

Interviewer: You mentioned, Ana Margarita, that you quit your job to enter wholeheartedly, to dedicate yourself to the electoral campaign and the mission in 2006. This means that you were doing other things. What were you doing before? Tell us a bit about that job and then, how you entered into the party completely and in the public, national, political life, how has your path developed within that?

AMV: I am a lawyer. I graduated from UCA,¹⁸ a university that no longer exists, because the regime of the Ortega Murillo¹⁹ family confiscated it illegally last year, along with 26 other private universities in Nicaragua, but that was my university, that is where I graduated from. I am sure we will recuperate it along with the rest of the stolen and confiscated institutions in the country. They offered me a job and I was the best student of my—

Interviewer: Congratulations.

AMV: Thank you. Yes, that is why they offered me that job. They had opened a position in the Nicaraguan embassy, in La Haya.²⁰ For one of the cases of one of the international

¹⁸ Universidad Centroamericano (UCA) was a private university in Managua, Nicaragua. It was shut down in 2023 by the Ortega Administration and replaced by Universidad Nacional Casimiro Sotol Montenegro. (“Central American University, Managua.” Wikipedia.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Central_American_University_Managua. Accessed 16 September, 2024).

¹⁹ This refers to the administration of both Daniel Ortega and his wife and vice president, Rosario Murillo. (“Rosario Murillo.” Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Rosario-Murillo>. Accessed 21 September, 2024).

²⁰ La Haya is the term used in Spanish to refer to The Hague. (“La Haya.” Wikipedia. https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/La_Haya. Accessed 16 September, 2024).

controversies of the country, the case of Nicaragua versus Colombia.²¹ And I went to work there, it was a big learning experience about international law, of greater awareness about how the superstructure²² of the world worked. And well, my time to have the opportunity to understand other societies, other realities, etcetera, but--.

I feel that there was always the need to return to Nicaragua inside of me, to contribute to Nicaragua and to live in Nicaragua. When the opportunity came up, I came back and got involved wholeheartedly. I was only able to do a sabbatical for a year because one has to live off something, and well, my savings were gone. Then I started giving classes and to work in different programs, a political formation program, that for me the design of the program was very important also in UCA, to give classes and to form myself. I also did my master's.

After finishing the campaign I came to the United States, I am a Fulbright scholar.²³ I did my master's in political science. I worked a lot during my master's on the issue of women and politics, which is a theme that has always been a passion of mine. I returned to continue the fight in Nicaragua because those democratic spaces were opening up. Remember, I come from Nicaragua.

In 2006, Daniel Ortega²⁴ came to power and started to close those democratic spaces, moreover he feels that the women's movement is one of his principal enemies and my party, the MRS at that time, now *Unamos*, was another of his enemies. In fact, he took our legal status from us in 2008. In that year he also criminalized various women of the movement, with whom, in fact, we had a lot of interaction.

I should tell you that in 2006 the MRS signed a political agreement with the Autonomous Women's Movement (*Movimiento Autónomo de Mujeres*),²⁵ committing itself programmatically to the causes of human rights for women in our own program and it continues. That strategic alliance continues.

²¹ In July 2023, the International Court of Justice in The Hague ruled in favor of Colombia, denying Nicaragua's long-disputed claim to extended offshore territory rights. ("World Court Backs Colombia in Maritime Border Dispute with Nicaragua." Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/world-court-rejects-nicaragua-claims-maritime-border-dispute-with-colombia-2023-07-13/>. Accessed 16 September, 2024).

²² Superstructure is a Marxist concept referring to the broad, overarching systems and cultural forces of a society. Superstructures are explained in relation to a society's "base," its everyday production and operations. ("Base and Superstructure." Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Base_and_superstructure. Accessed 21 September, 2024).

²³ The Fulbright Program provides grants selectively to scholars and researchers to facilitate international study and intellectual exchange. ("Fulbright Programs." U.S. Department of State. <https://eca.state.gov/fulbright/fulbright-programs>. Accessed 21 September, 2024).

²⁴ Daniel Ortega is a member of the Sandinista National Liberation Front who became leader of Nicaragua in 1971 after the Revolution and served as president from 1985-1990. He resumed office 2007-present and abolished term limits. ("Daniel Ortega." Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Daniel_Ortega. Accessed 22 September, 2024).

²⁵ Movimiento Autónomo de Mujeres (MAM) is a nonpartisan feminist NGO advancing women's issues in Nicaragua. ("Movimiento Autónomo de Mujeres (MAM) - Nicaragua." Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/MAMNicaragua/>. Accessed 22 September, 2024).

Those first years, after Daniel Ortega, were the prelude to all that came after. I was certain that I wanted to return to continue the internal fight. So I threw my hat in as a candidate for deputy in the 2011 elections. They inhibited me, illegally, I was not able to be a candidate. Then I decided to run for the presidency of the MRS. I continued giving classes. I am a professor of human rights and gender, but with many difficulties, because you know that to be in politics being recognized as an enemy or adversary of the regime was a problem.

You kind of become a pariah, because people are afraid to get too close to you because it can be harmful to them. In fact, at that time I was working at the Polytechnic University of Nicaragua,²⁶ now also confiscated and closed by the regime.

Interviewer: Could you tell us a bit about the results of your master's thesis? Because the case is Nicaragua, the case that you studied or that you compared and a bit about your work as a teacher, your academic work in UPOLI, in the Polytechnic University.

AMV: I wanted to work on an issue that had to do with women and politics, and I wanted to use as a case study some mechanisms to be able to access positions in the National Assembly, in the Nicaraguan congress.

I was analyzing a variety of variables, one of which was how, for example, political alliances affect women, because normally they are alliances between men, and when it comes to being dispensed with, they get rid of the women. For this reason, it is so important that women be at those negotiating tables, not just men.

There were men committed to the causes of women also, because we need them, we need a society in general that is committed to the cause. Also the role that we could play in alternate positions, because in a lot of cases women are sent, let's say, "Fine, I am meeting the quota, but the women I will send as alternates, not as seat-owners." Obviously, we have to fight for those spots, but also any gap can be used to reach those decision-making positions.

So additionally, how to use the roles of alternates to make changes, to reach those decision-making positions and how it is key to have allied men also in the process. That is to say, that was my other reflection. I mean, "We want a society where men and women are committed to this cause." How we also have a role to play.

Interviewer: The data that you found, what did it say? What did it reveal?

AMV: Well, what it revealed was that Nicaragua was a summarily chauvinist country and that women have been suffering an enormous underrepresentation throughout the years. Obviously that the most programmatic parties, progressive, were the places where women could put up a fight if there was institutionality there, right? If there were processes of institutionality where women could have a chance, well they could take advantage of those.

²⁶ UPOLI is a university in Managua. ("Polytechnic University of Nicaragua." Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polytechnic_University_of_Nicaragua. Accessed 22 September, 2024).

The most discretionary places where there were only people who made decisions and there were no laws or norms, well, women could be in a difficult spot because normally they prioritize other men, their male friends and I don't know what, for as much progressive discourse they might have too.

Interviewer: Your work as a teacher, how was that experience?

AMV: It is wonderful, I have always loved to teach.

Interviewer: What themes have you discussed in your classes?

AMV: I have always been, for the most part, a professor of human rights and gender, honestly I love it because I feel that I learn so much talking with the young men and women, understanding their way of seeing life.

I feel that it is a win-win, because I bring my information, I give the class, I explain all the importance of human rights to them, what they are, etcetera, and then all the inequalities of gender that bring about violations of human rights, etcetera, but I also listen to them and learn a lot. I have always loved it, it is something that I have really missed in the last few years since I haven't been able to teach.

UPOLI was like a haven of peace for me and for my brain, to be able to study, to learn, to research in UPOLI. I feel very happy because UPOLI also had the characteristics of university community. That university was a university, how do I say it, already confiscated, founded by the Bautista Convention²⁷ to reach the poorest neighborhoods in Managua,²⁸ I mean, Managua had the Central American University (UCA) of the Jesuits,²⁹ that was an elite University, where I studied, many years after its foundation. At that time, the Bautista Convention says well, a few years after the founding of UCA, "We have to create this other University to reach people who have never been able to attend, but yes they can" in moments that the focus of public higher education was in León,³⁰ not in Managua.

UPOLI was created first with the Nursing School and then continued getting bigger, I think the Law School was one of the latest additions. My students were students, I don't know, of the René Schick³¹ of the Americas, of the Americas where young men and women that had seen it as so difficult to be there, very hard, right? It was a school for me also where I felt

²⁷ The Baptist Convention (Convención Bautista) of Nicaragua is an association of Baptist churches founded in 1917. ("Baptist Convention of Nicaragua." World Council of Churches. <https://www.oikoumene.org/member-churches/baptist-convention-of-nicaragua>. Accessed 22 September, 2024).

²⁸ Managua is Nicaragua's largest city and capital. ("Managua." Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Managua>. Accessed 16 September, 2024).

²⁹ Jesuit is the title of members of the Society of Jesus, a Roman Catholic order founded in the 16th C. ("Jesuit." Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Jesuits>. Accessed 16 September, 2024).

³⁰ León is Nicaragua's 2nd largest city and the capital of its León Department. ("León, Nicaragua." Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Le%C3%B3n,_Nicaragua. Accessed 16 September, 2024).

³¹ René Schick Gutierrez served as Nicaragua's Minister of Education (1957-1961) and Minister of Foreign Affairs (1961-1962) under the Somoza regime, and as president from 1963-1966. (René Schick." Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ren%C3%A9_Schick. Accessed 22 September, 2024).

that I could make a difference in their lives and that made me a better professor, because I wanted to give more, every day give more for them too.

That was really a beautiful and interesting experience. I feel very proud of that university. I also have given classes at UCA and I love my university and those vibrant young people at UCA also and well I miss it. I miss it a lot. Obviously, it is a tragedy that 27 universities have been closed in Nicaragua, but those years at UPOLI have a very special place in my heart.

Interviewer: Of all your trajectory that you have described as a woman working in academia, working in political parties, has it been difficult for you as a woman? In what ways did you meet prejudice or discrimination from colleagues or others that you have had to work around and from other organizations?

AMV: Why do you address me with the formal you [*usted*],³² [interviewer]? It feels weird.

[laughter]

Interviewer: Because that is how it is on the questionnaire and I don't want to confuse myself. But yes. I will say the informal you [*vos*] ...

AMV: I think, yes. What happens is that I think that at first one doesn't notice it or if you notice it, you don't process it. I had some difficulty in my high school, for example. Seeing it in retrospect, I realize that if I had been a man maybe the things that the authorities in the high school criticized about me, they would have supported and would have praised, because that is how it is, because that is how the world was that we lived in. What is good for the goose isn't good for the gander.³³

A man who is very talkative or who has strong opinions is a leader, but a woman who is talkative or has strong opinions is a chatterbox, is complicated, or is hormonal on her period.

Interviewer: Those are the justifications.

AMV: Exactly. I feel that what I lived through in that sense, that is a discrimination that is under the surface, nobody says it to you, no, they tell you, "Everybody here is equal, of course," they say that, but it isn't true. There was a conception, furthermore, imagine, I studied in a high school run by a masculine religious order. Of course that was more

³² Usted is a formal word for "you" in Spanish. In many countries, the informal version of "you" is "tú," but some countries, including Nicaragua, use the word "vos" as the informal second person singular pronoun instead. ("Voseo." Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Voseo>. Accessed 22 September, 2024).

³³ This is a reversal of the expression, "what's good for the goose is good for the gander," which argues that situations or people should be treated equally in relation to each other. ("What's Good for the Goose is Good for the Gander." Merriam Webster. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/what%27s%20good%20for%20the%20goose%20is%20good%20for%20the%20gander>. Accessed 16 September, 2024).

pronounced. I think they have evolved since then, but at that time well, yes, I lived through it, I felt it and I learned then to realize that it really exists, that underlying chauvinism.³⁴

Maybe it wasn't politically correct for them to say to me, "Be quiet." But yes, they criticized me if I said things. They wouldn't have criticized me if I had been a man or even if what I said had been said by one of my male companions it would have been applauded. So I felt it there – No, I am privileged. I, in general Nicaraguan terms, I am a woman with lighter skin than normal,³⁵ from a well-off family. I don't know if I am explaining myself. That gave me power.

Interviewer: What your gender identity took away from you, let's say another part of your identity—

AMV: I definitely understood later what they now call intersectionality, when I started to have female classmates that came from other social strata, with different skin color, from other parts of the country and I realized that they treated them worse, damn, it wasn't their ideas that sometimes mattered at university, but rather the prejudice that there was about who they were.

It was a lot easier for me seeing how it was for my friends, sometimes because I did not have those barriers at that moment, which were barriers of class, race, I didn't face that, because I was among the privileged, I just had the issue of gender.

I think it was from my own experience, but also from the experience of people that I love, of my female friends around me, that I started realizing and processing that it was the fact of being a woman in a world constructed for men, you know? and also having a voice to be able to make changes, getting involved in politics, which is a man's arena.

Civil society is for women, but all things political are for men, right?, that is how the world is divided. If you want to do community work, work in the churches, women's domain, but if you are in politics, still – look, I am 46 years old. I tell you when I started. I think, no! I am clearly an adult woman, I am not young anymore. I already surpassed the youth statistic, but still in politics they call you, "The girls."

Interviewer: Right, to infantilize³⁶ you.

³⁴ Chauvinism is an attitude or ideology of superiority over another group, often used in the context of male chauvinism, which entails patriarchal and sexist values. ("Chauvinism." Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/chauvinism>. Accessed 14 September, 2024).

³⁵ Colorism (discrimination based on skin color, often with colonial roots) exists in Latin America as well as many other places, perpetuating social and economic inequalities that favor lighter skin. ("The Perseverance of Colorism in Latin America and its Links to Economic Exclusion." Emory Economic Review. <https://emoryeconomicreview.org/articles/2021/11/22/the-perseverance-of-colorism-in-latin-america-and-its-links-to-economic-exclusion>. Accessed 23 September, 2024).

³⁶ Infantilization is the process of treating people or groups as though they were younger than they are, often as part of a broader pattern of dehumanization or belittlement. ("Infantilization." Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Infantilization>. Accessed 14 September, 2024).

AMV: Exactly. “The girls.”

Interviewer: Putting you under their tutelage, in a certain way.

AMV: Yes, and moreover, you always hear—Last time, I don’t know who it was about, a guy who is a friend of mine. I don’t have anything against him, but they recorded him and he was saying, “That girl did something, but you know who is really behind it.” He says. There is also always this imagining in politics that whatever you do, whatever I do, there is always an important group that thinks, “it is because she has someone behind her or a strong man behind her.” Of course this is another barrier, you have to work double or triple just to—

I work hard so that the next generation of women in politics do not have to work triple to demonstrate who they are. I am convinced that it has gone so much easier for me than women who got involved in politics 20 years ago, yikes, light years! We have advanced, but we have advanced thanks to us working extra hard, us women. For that reason, we have to keep working extra hard, that is why I still feel this way, we also have a role to play in partisan politics to open those spaces.

Of course, I have felt that discrimination, even if it is subtle, but it has its effects and if you love another woman, even worse for you, sister. [laughs]

Interviewer: Because there is another layer.

AMV: Because it adds another layer of prejudice that is not politically correct to say, but you know it is beneath the surface.

Interviewer: Ana Margarita, what does feminism mean for you and how would you define it?

AMV: For me it is the lens through which I can identify social processes that make things difficult or put obstacles in the lives of women and also to see the alternatives to make a change.

Interviewer: What has feminism meant in your work, in your life, in your career, and do you consider yourself a feminist?

AMV: Yes, I consider myself a feminist and I believe it has been vital in my life to be able to understand the importance of seeing reality with another set of eyes, with diverse eyes. My responsibility to bring different views to the public arena and changes in public policies so that society can realize these different views – I learned that from my feminism. That there is not just one truth.

Even more, that you have to question the hegemonic³⁷ truth, because if there is only one truth, if they only tell you one thing, it is because there are many oppressed truths and

³⁷ Hegemony is the dominance and normalization of one group or set of values over others. (“Hegemony.” Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/hegemony>. Accessed 14 September, 2024).

where there is an oppressed truth, there are oppressed people. I learned that from feminism.

Interviewer: Thinking about your experience, your trajectory, how has it changed? If you could put a timeline and think about the way that you understand your role in this moment, in this decade. How do you think your projects or issues you are involved with have changed?

AMV: You know I think that I have matured. I think that being a daughter of the revolution, in the end, that polarization of the 80s and that—Speaking of hegemonic truths I had my evolution I think since childhood of true hegemony, where on one side they were saying that they had the truth and justice in their hands and to realize that the world is more diverse, there are more truths, like I was saying, there are more viewpoints.

I think my life has been--, I think I am in a moment in which I have matured enough to understand that what I take for granted might not be there anymore, that it is good to listen to other voices and that moreover life is not black and white, that the world is not black and white, the more I listen the more I learn. It has also been an evolution from, "I can do it myself." To "I am stronger if we do it together," right? Because you have these diversity of viewpoints, of ideas, and also of respect.

It is an evolution from, "I have the absolute truth," to "That's not how it is, it could be completely contrary or different." That is what I feel, that life is not always how one imagines and that one has to be open to experience, explore, find other truths and listen to them and learn. That not everybody has the same experience, the same lived experience.

Even if I cannot live 1,000 lives, I have the chance to hear those 1,000 voices and learn from them and give them the same value that I have learned from my own account. So there, I am not sure if I answered your question, but that is the idea.

Interviewer: Yes, that is the idea. Maybe this is something to talk about later, but I would like to know about your current work, what are you doing now and what are some of your expectations for the future in terms of your organization, in terms of your position, from where you see it?

AMV: As you well know, 2018 was a watershed moment for all Nicaraguans. Those massive protests that showed us that we really are all in the same boat, we want freedom, democracy, justice in Nicaragua, at least a large number of people are getting on that boat, but the reaction of the state that killed, that arrested, that continues asphyxiating Nicaraguans in the country, that many also had to leave, that changed my life, obviously.

I couldn't go back to teaching. I couldn't continue my normal life, not anymore. That was also the moment I learned to live with uncertainty and that is still what I am doing now. I was imprisoned for my activism in politics and human rights. I was detained for 606 days in solitary confinement. I was exiled.

Last year and this year and what you are asking me about has been a year of finding myself again and what my role is in this new context, to get back to feeling, get back to finding my path to contribute to this, my fight, that I told you that I have been working on since I was a young girl or this same project which was to build a better society, more just and with more opportunities for everyone and all women who were around me.

I believe I maintain the same project, but throughout the years, experience has told me, "You do not have to always do things the same way or the same thing," I am no longer in Nicaragua, I cannot do the things that I was doing in Nicaragua, but I am working from here, supporting the way I can for the people who are in Nicaragua, denouncing the human rights violations.

I continue being a Human Rights activist and I continue working with my party, for the construction of an alternative politics that could be a solution to the serious problems in Nicaragua and a space I also want to be able to work on and it is one of the projects that I have in development, now that I cannot teach in Nicaragua, which is how to use social media as formation spaces for young people who are outside Nicaragua, there are 27 closed universities!

Even the ones in Nicaragua do not have spaces to study or to reflect. Now imagine those who had to leave in exile in very precarious situations.

I believe that I am in a time of my life where I also want to make inroads that facilitate formation reflection spaces and continue doing what I was doing in a different way and learning how I can continue my activism with my same principles, with my same goal, but with different instruments and using different techniques and I am in the learning process to do this.

I am also in the process of learning, that in order to help, one also has to take care of yourself, and I need to take care of myself, that is also a form of resistance and that is also part of the feminist struggle, to take care of ourselves, to give ourselves care, love, and time, so I am also in that process, to heal myself after everything I lived through.

Interviewer: Ana Margarita you are, you have experience in the streets, as we say in Nicaragua, you are an activist that is familiar with and knows how to organize to make things happen, to work in a collective, but you also have academic expertise. The question is, how do you perceive that relationship, that connection between academia and activism?

AMV: I believe it is a very real connection, vital and super important, without each other they are empty, activism would not have a foundation. If your activism does not have a reason to exist and you do not nourish it, inform yourself, and do not study to understand the profound causes of the problem you want to fight against, you will not be able to present alternatives. So, the street needs academia, it needs those spaces for reflection.

On the other hand, if academia does not help to reflect about those fundamental problems and does not help to contribute, to find solutions to these problems that are being fought in the street, well then you also have an empty academia.

So I think that for me they have also been extremely tightly connected, I could not feel that what I am teaching is something that would not be useful for any one of those young men and women in whatever major they are doing, that they feel that this information will serve them by bringing to the table a vindication, a right and their voice for their change, for change, to generate alternative or different visions, etcetera. Yes, for me, they have always been super connected.

Interviewer: Has it been, I don't know, difficult or, how have you been able to balance the fact that as a professor, let's say how you presented yourself in the classroom? Your students knew that you also belonged to a political party and in Nicaragua that would be difficult.

AMV: You know whenever you have and you create an atmosphere of respect, I think that you can overcome those difficulties. I, a lot of times, but look, a lot of times I had young people, students who were part of the Sandinista Youth and I do not think that any of them ever felt assailed by me only because I was the professor and I had the authority, I never felt anything but respect from them.

I think the point is to make a climate of respect, of equal to equal, including with your students. I think that for me the classroom was a place where I could go and tell how I saw things, but I could listen to the young people and that helped me understand. I feel that for my own political activism to be able to understand why those young people were part of the Sandinista Youth was fundamental, because that space gave them a reason to exist, a space to do other things.

We could speak more profoundly about that, but what I can tell you is that I believe that it happened because of mutual respect, by walking that line, you can say that here everybody is their own person, nobody is going to disrespect another and your thoughts are just as valid as mine. To understand that, not coming in with superiority, helps so that the others also don't feel attacked by you and then they don't attack. Yes, my experience with students from the Sandinista Youth as I tell you was for me part of my own growth.

Interviewer: We know that *Unamos*, as a party, has international connections. How do you see, for example, the network of women in communication or in connection with other women's movements outside the country?

AMV: I'll tell you that it is within the country first, well it has been--, I think the Nicaraguan experience is beautiful, where women from political parties and women from civil society find common causes to say, "Of course we are here together, right, in this fight." And it doesn't matter. Everyone is from their own space, and really each having a part in the broader women's movement. We even have this programmatic agreement that is valid for everything, it is an agreement that we take on for all society, not just individually.

We have felt a lot of support and solidarity from women's movements outside of Nicaragua. I believe the women's movement in general in Latin America has been so belligerent, from the first who denounced Daniel Ortega since 1998, when it came out publicly that Daniel Ortega was, along with everything, a rapist, not just a despot,³⁸ not just that – He was a rapist.

I think that the women's movements from different countries were super consequential and key to unmasking Daniel Ortega. At the international level, also we are part of the Progressive Alliance [*Alianza Progresista*]³⁹ that is a space for social democratic and progressive parties and movements around the world.

That has also been an opportunity to connect with women from other parts of the world and realize that there are certain problems that cross borders, sister, that sometimes the relationship with your male companions have the same characteristics. To be able to listen, get ideas, help, feel like you are part of something bigger, always helps, always is motivating. Yes, I have felt that.

Interviewer: How do you analyze, how do you evaluate and what are your expectations of the development of the feminist movement in Nicaragua? What is your analysis?

AMV: I think that especially since 2018 it was a watershed moment where women in Nicaragua, the broader movement of women in Nicaragua again made their mark and I feel very proud of that because the commitment of the movement in general for the fight for democracy, and for liberty in Nicaragua, has been extraordinary.

It has even brought about sitting at the same table with people and groups that, or maybe they do in other parts of the world, would never have believed that a feminist movement could sit at.

To take that step has also been, I feel, very noble and mature to understand that this society and this boat we are all in takes all of us to keep it moving and takes everyone from their individual spaces to make it happen. So I forecast that the women's movement in Nicaragua has teeth and can expand. Right now it is very internally debilitated like all other organizations because Daniel Ortega and Rosario Murillo have been in charge of shutting down all the organizations.⁴⁰

³⁸ The term "despot" describes a ruler with complete power. ("Despot." Cambridge Dictionary. <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/despot>. Accessed 14 September, 2024).

³⁹ Latin America generally refers to Mexico, Central America, South America, and the Caribbean. Countries in Latin America are united by their shared history of Spanish and Portuguese colonization and the resulting prevalence of romance languages. ("History of Latin America." Briannica. <https://www.britannica.com/place/Latin-America>. Accessed 14 September, 2024).

⁴⁰ The Ortega Administration has shut down over 5,000 organizations, targeting those critical of him. The shutdowns are thought to have been spurred by a wave of political protests beginning in 2018. ("Nicaragua Bans 1500 NGOs in Latest Crackdown Against Civil Society." Al Jazeera.

There are more than 5,000 shut down organizations, in fact it is calculated that many of them are women's organizations, by that I mean, shelters where women's movements supported women who were victims of violence, shelters for mothers, spaces for women's organizations, all that is closed. We will have to return to this country, those who will return and those who are inside will have to, when the climate, when liberty returns to the country and we can recuperate, well we will have a big job and a great task.

I am sure that women will be present in that construction from different spaces, from civil society, from the political realm, from different areas. Yes, I am sure of that. There is no going backwards for the women's movement in Nicaragua, to the contrary.

Let me tell you also that I feel proud because in this latest period, there have also emerged young women's movements, that have plans that in some cases for me are completely novel, so it is really exciting to hear them, because you learn.

Interviewer: Like what, for example?

AMV: Oh I don't know, I can say, the badly-behaved women [*malcriadas*],⁴¹ I love the badly-behaved ones! I even love the name, *malcriadas*. I hear them and I see them on social media.

I don't know, it is like, I like it so much, the movement of women and feminists in Nicaragua, they are so diverse. You can see the differences, the commitment of their lives of these women, that crosses everything, the commitment to a better life, but with different focuses, with different jobs. It is so beautiful to me because I feel I am learning, like I can tell you, because since I am a lawyer, my brain is super schematic.

Sometimes things don't occur to me, I feel that to get out of this huge crisis, we need to open our minds, look for new ideas, new ways of organizing, new forms of activism. You say that I have experience with activism. It is true that I have been on the street, I think all my adult life, but I do not remember doing anything very creative.

[laughter]

I think that the contact with these groups of women and young women and all of that has opened my mind to see new ideas, to see new ways of thinking or things that would never have occurred to me. They are making corrections and it seems they are super correct. All this new understanding, I spent two years in prison.

So there is a lot of new things in the world that have emerged, even the development of the language of gender, the very understanding of the diversity that can exist in the concept of

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/8/19/nicaragua-bans-1500-ngos-in-latest-crackdown-against-civil-society>. Accessed 23 September, 2024).

⁴¹ Las Malcriadas is a Nicaraguan feminist collective founded in 2018 which produces feminist media content and engages in political and legal advocacy. ("Las Malcriadas." PBI Nicaragua. <https://pbi-nicaragua.org/en/who-we-accompany/las-malcriadas>. Accessed 14 September, 2024).

gender, of identity based on gender, etcetera. A lot has evolved and I really enjoy hearing about all this work and learning in all those spaces to try to understand it too.

Interviewer: Earlier you mentioned how you discovered the term intersectionality and how it applied to your life. How do you see this discovery in personal terms and in the work that the network does or the work of *Unamos*? How are other indicators of inequality recognized, besides gender, in the case of Nicaragua, and how can that be resolved? How do you perceive other ways in which inequality exists and the inequality that continues permeating the life of women?

AMV: We come from a tradition in which the social struggles and struggles against inequality started originally, at least in theory, from the farthest left or progressive movements in the 60s and 70s as an issue of class, uniquely. Well it is well documented, of course, that it happens everywhere. When women's movements got involved, they got involved and started to say, "Buddy, class is one thing but there are oppressed women and that is another issue, let me explain and you have to keep this in mind."

There had been all this work and then you have the Caribbean women, in the case of Afro descendant Nicaraguans, from the Caribbean or also indigenous communities, Nicaraguans. I just had a discussion precisely about this two weeks ago with a young woman from a Pacific indigenous community, from Nicaragua, who was telling me her story and about overcoming her own obstacles.

You realize that, oh no, there's also this other issue of race that permeates, and then you realize that all of Nicaragua's public policies and all our planning is completely focused on Managua. Just leaving Managua already creates an additional difficulty because all the services are in Managua. Of course, there is other discrimination, but also leaving Managua is not just that, because living in León is not the same thing as living in the Dry Corridor⁴².

I think my best understanding of intersectionality, is to understand that there are many variables that make up a human being and they can affect a human being in different ways and generate elements of vulnerability for you and that public policies can increase those vulnerabilities or uncover them and make them better. That is to say, a country that only invests in its wealth is a country that is creating a process of enormous territorial inequality. A country that does not recognize that women have certain specific conditions in their lives.

If there are no public policies to resolve that, well it is a country where that gets worse. If we do not recognize that the greatest numbers of malnutrition in the country are in the Dry Corridor of Nicaragua and the Caribbean coast, we do not have public policies to resolve that.

⁴² The Dry Corridor is an area of land especially vulnerable to drought and other extreme weather. It includes parts of Nicaragua, El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala. ("The Dry Corridor." World Food Program USA. <https://www.wfpusa.org/countries/dry-corridor/>. Accessed 14 September, 2024).

I think that the understanding of intersectionality for me in fact relates to that, to those aspects of vulnerability and understanding that there has to be better understanding from the State of that and that possibly it cannot resolve it alone and for that reason it is so important to have municipal autonomy so that more can be done locally and to be able to listen to a belligerent society that can let you know what the problems are as well.

That is to say, the connection between the State and society that guarantees a better understanding and the necessity to return to the discussion of the social contract, that they tell you what the basis of those political policies should be and they do not just have to come off the top of your head, that they come out of an integral discussion with society so that all these visions and these little pieces, this mosaic works together to construct what Nicaragua wants for ourselves to have in 20 years.

What policies do we have to have now to be able to get to that and how can we take into account those elements of inequality or difference. I think that the party still is light years away from what we would want, because that is the situation of the country, but we are on the way to making those spaces of discussion to be able to incorporate all those issues in our own program of government, but understanding that we are just a small piece of this society that is so diverse.

That at least, part of our role in the new Nicaragua and in the current Nicaragua is to be able to be a hinge that can listen to other sectors of the Nicaraguan society and learn from them even if they are not in our party.

Additionally, if we reach the government we cannot just do whatever we want, we have to listen to society and we have to have an ample national dialogue. I tell you in this case also because there is another variable very much at play here, which is politics in Nicaragua. Right now to the opposers we are pariah, because the power – when we arrive to power, we will have the others as the pariah, the Ortega followers as pariah. If we do that, we reproduce the cycle, we cannot do the same thing.

People who are in Nicaragua, the people who are supporting that right now, also have to know that this Nicaragua will be theirs and that their voice will be listened to as well. Obviously understanding that one of the great compromises in this new stage is justice and those who have committed crimes, there has to be a process of truth and justice in Nicaragua, but that does not mean revenge against a specific social group.

This understanding that there are many people right now who don't think like us, but are still Nicaraguans, will be very important and to be able to reach out to those bases from there, I think it is really important. Let me tell you that for me in this sense it was very instructive to have been in jail, because being in jail I saw the police that were there.

Maybe I could have arrived, you know, thinking, "These are my enemies, right, because these are the people who were hitting us in the street, because they were the ones shooting at people." But it is not true, that those police that were with me were there, and that's it.

We cannot put everyone in the same bag, because there were very good police there with us and others who were simply humble people doing their job.

Interviewer: And who didn't want to lose their job.

AMV: Right, no, they were doing their job and that's it! These are the jobs there are in Nicaragua. Understanding that life is complicated and that we cannot demonize groups only because they think differently from us. That this doesn't mean there will be impunity in the country, but rather obviously that Nicaragua needs more than anything to close its wounds, spaces of truth and justice. That this justice cannot be tarnished with the thirst for revenge nor with sectarianisms, nor with authoritarianism, with none of these 'isms.' We have to do a job there of real reflection and action.

Interviewer: How has your job changed as a result of the pandemic?⁴³ What effect did the pandemic have on the work you were doing or especially how did you observe that the pandemic affected the lives of women specifically?

AMV: I feel that in a country like Nicaragua where the State did not get involved with helping in the middle of this terrible tragedy and it was civil society who had to get moving to educate ourselves, to disseminate information, to provide even hand sanitizer and methods of solidarity and support in communities, etcetera.

The watch groups of civil society were causing awareness of cases of COVID in Nicaragua, not the State, to the contrary. I think that the pandemic was a moment that also was, in the first place, a moment to recognize that we had to help each other ourselves and that we had a role there.

I think those months were months where the main task was to identify mechanisms of support for people, access to health, taking the most advantage of virtual media, connecting people to virtual medical attention who had symptoms, repositioning our own activism using social media more, even those who had already been using virtual media since 2018 because a lot of us had been working clandestinely, those were the means we used.

It was like exponentially amplifying what we had already been doing. We already had a Zoom⁴⁴ account. It wasn't like we opened it because of the pandemic, we already had it. I think it caused awareness of the need and the power that humanitarian work has, right? In the middle of the tragedy of the pandemic, we had to find that niche for activism. Activism at that time was to make sure more people survived, that was what we focused on. I think that was a learning experience, our role there also in people's lives.

⁴³ The COVID-19 pandemic began in December of 2019 and spread globally, causing millions of deaths and impacting many areas of daily life and communication. ("COVID-19 Pandemic." Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/COVID-19_pandemic. Accessed 14 September, 2024).

⁴⁴ Zoom is a video communications platform that gained popularity during the COVID-19 pandemic. ("Zoom (software)." Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zoom_\(software\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zoom_(software)). Accessed 14 September, 2024).

In the second place, obviously that made us realize the terrible difficulties that, again, this implied for women. I remember when we were saying, “Stay home,” but a lot of women who we were aware of or we were working with along these lines were saying, “In such a small space, I am suffering violence,” or “I can’t take care of my kids here because between work – I have to go to work and now I can’t send the kids to school.”

Definitely, for women it was terrible in other ways, not just the tragedy of the illness and having death all around you, but the differences of gender created bigger problems for them. I remember perfectly well that, households are small and spending more time there...

Interviewer: Overcrowding.

AMV: Overcrowding gave the potential for more exposure to violence as well and, in the second place, the work of caring for older adults and for kids fell to women. There you can clearly see the social inequalities that still exist in the world. I definitely saw that more clearly during the pandemic.

Interviewer: We have arrived at the end of the interview. Is there anything you would like to add or maybe that you wanted to go back to about any of the questions? Is there anything you would like to finish the interview up with?

AMV: No, thank you for this opportunity. I feel very honored that you wanted to interview me. I hope my voice, my thoughts or my reflections are helpful in some way.

Interviewer: Of course they will be helpful. Thank you so much for your life’s work and for your time. On behalf of the Global Feminisms Project, thank you for participating in today’s interview.

AMV: Thank you.