

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

SITE: COUNTRY

Transcript of Tamara Dávila Rivas

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Tamara Dávila, born in 1981, is a Nicaraguan feminist political activist and human rights defender. She graduated with a psychology degree from Universidad Centroamericana in Managua and holds two master's degrees in Gender, Identity, and Citizenship from the Universidad de Huelva, Spain, and another in Public Policy, Rights and Youth Leadership from Universidad Centroamericana in Managua. Since 2004, Tamara has worked extensively with women's organizations and other civil society groups that promote sexual and reproductive rights and advocate on behalf of survivors of violence against women and girls. Dávila has been an active participant in demonstrations and initiatives regarding gender-based violence in Nicaragua, such as the staging of the performance "*Un violador en tu camino*" (A Rapist in Your Path) in downtown Managua.

Since 2014, Dávila has been a member of the political party Unamos (previously known as Sandinista Renovation Movement, MRS). During the student-led mass protests in 2018, which included more than 500 assassinations at the hands of the police and paramilitary groups, she denounced, and continues to denounce, the Ortega-Murillo government and works with [UNAB](#), [Articulación Feminista](#), and [UNAMOS](#), among other political and civil movements, to achieve a democratic transition in her country that allows justice, equality, equity, and freedom. Because of that, government-sponsored intimidation and persecution increased, as she was being followed and her house was placed under surveillance. Due to her advocacy in defense of human rights and her leadership in the widespread opposition movement, Tamara was illegally and violently arrested at her house by the Ortega Murillo regime on June 12, 2021, in the presence of her five-year-old daughter. After the police raided her house and denied knowing her whereabouts for several weeks, Tamara officially disappeared into the hands of the Nicaraguan authorities. She was placed in solitary confinement for twenty months at the new prison built by the regime for political prisoners known as "El Nuevo Chipote." There, and in clear violation of international law on the prevention of torture and treatment of prisoners, she faced several forms of torture that included dietary restrictions, interrogations in the middle of the night, irregular family visits, denial of access to reading and writing materials, and solitary confinement. Her case was emblematic because [the regime prevented Tamara from establishing any form of contact with her daughter](#) for over a year. On February 9, 2023, she was sent into exile alongside 221 other Nicaraguan political prisoners and granted humanitarian parole status in the United States. Currently, she is the 2023-2024 Human Rights Fellow at the Arcus Center for Social Justice Leadership in Kalamazoo College, Michigan. She continues to advocate for Nicaragua's freedom and works to build a united and diverse movement in exile in coordination with people inside Nicaragua and around the world. She was recently elected spokesperson of the new political movement of leaders in exile, [Monteverde](#).

Keywords: Military Work in Nicaragua, Imprisonment, and Reproductive Rights

Interviewer¹: Thank you so much, Tamara, for accepting to participate in the Global Feminisms Project². We will be speaking for about an hour. Let's begin by talking about your life and how you became involved in the work you are doing now, your thoughts and your point of view about your work in the context of the women's movement and the connections you observe between your work and that of activists in other areas.

To begin, I would like to ask you, considering the position you are in today, about your personal history. Tell me about your childhood, what brought you to where you are at this moment? What are the commitments of your life, your principal commitments?

Tamara Dávila: What profound questions! Thank you so much, [Interviewer], to you for your commitment, for your research work and also to the Global Feminisms Project for granting a voice to us Nicaraguan feminists. Thank you so much for the opportunity, really.

Interviewer: It is a pleasure.

TD: I come from a family in which, my immediate nucleus, my father and my mother, were involved in the process of the revolution. I was born in 1981, so I did not live through the dictatorship of the Somozas³, but I did live through, although I was very young, the war in the 80s⁴. My mother had a very active role within the party at that time, she was the politician responsible for the fifth region. I am talking about Santo Tomás⁵, Juigalpa⁶.

I remember, from my few memories of my childhood, being under a bed with the woman who took care of me, because there was a shooting. It is one of the clearest memories of my childhood, but I also grew up in a very free environment. I mean, as a girl of a young age I

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

² The Global Feminisms Project was started in 2002 with the purpose of recording feminists and their activism from various countries across the world. ("About the Global Feminisms Project." Global Feminisms Project. <https://sites.lsa.umich.edu/globalfeminisms/about/>. Accessed 15 August 2024.)

³ The Somoza family controlled Nicaragua from 1936 to 1979. Throughout those 43 years, the Somoza family did not consistently rule the country, but were still able to remain in control through the national guard. ("Somoza Family." Wikipedia.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Somoza_family#:~:text=The%20Somoza%20family%20\(Spanish%3A%20Familia,Debayle%20and%20Anastasio%20Somoza%20Debayle](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Somoza_family#:~:text=The%20Somoza%20family%20(Spanish%3A%20Familia,Debayle%20and%20Anastasio%20Somoza%20Debayle). Accessed 15 August 2024.)

⁴ During the 1980s, the Nicaraguan government was at war with the Contras, who were a group of people supporting the Somozas. This war is considered to be the last war part of the Nicaraguan revolution. ("Nicaraguan Revolution." Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nicaraguan_Revolution#Contras. Accessed 16 August 2024.)

⁵ Santo Tomas is a town in southern Nicaragua. Much of the town depends on business from agriculture and livestock. ("Santo Tomas, Nicaragua." Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Santo_Tom%C3%A1s,_Nicaragua. Accessed 17 August 2024.)

⁶ Juigalpa is the capital on the Chontales Department in western Nicaragua. ("Juigalpa, Chontales." Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Juigalpa,_Chontales. Accessed 17 August 2024.)

played in the streets with other children, we would climb trees, we would eat fruit off the trees on the block.

I grew up surrounded by so much companionship, so much friendship from neighbors, people who did not have any blood relation to me and with the framing of a family that was committed to the project of the revolution. Actually, I went to elementary school in various places in Nicaragua⁷ and that permitted me as a child to connect with different children from different backgrounds.

I studied part of my elementary school, until fourth grade, in a school that was called Carlos Fonseca Amador⁸, in Matagalpa⁹, where my little class companions, it wasn't my situation, but it was the situation of my classmates in that decade, after school they would go sell tortillas, for example. My situation was different.

I didn't have the need to be working after school, but it also permitted me to have a different view of people, the other boys, the other girls and also to see poverty, to realize the privileges that I had as well. It allowed me also to, let's say, be very observant of differences and to recognize that one is always surrounded by people who can really impact your life.

I feel that I grew up in an environment of a lot of diversity, in a complicated environment because, as I was saying, there was a war and I feel that I lived through it up close. Also, my father and my mother separated when I was very young, my mother married again and of course married someone who was also involved in the revolution, and he was killed. He was in the army, so he is the father of one of my brothers and they killed him.

I also lived the horror of the war up close, which involved that side of the history of Nicaragua. I look at my childhood and I see where I came from and I feel that I am a product of that great capacity to connect with each other and be in solidarity with each other during such a violent context that we had to live through in Nicaragua in the 80s. I am not sure if I answered your question.

Interviewer: Yes. Continuing with that, what are the principal commitments of your life?

TD: I consider myself, more than a feminist, a humanist. I believe, you know, [Interviewer], in the capacity of human beings to make a difference, to do good for oneself and for others. I

⁷ Nicaragua is a country located in southern Central America. It is one of the largest countries in the region. ("Nicaragua." Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nicaragua>. Accessed 17 August 2024.)

⁸ Carlos Fonseca Amador was a teacher from Nicaragua. He is known for starting the Sandinista National Liberation Front, a political party in Nicaragua. ("Carlos Fonseca." Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carlos_Fonseca. Accessed 17 August 2024.)

⁹ Matagalpa is a city located in western Nicaragua. It is one of the largest and most populated cities in the country. ("Matagalpa." Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Matagalpa>. Accessed 17 August 2024.)

do not deny by saying that that there is goodness and darkness in all of us, because that is human complexity.

I feel that this is my view and my lens toward the world, besides the feminist lens, that it is this capacity that feminism has given me to see my reality critically. Not just the critical view toward reality that I want to change, but also toward the reality to which I commit myself. That critical view, in the space in which I move and to which I am committed, because for me there is also the understanding of human beings in their complexities, with their lights and their shadows.

The simplism with which people see the spaces organized around them sometimes, only the goodness, “I am here in this space, this is the best of all places, and here everything is perfect.” No, that is not true. I feel that lesson comes from the experiences of my childhood, to understand the complexity of human beings and to see more light than darkness, that I have as well, and that we all have. I feel that way.

Interviewer: Connected to the question about your commitments, what would be the main achievements of your life?

TD: I feel that, you know that for me, I can tell you the different facets of my life. That way I can find the different achievements that for me translate into what I learn and what make me grow as a person, or what I bring along to the space in which I move, in terms of my activism as a feminist, as part of the Nicaraguan Feminist Articulation¹⁰ and in terms of my political activism as part of *Unamos*¹¹.

I feel that one of my major achievements is the capacity to be who I am in those spaces. I mean, to have a lot of pressure, above all, at least I feel that way, every person has a different experience, but in general there is a strong pressure for women who decide to participate in politics or who are in spaces that politicize your participation, the pressure to stay in it.

In the political space, for example, a space dominated predominantly by men, and adult men. So the achievement is staying with it, not giving up despite all the contradictions and despite all the hurdles and that politics, tailor-made for men, puts up for us women.

¹⁰ Articulación Feminista de Nicaragua is a network of organizations that focuses on emphasizing women’s rights in democracy-based activism. (“Articulación Feminista de Nicaragua.” <https://solidarityaction.network/media/articulation-feminista-de-nicaragua.pdf>. Accessed 4 October 2024.)

¹¹ UNAMOS is a political party in Nicaragua that was started in 1995. It was previously known as Sandinista Renewal Movement. The political party identifies itself as a progressive and democratic party. (“UNAMOS (Democratic Renewal Union).” Wikipedia. [https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/UNAMOS_\(Uni%C3%B3n_Democr%C3%A1tica_Renovadora\)](https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/UNAMOS_(Uni%C3%B3n_Democr%C3%A1tica_Renovadora)). Accessed 17 August 2024.)

I think that is an important achievement for me, that is, to be able to remain and be able to know that I am capable of stretching the limits that men impose on me in those political spaces in which I move or which the patriarchal system imposes on me, as well as society.

Yesterday we also had a conversation about this in one of the classes and we talked about the importance of also stretching our own limits, my limits, my own insecurities, my own fears that come from my own past, but also the environment, the context and that really patriarchal, archaic, and all that, mentality.

That capacity to stretch my own limits has been a huge success, because it has allowed me to survive different difficulties that life has presented me with and to come out more or less levelheaded, more or less sane. That is to know that I have power. I think that has been my greatest success in the different areas of my life, knowing that I have power and that if I do not use my power where I am, others will use it for me.

It is like this mantra that has helped me resist and exist even in the worst circumstances. I think that another of my successes is my life experience and the story of my childhood, the diversity and the diverse composition of my family, I mean, within my family—I am already mixing things with the previous question, but in my family, we are very diverse.

I also come from a family where, separated parents, but they got along really well. Then my parents joined with other families and they were yours, mine, and ours. It is a mix of diversities, which is complicated, but which helped me to grow up and see the world in its complexity and not simplify it.

I feel that is a great quality in me that has made me successful in those spaces, and it is my capacity to connect with people, to understand that, I have a lot of success understanding bridges, in connecting with people. That also is another element that does not come necessarily from university academia, but rather the academia of life.

Interviewer: That is true. Let's talk more about, going deeper about your work. I think your last answer really responds to what brought you to the work you do, but we would like to know what your first steps were to get involved in the area you are in now and maybe speak about what areas, which areas do you work in exactly? What were those first steps? How did it all begin?

TD: I am a psychologist by profession. I studied my major in the extinct UCA¹². Recently graduated, I began to get involved with civil society organizations in Nicaragua, principally women's organizations. There I started my political participation, that is, my feminist

¹² The Central American University, also referred to as UCA, was a university located in Nicaragua. It was started in 1960 by the Somoza Family, but was closed in 2023 due to accusations that it fostered terrorism. ("Central American University, Managua." Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Central_American_University,_Managua. Accessed 18 August 2024.)

participation, feminist politics was first and it was actually later on, because I left university at 20 years old. So it wasn't during my adolescence, or in my childhood. My more organic connection with Nicaraguan feminism started at 20, 21 years old.

And more than anything my work was with women's organizations that worked on prevention of violence against women. I was involved for many years of my life and then I started to get connected with different feminisms, because in Nicaragua there are different feminisms, there are different feminist views and that is also part of the richness and complexity of Nicaraguan feminism.

Around then, about 2013, I graduated in 2004, I was about 28-29 years old, I had the opportunity to have a fellowship in the United States¹³ for three months, in Seattle¹⁴. That opportunity allowed me to have contact with other women feminists or social workers from different parts of the world. I feel that experience changed my focus.

I was able to extract myself from my Nicaraguan reality, from my reality of working on the prevention of violence in Nicaragua and my connection with different women's organizations and their different views and complexities that all that had. I felt in that moment, it wasn't like an illumination, it was three months of a lot of work and a lot of reflection about the issue. I felt that—but I decided in that moment that I could and really wanted to be part of a very profound change in Nicaragua.

In that time, I was able to gain a more panoramic view and to see the tremendous work that so many women have done, the tremendous prolonged and intricate work of women's organizations in communities for the prevention of diseases, on issues of health, on issues of adolescent pregnancies.

I saw year after year, even though I only had been working in this area ten years, but I saw the enormous amount of work. It was like always facing a wall, because the system did not really guarantee any prevention, but rather only attention to the victim. I said, "We need a change, and we need more people who are committed, like me, to get involved in politics," so I decided to participate in the party.

I came back to Nicaragua and started to see the list of options that I had and the truth is that I did not have many options within political parties and the only one that, only because it was connected to a more progressive conception of society, in which there is a mix of

¹³ The United States is a country in North America. It is composed of 50 states and many other territories. It is considered to be one of the largest countries in the world, by land and population. ("United States." Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States. Accessed 18 August 2024.)

¹⁴ Seattle is a city located in the state of Washington in the United States. It is located on the coast of the Pacific Ocean and is one of the largest cities in the country. ("Seattle." Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seattle>. Accessed 18 August 2024.)

private property, but also individual and collective rights. I said, “That is the party that I want,” and I decided to affiliate myself with what is today *Unamos*.

Since then, I started my political party participation. That brought tensions with my own colleagues in the feminist movement in Nicaragua, because the feminist movement in Nicaragua also had their fractures with the Sandinista Front¹⁵ in the 90s, but also had its fractures with the same party that I decided to affiliate myself with when a group of women decided to support it and another didn’t.

I was really organically very connected to the feminist movement in Nicaragua at that time, now none of those organizations exist because the dictatorship has—but the movement still exists, I mean, the movement that is now in exile continues to exist.

At that time, I was connected to the wing of women that had not supported that political party. So that generated some tension with my feminist activism, but that subsided because after 2018, then we broke our bubbles also as feminists and were able to have a broader view and less divisive between the political state, at least in my opinion, between the State and civil society.

My experiences comes from there, it was an analysis of the enormous work that women and feminists in Nicaragua had done, and the necessity to be able to bring more profound changes. I felt and I still feel that we also need a political party that is committed to the rights of women so that those changes can be sustainable and be more policies of the State than policies of organizations.

Interviewer: Could you describe for us, Tamara, the areas or sites of intervention in which you have worked? What has been your trajectory in this feminist activism? You mentioned the prevention of violence. Were there other areas in which you were able to work and in what way?

TD: Yes. I also worked very closely—Nicaraguan feminism or Nicaraguan feminisms have had an enormous, in my opinion, ability for this critical view of embracing women’s rights, but having a view specifically focused on the fight for sexual and reproductive rights of women. In that view, the right to decide is an elemental right. Also, the right to identity, with respect to your own sexual identity.

¹⁵ The Sandinista National Liberation Front is a political party in Nicaragua. (“Sandinista National Liberation Front.” Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sandinista_National_Liberation_Front. Accessed 18 August 2024.)

That led to me having a lot of contact and working a lot with organizations for trans people¹⁶, very small organizations, but with the feminist, LGBTQ¹⁷ movement, of younger and more anti-establishment people, in the sense of exercising their sexuality, more rebellious in that sense.

It brought me to work with many sexual diversity groups in Nicaragua, it also brought me to work a lot and to research about the issue of penalization of therapeutic abortions in 2006¹⁸. It also really brought me, during that time of political organizing work, to that connection with the network of women in political parties in which I had decided and have decided to belong to along with the women's movement.

I feel that ability that I was telling you about before, of creating bridges, that I feel life has gifted me with, I think that in some way I stretched that bridge between what is today *Unamos* and what was, what is the Nicaraguan feminist movement in its broader spectrum.

The issue of violence prevention, attention to victims, yes I worked directly with that, but I was much more focused on the issue in my work in feminism with sexual diversity organizations in Nicaragua and the movement of men and women for the decriminalization of therapeutic abortions and in forums, analysis, debates with different groups about those issues in that, let's say, my activism as a feminist.

Interviewer: We would like to know about, digging into your reflections about this work and what your experience as a woman has been working in these organizations, if it was difficult, what prejudices, discriminations have you observed or have you seen from your colleagues or people in the community in that sense.

TD: I feel that—I will talk to you at this moment, [Interviewer], as a Nicaraguan woman. I feel that more than my experience as a feminist or as part of the political party *Unamos*, but also since 2018 to now I have had a lot of participation with different Nicaraguan opposition groups which, as our only objective, want to push for a civil exit for Nicaragua.

I have had the opportunity to have dialogue with a lot of people. I feel that one of the greatest difficulties that we have as Nicaraguans, independent of the sector, some more, some less, but I feel it has to do with—now that I see the reality and the problems that

¹⁶ Transsexual refers to individuals whose gender identity does not align with that of their sex assigned at birth. ("Transgender Definition & Meaning." Merriam-Webster. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/transgender>. Accessed 18 August 2024.)

¹⁷ LGBTQ stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer. It is used to refer to individuals who are not cisgender and straight. ("LGBTQ Definition." Center for Inclusion and Social Change. <https://www.colorado.edu/cisc/pride-office/lgbtq-resources/lgbtq-definitions#:~:text=LGBTQ%20%7C%20An%20acronym%20for%20lesbian,falling%20completely%20outside%20these%20categories>. Accessed 18 August 2024.)

¹⁸ In November of 2006, the abortion law of Nicaragua was changed so that it was completely illegal. Previously, women were permitted to have abortions if 3 doctors agreed. ("Abortion in Nicaragua." Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abortion_in_Nicaragua. Accessed 18 August 2024.)

other countries are facing in the Latin American region¹⁹, I realize that it is also not just a Nicaraguan problem, but rather it extends across the continent, unfortunately, and it is an enormous authoritarian strain.

There is—I won't say it is in the DNA because DNA is immutable, we can't change it. It is not in the DNA, but it is in our very marked cultural learning and requires a profound acceptance that it is there to be able to change it. It is that, that is, we have a very strong authoritarian strain as Nicaraguans.

I would tell you, it is not a *mea culpa*²⁰, it is really trying to make an analysis of how we arrived to the situation we are in, that it is not just fucked up for feminists, but it is fucked up for the whole world, or for women in general. That is, it is not just a situation that is affecting women, even though it is true that it is affecting us more because the indexes of femicides²¹ have increased, because the indexes of adolescent pregnancies are at a height, because the indexes of—

Interviewer: The impunity of sexual violence.

TD: Because you have the state apparatus dedicated to repressing and not taking care of its citizens. We have a very authoritarian strain. This authoritarian strain does not permit us to have more fluid dialogue about differences. Nicaragua is a very particular society with many wounds, [Interviewer]. I can tell you my own story.

I buried someone that the Contra²² murdered, but surely the Contra, I don't doubt it, and moreover I have met many people my age in the other camp in the 80s, they also buried someone that the army killed in the 80s. That is our history. It is a very difficult history. There is a lot of sectarianism, there is a lot of authoritarianism in all the sectors.

That reality, I feel, is that somehow we couldn't see in time that we had a dictatorship over us until 2018 came and slapped us in the face, because the “messianic leader,” “the male leader,” “the one who will save you,” “We need a single leader.” That is what many

¹⁹ The Latin American region refers to Central America, South America, and the islands located in the Caribbean Sea. In all these areas, the main language spoken is a romance language, meaning it is derived from Latin. (“Latin America.” Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Latin_America. Accessed 18 August 2024.)

²⁰ The phrase ‘mea culpa’ is used by an individual to recognize their own mistake. (“Me culpa Definition & Meaning.” Merriam-Webster. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/mea%20culpa#:~:text=Mea%20culpa%2C%20which%20means%20%22through,is%20also%20a%20noun%2C%20however>. Accessed 18 August 2024.)

²¹ Femicide is defined as the purposeful murder of a woman. (“Femicide.” Oxford Reference. <https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/acref/9780191834837.001.0001/acref-9780191834837-e-127#:~:text=The%20deliberate%20killing%20of%20a.,%20...%20...> Accessed 19 August 2024.)

²² The Contras refers to groups that were supported by the United States that rivaled the Sandinista National Liberation Front. These groups all combined into the Nicaraguan Resistance in 1987. (“Contras.” Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Contras>. Accessed 20 August 2024.)

opposition groups tell you and that is also what the international community tells us, “Who is the leader? Who am I talking to?” because that is the perception. You have to have a leader, there has to be only one.

Interviewer: And a masculine leader.

TD: A masculine leader, moreover.

Interviewer: Because they do not talk about female leadership.

TD: No female leadership, not in the slightest. That concept of a messianic leader, that authoritarian concept of, “from where I speak and from where I find myself, this is the correct place of history.” That is the vision and that is what has made it difficult for us to get out of this situation. I feel that it is the greatest challenge, but it is not just for feminism or for the different feminisms, but rather for our society, as Nicaraguans, it has to do with the history that you know better than me because you are a historian.

That it is a great challenge, because we will leave this situation, because women will be able to continue participating and we will continue the battles we have to fight, but in a society that continues being patriarchal with that concept of messianic leader in an Almighty God style and with a patriarchal concept about the role of women also.

So that is the long-term battle, but also recognizing, it is terrible what I am going to say, but there is a little Daniel Ortega²³ and a little Rosario Murillo²⁴ in each Nicaraguan. I feel that if we do not recognize this, we will not be able to combat it nor will we be able to build bridges to construct a society in which we understand that women have rights and it is not that they are in counterpoint to the rights of everyone else.

That is really the most difficult, but we continue the fight day after day, but having a clear understanding that this is a great challenge. At least I feel that this is a great challenge and it is also a great challenge to achieve leaving this dictatorship in unity, because nobody can do it alone, not even the feminists who have a lot of experience, nor can the Nicaraguan feminism that came before me, that has so much organizational and mobilizing experience, achieve it alone.

We will not be able to get out of this situation alone, we will not be able to gain sexual and reproductive rights unless it is in alliance with other sectors that believe that this is prohibited or outlawed.

²³ Daniel Ortega is the current president of Nicaragua. He was previously the president of the country from 1985 to 1990, and was reelected in 2017 for a second term. (“Daniel Ortega.” Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Daniel_Ortega. Accessed 20 August 2024.)

²⁴ Rosario Murillo is the current vice president of Nicaragua. She is also the wife of President Daniel Ortega. (“Rosario Murillo.” Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rosario_Murillo. Accessed 21 August 2024.)

Interviewer: In a particular way, in your experience in leadership spaces, you as a leader or as a representative, have you observed or lived, experienced any form of discrimination because of being a woman?

TD: Yes, of course and for being feminist. A ton! Of course, yes. Because of the recent history in Nicaragua and because of my leadership role within Nicaraguan feminism and UNAMOS, I have had to engage in various and more plural opposition platforms over the year. One of the main barriers that others put up or put up against me is, “No, this is an abortionist. I will not talk to an abortionist. I will not talk to feminists.”

I remember, I will tell you this story because it describes the perception. When I was in prison, they took us out to interrogate us. One of the interrogators also wanted to sow a little discord, because part of the strategy was that we continue hating all the opposition leaders who we were in prison with at the time in El Chipote²⁵.

He said to me, “You know so and so,” one of the candidates for presidency, “He says he will never join with you because you are a lesbian²⁶ abortionist.” And that made me laugh so much. I couldn’t stop laughing. That was—that is the enormous sectarianism that we have to battle as women, and worse if you are a feminist. I feel that this is a difficult epithet.

A difficult pill to swallow for more conservative groups, who are the ones there. And the fact that moreover I belong to a leftist party, when we are living under a dictatorship, supposedly to the left for the rest of the world, but the left has nothing to do with it and progressive much less, it also makes the dynamic complicated. The fact that I am a woman, a single mother, adds many more components.

For example, I think that we were talking about this a bit this morning, which is in that same prison, another one of my interrogations, but they also did the same thing to another colleague who is a mother and was jailed at that time was, “Why did you get involved in this? Why were you in the street calling for justice, liberty, and democracy, if you have a daughter? Don’t you know that your daughter is suffering because she doesn’t have you?”

I mean, that was a recurring approach. To me as a mother, never to the other men that had a bunch of kids, who were also—I mean, I don’t doubt that my daughter suffered and that I also went through suffering during that time, but it is the element of maternity that limits

²⁵ El Chipote is a prison in Nicaragua that was started by the Somoza family. Currently, the prison is under the Nicaraguan government’s authority. Although ownership of the prison has changed, the same cruel torture techniques are used on its prisoners. (“Nicaragua’s El Chipote Prison: The Ax Survives its Owner.” Confidential. <https://confidencial.digital/english/nicaraguas-el-chipote-prison-the-ax-survives-its-owner/>. Accessed 21 August 2024.)

²⁶ Lesbian refers to women who are attracted to individuals of the same gender. (“Lesbian.” Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lesbian#:~:text=A%20lesbian%20is%20a%20homosexual,homosexuality%20or%20same%2Dsex%20attraction>. Accessed 21 August 2024.)

your capacity for agency, your capacity to participate and your capacity moreover to be a leader in those spaces.

It is like, “This is not your place. Your place is with your daughter, especially because you chose that life. You chose to be a mother? Take care of her! Don’t be here talking about women’s rights or rights to justice because you should go take care of the rights of your daughter at home.” That is the message. It is an enormous challenge also to be a feminist, political activist and a single mother in this context, it is very complicated.

It is only possible to achieve when you have other women that support you and other women that are there helping you to integrate all these spheres of your life so that you can continue with this work. For me that is of tremendous value, that sorority and solidarity among women, not just of your own clan, of your own family, but also other companions that are also in the same situation as you.

I feel that, more in terms of—within Nicaraguan feminism well of course, one also has to be stretching your own limits because you have your insecurities, I have them at least, I believe. I have them.

Interviewer: We all have them.

TD: Always being in spaces with other women who you also admire. Suddenly raising your hand and giving your opinion generates a lot of anxiety in you, to stretch that limit, I mean that your voice also matters. In that space that is for me at least my primary space, that is with other women, it is also difficult. Because being a young woman in front of a bunch of women feminists who have lived and have lived more than what you have lived, well, it is a little intimidating.

Yes, it is. To be in front of Sofía Montenegro²⁷, Tere Blandón²⁸ and all of them there. It scares you well, but I am going to be stretching my internal limit, I will raise my hand and I will say what I think. It is also that dynamic within your own space because there are many feelings of admiration, there are many feelings of idealization that sometimes daze you. There is also, “I recognize elements in them, but I also have elements in me that I can bring and that I can give,” even in your own more natural spaces.

And not to talk about spaces of broader opposition. That is, when I was in the National Coalition, it was continually making my voice heard to be able to be heard. When you said

²⁷ Sofia Montenegro is a journalist in Nicaragua who mainly writes about gender and influence. She started the Center for Communication Research, an organization that conducts research without any government interference. (“Sofia Montenegro.” Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sof%C3%ADa_Montenegro. Accessed 21 August 2024.)

²⁸ Maria Teresa Blandon is a sociologist from Nicaragua. She started an organization called La Corriente, which is dedicated to advance feminist thinking. (“Maria Teresa Blandon.” Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mar%C3%ADa_Teresa_Bland%C3%B3n. Accessed 21 August 2024.)

something, it was over and over again. When you gave an opinion or you said something in a political meeting where they were meeting to decide something, nobody said anything.

You knew that what you were saying is eloquent and it is a reasonable response but two opinions later, a man would say it, exactly the same thing, with the same words, and they would say, “Yes, I agree with what that man says,” and it was what I had said. It was continuing to battle against that. Then I would raise my hand again, “I also agree with what he said because that is what I said before. I agree. I completely agree. What he just said seems amazing to me, because I just said the same thing.” You know what I mean?

I mean, it is like going in without a full plan, without anything, but going, you have to make double the effort for your voice to be heard when you are in different spaces, because of being a woman, because of being young. But then, I never had the experience of sexual harassment in more diverse spaces, but yes, many of my friends have had those experiences. I believe that I have not had them because I had the moniker of feminist, and “feminist is the same as lesbian and abortionist,” I know feminists who are not either of those things.

Since I had that moniker, I never experienced harassment from men, but yes, it was an experience that other women had. In terms of corporal and sexual, yes, I can tell you that yes there is an element connected to the fact of being a woman, the fact of being women, of having a vagina.

Interviewer: Right, a feminine body.

TD: A feminized body. In my case, I never had that experience directly and I think it is because of the fact that I was “the feminist” participating in those spaces.

Interviewer: With that stigma of being a feminist being the same as—

TD: “Feminism equals lesbian abortionist,” so I never had problems. That was a great defense for me, defense against sexual assault by men. Yes.

Interviewer: Tamara, what does feminism mean for you? How would you define it? How would you define feminism? What does it mean? You already affirmed to us that you consider yourself feminist.

TD: Yes, true. For me feminism is—to me feminism has given, [Interviewer], this great capacity to always see whatever I live through with a critical lens. I was saying to a friend many years ago, I did my masters²⁹ in gender, I found myself with another militant feminist,

²⁹ A master’s degree is given to individuals by a university after they have completed additional study in a particular field of study. It is usually given after completion of the first 4 years of university, or a bachelor’s degree. (“Master’s degree.” Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Master%27s_degree. Accessed 21 August 2024.)

moreover an Argentinian³⁰, who are very passionate, so I was saying to her, “I feel that finding feminism made me a problem. Now I am constantly living with this critical view of everything. Damn, I can’t get a break.”

Interviewer: Seeing yourself that way.

TD: Seeing myself, “I was fine how I was, with my status quo!” [laughter] I feel that feminism gave me this restless viewpoint, this critical view of myself and reality. It gave me this enormous capacity to give value to my voice, you know, [Interviewer]? Feminism gave me that shield, “I am a feminist and I speak on behalf of feminism,” it gave me that strength. It is not just that critical lens toward reality but also the strength to say, “I am part of something, I am a feminist, I am not here alone.” That sense of belonging to something bigger than myself, of belonging to an abstract if you like, because who has a feminist-meter to say, “This yes, that no.”

Interviewer: “How feminist are you?” [laughter]

TD: It gave me that internally, that feeling of, “I belong to something bigger than myself,” and that is moreover part of the strength that I need to make my voice heard, at least so that my voice can be heard. I feel that this—and of course the great feeling of belonging and of collaboration among women. Even though maybe other experiences gave me that feeling also, but that is, I think, what it mainly gives me and that is feminism for me.

It is hard to say because within feminism there is everything, because women are people and because women are complicated, like every human. There are different practices and sometimes they are not so congruent in their practices but that is part of the complexity and that also helps me learn that feminism is also a project under construction and that is beautiful, to know that you can also move the gears for that construction of those feminist spaces to continue growing, not in number but also in reflection and actuation.

Interviewer: We know that you have many decades of work in your organizations and that the historical context of Nicaragua has changed, for example 2006 was a landmark year, also 2018³¹. We would like to hear a bit about how you see the development of your work in these organizations. The history of the organizations in counterpoint to the historical context. The feminist organizations before Daniel

³⁰ Argentina is a country located in southern South America. It is one of the largest countries on the continent and in the world. (“Argentina.” Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Argentina>. Accessed 23 August 2024.)

³¹ In April of 2018, many Nicaraguans began to protest the Ortega administration. The protests started after current president Daniel Ortega increased social security taxation of the citizens, but lessened the benefits. (“2018 Nicaraguan protests.” Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2018_Nicaraguan_protests#:~:text=The%202018%20Nicaraguan%20protests%20began,increased%20taxes%20and%20decreased%20benefits. Accessed 22 August 2024.)

Ortega arrived to power, once Daniel Ortega was in power and then what occurred in 2006 and beyond, after 2018.

If you can see any change or some historical trajectory of these organizations and the way you work in relation to the changing political context in Nicaragua.

TD: For me it is very clear. I was very young in 1990, when all the strengthening of civil society organizations starts and the expression of movements more connected to feminism and to feminisms. I feel that in the different periods in the 90s, then in 1998 was a landmark.

That is, 1998 in Nicaragua was a landmark asking, what is the fight of Nicaraguan feminisms? And is that fight in favor of the lives of women and of nonviolence in all its expressions toward women, the support of the denunciation of Zolamérica³² of the rape that she was a victim of by Ortega, there the feminist movement closed ranks and the different women feminist organizations in Nicaragua closed ranks.

It was a view that—and many of them even identified as feminists before that, many of them faced the difficulties of romanticism that had signified the revolution, but they broke away from that, because I feel that one of the strengths of the feminist movements in Nicaragua, of the broader feminist movement in Nicaragua is precisely the understanding that there is a patriarchal system and that our fight is not ideological, it is not about feuds or plots for power, it is against a system that oppresses us.

If that system attacks any woman, no matter where they are from, their color, the feminisms will be there supporting that woman. That is what marked the unity around the Nicaraguan feminist agenda. In 1998 there was that strength, right? of the feminisms. The electoral politics and the view of some feminist women about, “No, our work is only for civil society and it is not connected to political party organizations,” and the view of others is that yes, we will work politically in parties with other spaces.

That marked some fissures within the feminist movement, but still came 2006 and the derogation of therapeutic abortion and all women went back to the streets, to call for the agenda of sexual and reproductive rights. Then the political and party tensions return and there is this internal tension within the feminist movement, but then comes 2018 and all the women independent of if they are working in civil society or supporting a political party, in opposition always to the patriarchal system and the governments turning toward

³² Zoilamerica was sexually assaulted by the current president of Nicaragua, Daniel Ortega. She came forward to the public in 1998, but was not believed. Ortega eventually went to court, but was not punished as the statute of limitations had passed. (“Case 12,230: Zoilamerica Narvaez vs. the Nicaraguan State.” *Revista Envio*. <https://www.revistaenvio.org/articulo/1567>. Accessed 22 August 2024.)

politics of no human rights for women, well then again the women were united and there the women are again.

I see let's say, a Nicaraguan feminist movement, that is why I say the feminist movements are diverse, because women are diverse, but they have a clear view, independent of their differences that there is a patriarchal system that oppresses us and there is a demand for a life free of violence and we will work as hard as we can. We will give everything, all of us. I see that present. I don't see that clarity outside Nicaraguan feminism, there is a lot of solidarity in other feminisms.

The feminisms in Europe, in Latin America, while I was in prison I realized the many actions that many women feminists did in so many places, because of that solidarity. Even being feminists, that are not on the left or are not progressive or that are not—Because there are and there are many. So in that sense I see that diversity within Nicaraguan feminism, but that clarity. Our differences, we will keep having them and they can be different in nature, but when there are violations of the rights of women, we will all go today and we will be there until the end.

Interviewer: Going back a bit to the present, we would like to know more about your current work. What are some of the expectations for the future in your work, in your organizations?

TD: I think that in general there is an immediate need, I mean, Nicaraguan feminists are dispersed around the world because the dictatorship has charged itself with annihilating any idea of organizing within the country. There are no women's organizations in the country. All have been cancelled, confiscated.

Interviewer: Expelled.

TD: Expatriates, prohibited from returning. The enormous challenge that all of us feminists have is to end the dictatorship. Therefore, Nicaraguan feminists, as an agreement also as a Nicaraguan feminist movement that is formed by different Nicaraguan feminisms, the stakes are, "We will do everything in our power to get out of this dictatorship."

We will continue promoting our rights with a very clear emphasis on the issue of sexual and reproductive rights, but with the view focused on, "We need to end this dictatorship." I think that this has been an enormous contribution for the unity of Nicaraguan opposition. The women are there, the feminist women are there. That does not guarantee that when it ends—

Because we will get out from under Daniel Ortega and Rosario Murillo. When they leave, it does not guarantee that our rights will be reinstated. We will have to continue that battle too, but we have had the political maturity to say, "In this moment, we need democracy in

order to coexist as a society within the country, to be able to return to our homes, our gardens, our beaches, our life in Nicaragua.”

So I feel that this has been a great political maturity that the Nicaraguan feminist movement has had, that it has been a consequential movement in this sense. The Nicaraguan feminists were the first to say, “This is a dictatorship,” before 2018, when they started prohibiting us from marching on emblematic dates and all the rest.

The Nicaraguan feminisms have had that political maturity in this moment to say, “We need to get out of this dictatorship.” In order to do that, we will be in opposition alongside all these people who don’t like us, but we will be there because we are part of the democracy because there is no democracy without women’s rights and without human rights.

Interviewer: Tamara, you have talked about the fact that you are a psychologist. I imagine you have worked in practices, you have worked on the more academic side. How do you perceive the relationship between academic contribution, in this case regarding feminist theory, with more concrete activism, concrete forms like going out to the street, like doing community work?

In Nicaragua’s case, how do you see that dynamic between what work is done in the universities or in other places and the knowledge that is produced about the reality of groups of women, or children, issues of the family? How do you see the relationship between what academics do and what activists are doing more concretely?

TD: You know, [Interviewer], I would have responded to that question differently if you had asked me before 2018. Before 2018 I was giving classes at UCA to students of Psychology.

Interviewer: You were a professor.

TD: I was a professor and I was also an activist, I was also in the streets as a feminist activist. I clearly saw that bifurcation between academia and activism. It was so clear. You could see that academia wasn’t able to leave the classroom, a thought-process that was not connected to activist practice. I think that in some way that connection couldn’t be achieved. I felt that, I saw that as—

Interviewer: Like disconnected from reality.

TD: Completely! A feminist and vanguard way of thought, but completely disconnected from activism and from feminists that were being activists in the streets, but 2018 changed that. You started to see some—I mean the bubbles burst, [Interviewer]. If you want to know what those five years of the terrible dictatorship were for, it was for that, to burst bubbles.

Ortega required us to see each other's faces in the streets and to see each other's faces also at the universities, but as activists within the universities.

Interviewer: Right, especially when universities were the first bastions going to the street and the university was a place of social effervescence.

TD: But also, after those first months of entrenchment of young people in the universities, there started to be dialogues in those groups, in the very universities. The classrooms, weren't necessarily – or after classes, you would see professors, activists and the very students talking about the issues that now had a view more connected to the street, less to books, also talking more about the theory with the practice of the students who were also in the streets.

That bubble burst and moreover Ortega also took charge of destroying academia, the liberty of professorship and all the rest. You have—

Interviewer: Professors jailed as well.

TD: With jailed professors, with young people in jail. You can now see the different spaces of opposition in exile from different expressions. You see professors, you see academics, teachers, with young people and they are continually or even daily in those dialogues, about their difficulties, but with that separation that I felt in my role within the university as a professor and my role as an activist, 2018 broke that.

Interviewer: It was a transcendental shift for—

TD: Yes, very clearly, I think. It was a space for, universities once again as a space—what word can I use? Like a trench of—

Interviewer: Like a space that was regained, that was once again reclaimed.

TD: Like an activist space that was reclaimed. This building became not just for books that I read or an essay that I correct, but also in that reflection-action because that changed, again. The university was this new space and that is why Ortega closes it.

Interviewer: It becomes dangerous for the regime.

TD: That's right, it turns dangerous.

Interviewer: You have spoken about the women's movement and the feminist movement in Nicaragua, but also the connections that exist in other places at the global level. What is your analysis about the relationship between activists from Nicaragua and those from other places? I think that you have especially talked about how work is still being done now from exile with new networks, meeting new people along the way.

How do you see the connection between the work of the Nicaraguan feminists that had been done inside the country with those that might be in other parts of the world?

TD: You know, I, honestly, believe that one of the strengths of the Nicaraguan feminist movement in its distinct expressions was always that connection with other feminists outside of the country. At least my perception is that Nicaraguan feminist women who belong to the Nicaraguan feminist movement always had a tight link to more global feminisms.

And that has manifested clearly in the great solidarity that there has been from global feminisms toward Nicaraguan feminists. Nicaraguan feminists have had to leave the country and have been supported by other networks of women feminists at the global level, but because those connections already existed and because there had also been a very strong connection between different feminisms outside of Nicaragua with a view, I feel, the Nicaraguan feminism was very broad, because for example, in Nicaragua there was never, at least in my perception and from what I experienced, probably trans companions have a different opinion about the matter, but I never saw those tensions between the feminisms and trans women that you would see in other countries, in Argentina for example, and those continuous conflicts and all that.

What I am trying to say is that the Nicaraguan feminism has been very broad and very open in all its expressions and there has been so much connection since the beginning, a lot of connection and that has helped us, it has helped us Nicaraguan women who need it now, having to leave in exile, to have that enormous solidarity and that great connection with other feminism. The other phenomenon that I feel helped, that has helped a lot in Nicaraguan history is that, of course, throughout the revolution and the great infatuation with the revolution, a lot of feminists from many countries stayed in Nicaragua.

That also helped connections, right? Because within the Nicaraguan feminism there were feminists—Some even spoke like Spanish women, but they were more *nicas*³³ [Nicaraguans] than they should have been. Spanish *nicas*, Argentinian *nicas*, I mean, from many nationalities on the continent, but also European. There has been a very strong link with the European feminisms, with the Latin American feminisms since the beginning, not always with African feminisms, maybe not as much with feminisms more from the Asian world and less so.

³³Nicas is another word that is used to refer to individuals who live in Nicaragua or have many relatives from Nicaragua. ("Nicaraguans." Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nicaraguans#:~:text=Nicaraguans%20\(Spanish%3A%20Nicarag%C3%BCens%3B%20also,having%20significant%20heritage%20from%20Nicaragua](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nicaraguans#:~:text=Nicaraguans%20(Spanish%3A%20Nicarag%C3%BCens%3B%20also,having%20significant%20heritage%20from%20Nicaragua). Accessed 23 August 2024.)

It has to do with the closeness in language, not so much to do with the stakes. However, feminist women from the Caribbean coast³⁴ do have that view of black feminism as well. That is, there has always been a very advanced practice, I feel. That allowed us to always be in contact with other more global feminisms. I think that it has to do with a practice, with the presence of those feminist women who stayed in Nicaragua and with that very open view of the Nicaraguan women feminists around to embrace all those feminisms and to have a broader view, not sectarian related to—

Interviewer: In that sense, I think it helps us to think about the next question, which is, how has the women’s movement confronted other indicators of inequality and oppression, besides gender? Here we can think about, how has the movement been committed to or discussed the issue of intersectionality? And speaking of women from the coast, how do you see in the broad sense, how does the women’s movement think about intersectionality?

TD: I think that we are lacking that, we are lacking having a more intersectional view, but there is the desire, what we need is to be able to have more spaces to talk about intersectionality and about—but I think that there are, there has been openness, but it has been lacking. That intersectional, decolonial view is still ongoing, but it is not for a lack of—I think it doesn’t have to do with being myopic, but rather with a lack of tools and of reading, of study.

I, for example, now that I realize that there are a ton of feminists who are in exile and who are studying with that focus. I say, “Damn, once we return, we will have so many tools to be able to talk about, discuss, analyze from different lenses.” I think with that view, that opening exists, but it is lacking. In my opinion, I also feel that I am lacking that lens and that view. You saw, in exile, that many feminists are training in those areas, and that will be a huge gain.

Interviewer: It is something positive.

TD: It will be a gain for those of us who have not had the opportunity to train with that lens, but there is openness. I feel that yes, at least there are the distinct feminisms but we definitely fall short.

Interviewer: Just to add, to specify the context of Nicaragua and the differences that exist between the Pacific population, the Caribbean population and to think that anytime we talk about the patriarchal state and to remember that it is also a racist state, it is a classist state, it is also an urban-centric state, leaving people from rural zones a bit invisible and the intersectionality of these fights helps to critically see in

³⁴ The Caribbean coast refers to southeastern North America, eastern Central America, and northern South America. (“Caribbean.” Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caribbean>. Accessed 24 August 2024.)

other spaces in those it seems that the patriarchy erases and cuts us off and relates to us in the same way and it is not that way, that is what intersectionality has shown us.

TD: Exactly, [Interviewer], I have a blindside as a white woman from the Pacific. I am speaking to you from the perspective of a white woman from the Pacific. Even though, part of my family comes from Matagalpa. The women's movement in Matagalpa has a strong link and is related to the expression of indigenous women in Nicaragua or rural, indigenous women and rural women from Nicaragua, it is for the women from the North, that includes part of Zelaya³⁵ and all the Atlantic zone.

That is, the work in the networks and the social fabric of the women in all this social mechanism and the social fabric for the prevention of violence, has caused us to work with very rural women. The feminist practice in Nicaragua is really a practice that has been being done *in situ*. It is as if the practice is more advanced than the narrative and the discourse and academia in that sense.

Interviewer: The theory.

TD: Because the theory we have is theory from outside and about these intersectionalities and of that colonial thought from outside. From a biased view, I feel that the feminist practice and that the intersectional work is much broader than the capacity that we have to elaborate an anticolonial discourse. I don't know if I am explaining myself, [Interviewer]. In that sense I feel that—I mean, I think that women in the North, are indigenous women, farmworkers, who do not necessarily identify themselves with any ethnic group, because especially in the Pacific, this is very diluted, but they are women from the North, the network of women in the North, in the Nicaraguan Pacific there is the strongest women's movements, with some decolonial platforms, even if not written, but that is what they work on.

Interviewer: The principles are put into practice.

TD: Exactly. Maybe what has been lacking for us—Moreover, I do not have much work experience on the Atlantic Coast, I have never worked there, but I do have connections with women's organizations there and they also have an intersectional and decolonial practice. How beautiful to know that now feminists that have had that experience are nourishing themselves, studying their doctorates outside, because that will help us a lot to connect that reality with a broader analysis. I see it as an opportunity, but certainly we are – I mean, yes, it's needed.

³⁵ Zelaya Central was a former department in Northern Nicaragua. It has since been divided into North Caribbean Coast Autonomous Region and South Caribbean Coast Autonomous Region. ("Zelaya Central, Nicaragua Genealogy." Family Search. https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Zelaya_Central,_Nicaragua_Genealogy. Accessed 4 October 2024.)

Interviewer: We would like to talk about something very timely, which was the global phenomenon of the pandemic, COVID³⁶. How has it changed or did the pandemic change the work that you did in your organizations? What has been your evaluation of the impact that the pandemic had on the work that women were doing to confront the problems of the women’s sector in Nicaragua in that year, in 2020, middle of 2021? Perhaps we could start from the fact that distinguishes Nicaragua. Nicaragua did not shut down, there was no—

TD: They did not close the borders.

Interviewer: Right, there was no lockdown. There was a state policy of total denial.

[laughter]

TD: Yes, you know, it is curious, because even though the state had a state policy of denial, as you have put it, in relation to the pandemic, the Nicaraguan society did not. Women’s organizations and organizations in general civil society started a very strong campaign. Started by women feminists, spurred by women feminists, they created the COVID 19 observatory³⁷ which was what provided information!

All of that were networks of people, of women connected to different community spaces, to different community organizations, who passed on information via WhatsApp³⁸, “Here in my community so and so is sick.” And that is how the COVID observatory was constructed, which was a citizens’ observatory and it is the information that records the numbers that we were left with in Nicaragua. Because the state doesn’t give numbers. There were no numbers! That is, according to the state and the figures it gave, the indexes were zero, or barely any, here there isn’t anything going on.

You could see, there was not a single campaign of prevention of COVID or the use of masks. There was none! You saw people in 2019, middle of—No, 2020, March, April, there is the campaign from women’s social networks, from women’s organizations, societal organizations, “Put on your mask.” Independent doctors, anonymously, organized a committee that was called the Interdisciplinary Committee of Professionals, something like that. They started to organize a series of—I can’t remember the name right now.

³⁶ Coronavirus, or COVID-19, is an infectious viral illness. It mainly affects the respiratory system, causing symptom such as a cough or cold. However, it is significantly more dangerous for individuals with previous chronic diseases, like diabetes. (“Coronavirus.” World Health Organization. https://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus#tab=tab_1. Accessed 24 August 2024.)

³⁷ The Citizen Observatory for COVID-19 was started in Nicaragua to track the spread of COVID-19 as the Nicaraguan government was not doing so. (“Citizen Observatory for COVID-19 Nicaragua.” Participedia. <https://participedia.net/organization/7237>. Accessed 25 August 2024.)

³⁸ WhatsApp is an application on phones and computers that can be used by individuals to send text, voice memos, images, and more across the world. (“WhatsApp.” Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/WhatsApp>. Accessed 25 August 2024.)

What I am trying to say is that it was the Nicaraguan society who started to organize itself to prevent COVID. It was like a collective action of protest, and against the regime. You had that group of doctors, many of them had been fired in 2018 and many of them had had a lot of experience with epidemiological work. You had Dr. Quant³⁹, who was fired. That is, the maximum authority on epidemiological issues in Nicaragua is Dr. Quant, who worked in the Ministry of Health⁴⁰.

For saying things like, “COVID exists, you have to use masks.” He was fired! He was the only epidemiologist who also took care of the HIV prevention program. They fired him! He, along with other doctors, anonymously organized and started to record videos, giving a series of workshops to different groups and organizations over Zoom⁴¹, to record little videos so that they could go viral in the country on WhatsApp, on Facebook⁴², talking about prevention, talking about washing hands, talking about using masks.

Women’s organizations also started the search for resources to hand out masks. I myself walked between streetlights in Managua⁴³ handing out masks, and people were using masks. That is, COVID in Nicaragua really was prevented thanks to the organized work of the Nicaraguan civil society and also women. It was an enormous task, it was a mechanism that also revived those social networks.

For example, on the coast, in Waspán⁴⁴ or in Río San Juan⁴⁵ in the North, Georgetown, San Juan of the North. Río San Juan of the North was able to contact some doctors who were there, and they organized a whole shipment through networks, because you couldn’t do it by plane, they shipped boxes of masks for different communities. The people used them.

³⁹ Dr. Carlos Quant is a doctor who is an expert in infectious diseases. Dr. Quant was one of many doctors in Nicaragua who were fired for doubting the Ortega administration’s reply to the pandemic. (“Nicaragua: Doctors Fired for Covid-19 Comments.” Human Rights Watch. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/06/23/nicaragua-doctors-fired-covid-19-comments>. Accessed 25 August 2024.)

⁴⁰ The Ministry of Health is a subdivision of the Nicaraguan government that is responsible for advancing the quality of healthcare in the country and making it more accessible to the people. (“Mission and Vision.” MINSA. <https://www.minsa.gob.ni/index.php/la-institucion/mision-y-vision>. Accessed 25 August 2024.)

⁴¹ Zoom is an application that allows individuals from all over the world to meet online face-to-face. It is primarily used for videoconferences. (“Zoom Video Communications.” Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zoom_Video_Communications. Accessed 25 August 2024.)

⁴² Facebook is a website in which individuals can connect with others online and post text, images, or videos for their facebook friends to interact with. (“Facebook.” Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Facebook>. Accessed 25 August 2024.)

⁴³ Managua is a city located in western Nicaragua. It is the capital of the country. (“Managua.” Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Managua>. Accessed 26 August 2024.)

⁴⁴ Waspam is a town located in northern Nicaragua. (“Waspam.” Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Waspam>. Accessed 26 August 2024.)

⁴⁵ Río San Juan is a river that runs between Lake Nicaragua and the Caribbean Sea. It borders Nicaragua and Costa Rica. (“San Juan River (Nicaragua).” Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/San_Juan_River_\(Nicaragua\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/San_Juan_River_(Nicaragua)). Accessed 26 August 2024.)

That is why I think that there was a—Now, the deathrate was high, but there was a lot of prevention work that helped make COVID less lethal.

Interviewer: Opposing the attitude of the government.

TD: Opposing the ignominy and the ignorance of a state that basically ordered people to infect themselves. I mean, they called for—Of course, because this was all in April, May, June 2020. In May, the celebrations of *Palo de Mayo*⁴⁶, the authorities were promoting them in the middle of the pandemic! The people were the ones who said, “Don’t go.” The ones who were there were state employees who didn’t have a choice, who didn’t have any choice but to go get infected, and they were the ones who got sick. Employees, representatives who were going to sessions and they got infected. Some of them died. All of those high functionaries who died because of COVID, because of these activities of—

Interviewer: Conglomerates.

TD: Thank you. Conglomerates of people who met with Daniel Ortega and Rosario Murillo. The citizenry in general, was like an act of protest. That is how I see it looking back.

Interviewer: Tamara, is there anything you would like to add to the interview? Anything that you would like to say? Or you feel that--?

[laughter]

TD: No, I thank you again. I think that yes maybe, thank you so much for this work, because it is really vital that our voices be heard. I am grateful, and hopefully the next time that we see each other for an interview, Daniel Ortega and Chayo⁴⁷ will no longer be in power.

Interviewer: In liberty. Thank you so much. Thank you very much, Tamara, for your lifelong commitment, for your time and for participating with us in this interview for the Global Feminisms Project.

TD: Thank you to you.

⁴⁶ Palo de Mayo, or May Day, is a festival that celebrates that halfway point to the June solstice from the Spring equinox. It is typically celebrated on the first of May. (“May Day.” Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/May_Day. Accessed 27 August 2024.)

⁴⁷ Chayo is a nickname that refers to the current vice president Rosario Murillo. Chayo is short for ‘the chayopalos,’ which are referred to as the ‘trees of life.’ (“VP Murillo to Reinstall Metal “Trees of Life” in Managua.” Havana Times.” <https://havanatimes.org/nicaragua/vp-murillo-to-reinstall-metal-trees-of-life-in-managua/>. Accessed 27 August 2024.)