

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

SITE: NICARAGUA

**Transcript of Juanita Jiménez
Interviewer: Shelly Grabe
Interpreter: Julia Baumgartner**

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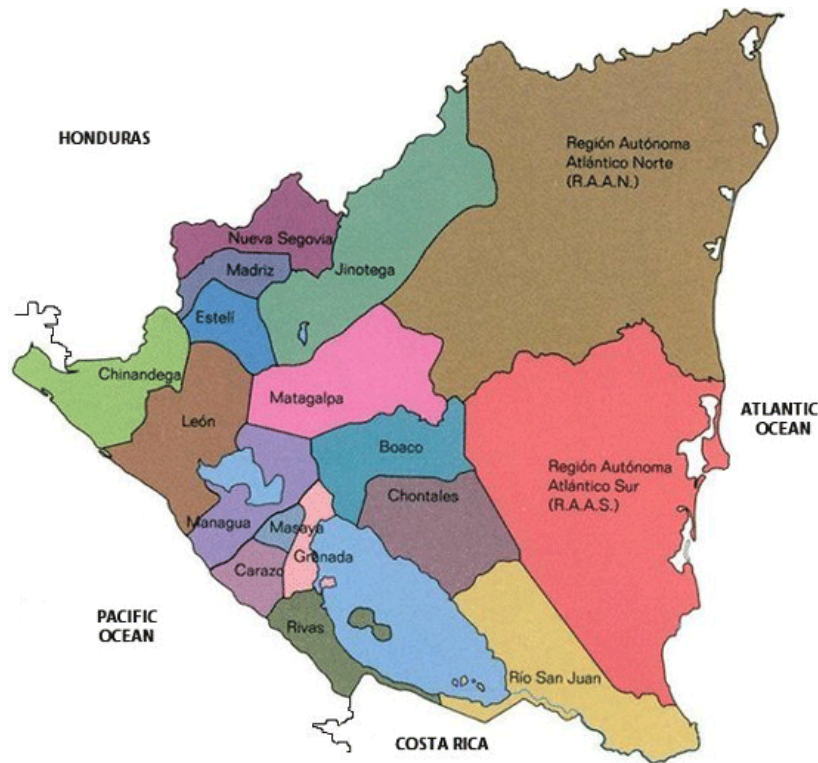
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Juanita Jiménez was born in 1967 in Masaya, about 35 miles from Managua. She is a lawyer, a leader in the Women's Autonomous Movement, and longtime activist focusing primarily on women's health and reproductive rights. In recent years she has become particularly active in protesting the 2006 law that outlawed all forms of abortion in Nicaragua. She has faced political persecution for her work in favor of abortion, and in particular for her support of a 9-year-old girl who had an abortion after being sexually abused.

Shelly Grabe is an Assistant Professor in Social Psychology, Feminist Studies, and Latino and Latin American Studies at the University of California, Santa Cruz. Shelly received her degree in clinical psychology with a minor in quantitative statistical methods. After completing her doctorate, she switched course and became a community organizer in Madison, WI involved primarily with CODEPINK and the then Wisconsin Coordinating Council on Nicaragua (WCCN). Through solidarity relationships with the women's social movement in Nicaragua (Movimiento Autónomo de Mujeres), Grabe became learned in women of Color and "Third World" feminisms from a grassroots, decolonial perspective. She has since coupled her interest in structural inequities, gender, and globalization with her academic training to work with transnational women's social organizations in Nicaragua and Tanzania. As a scholar-activist, Shelly partners with women's organizations to test new areas of inquiry that can support positive social change for women. She joined the UCSC faculty in 2008 after a Visiting Position in the Department of Gender and Women's Studies at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. In California Shelly has partnered with the Santa Cruz County Women's Commission on efforts to ratify a local draft of the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Walnut Avenue Women's Center to support youth outreach surrounding sexuality and violence against girls and women.

Julia Baumgartner holds a degree in Spanish and Sociology from the University of Wisconsin, Madison. She works as coordinator of Farmer Relations and Delegations for Just Coffee Cooperative in Madison, WI and is currently living in Nicaragua coordinating a project with Fundación Entre Mujeres, a feminist organization working for the empowerment of rural women in northern Nicaragua.

Interview with Juanita Jiménez



[00:09]

Childhood, Family, Education

Shelly Grabe: Okay, Juanita, I'd like to start by thanking you today for being part of the Global Feminisms Project. We're going to talk for about an hour and a half today about several topics. I'll ask you first about your personal history. I'd love to hear the story of your background, as well as the work you've done, and some of your thoughts and insights about the women's movement in Nicaragua. And then we'll end with any connections you see in the Autonomous Movement and other activists groups in Nicaragua as well as in other countries.

And I know, Juanita, you've become a spokesperson for the movement and your most—you've spent a lot of time talking about the movement, but today I'd like you to actually talk about your own personal history. Tell me some things about your early years, your childhood, what kind of family you grew up in, some things that you remember from when you were young.

Juanita Jiménez: Well, I'm Juanita Jiménez, I was born in the city of Masaya which is a city about 35 kilometers from Nicaragua's capital,¹ in a humble *barrio*² that is like the—it's called Países Bajos³ and it's kind of between we'll say, between the indigenous *barrio* of Monimbó and the rest of the city of Masaya. In my childhood, well I kind of have dual origins. On my maternal side, it's a very humble family, artisans in Masaya. My grandmother is indigenous, she is from the original settlers of the area of Monimbó. And on my paternal side, well, my father was a man from, we'll say the city's oligarchy. He was a widower who fell in love with my mother when she was young and from that union he had three more children. Well—on my father's side, it's a—it was a—it's a, we'll say a family with more economic resources.

And I think that what impacted me most from childhood was inequality, being able to see and, well, live with two realities. With the reality of my maternal family, very humble people with lots of limitations and the reality of my paternal family, well, with a lot of money, with a lot of land, with a lot of resources, well with abundance. And this was a contradiction in my own life from a very young age. I think this had a very important impact in my life. Since I was a girl, well, my mom handled my care and upbringing and this made me feel a part of that poor *barrio* and I was able to interact with that community, well, with this—with the boys and girls of the community. Although my studies – because I was the daughter of this man, they wanted to guarantee that I study in the private school there in Masaya – and this connected me to families with more money in Masaya.

So then, this is me. Well, a life of contradictions from a young age in a city, it's also a very genuine city, because it's characterized by being very dynamic, a city of artisans, with half the population conserving the culture of the ancestral communities and this combination, well, made me not disassociate myself from this reality in Nicaragua and of my country. You know, it's a country full of contradictions.

Because of my age, well, I had the possibility of—during my childhood, I was born in 1967, as a young girl I still have memories of the Somoza dictatorship⁴ and I lived through the revolutionary insurrection of the Monimbó *barrio* in Masaya, to see the struggle of the—um, the least protected communities and of the people yearning for freedom and also looking

¹ Nicaragua's capital is Managua.

² *Barrio* can technically be translated to “neighborhood” however the word carries a different connotation, like a working-class neighborhood. At times, can be translated it as “hood” but this often implies a rougher, more dangerous place than *barrio* often does in Spanish.

³ Low country.

⁴ Anastacio Somoza García took power of Nicaragua in 1933 after betraying the peace agreements. He was succeeded by his sons and the Somoza dynasty ruled Nicaragua until the triumph of the Sandinista Revolution in 1979. (Vanden, Harry E. & Prevost, Gary. *Politics of Latin America: The Power Game*. Oxford University Press. New York. 2006, 2nd edition.)

for equality for citizens. And in this context I lived through this whole revolutionary struggle in which members of my mother's family participated. I also saw what the inequality of Somoza entailed, right, because my father's family was supportive of Somoza. They were forced to flee the country. And in that sense my family was divided. One part was expelled from the country for being people that yielded to the Somoza project, right. And my mother's family, who were Revolutionaries, people who fought in the insurrection and who are leaders, or who established themselves as leaders in the course of the Revolution.⁵

I was twelve years old during the anti-Somoza fight and the triumph of the Sandinista Revolution. In my childhood, because of this identity with my mother's family, I gave up being in a private school and decided to go to a public school. So for secondary school, I went to a public institute and there I entered into a program for student leaders and through this youth group I participated in the revolutionary process of the '80s. I mean I have a history of leadership starting with the student groups, in the Sandinista Youth—in that context—and later, well I worked in the—I mean just after I graduated, after graduating as a lawyer, I worked in the courts at the end of the '80s, in the military courts. And when I was—when I was twenty-two years old I became a mother, I mean with the peculiarity that I always dreamed that if I had children it wouldn't be in the context of war, which was such a hard context. I also lived through the war, the Revolution – I mean the counterrevolution,⁶ this context and the contradictions that it invoked. And it also gave me a perspective on life, on justice, on what people aspire to; and that many times these projects aren't able to culminate in the improvement for the majority. My daughter had the luck of being born exactly in 1990, July 18 of '90 and she was born in this post-war context, when the country was beginning a peace-building process.

[08:18]

Activism, Education, Class

Grabe: Juanita, can I ask you to back up and tell me a little about your experience when you were participating in the Sandinista activity?

Jiménez: Yes, I was saying that I was already hearing, in my studies—I mean I was twelve years old in '79 when the Revolution triumphed. So I was ready for secondary school—for high school—and then in the, when I left—since I decided not to continue in private schools and I decided to go to a public school because I—in that context, I identified with the poor because my mother's family were artisans, they were poor. And in this context, I stood out as a student leader. I don't know if it was because of my personality, because I had always liked to say what I think, I have always liked solving problems, large or small. And as a

⁵ The Sandinista Front for National Liberation (FSLN). In 1979, they became the only guerrilla movement to overthrow a Latin American government since the Cuban Revolution. (Wright, Thomas C. *State Terrorism in Latin America: Chile, Argentina, and International Human Rights*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. New York. 2007. pp. 31) The FSLN maintained control of the government until 1990.

⁶ "Counter-revolutionaries": those opposing the Sandinistas. Contra is used to name the rebel groups that opposed the FSLN government following the 1979 Revolution. The Contras were strongly supported by the United States government.

student, within the context of the Revolution, I think I was able to maximize my capacity in leadership, or my intentions to change things, from my own perspective, despite being very young.

So from a very young age, I was at the front of the groups that the student movements organized to increase production. I was—so I lead the youth battalions in my region, right. I mean in Masaya, in what was the fourth region to go harvest cotton, in Masaya, in the—in the higher altitude area around Masaya there was a lot of cotton production. So we would go there—so that this crop would not be lost, well we would go and harvest the cotton crop. And the region also had coffee plantations and there was also a deficit of labor to harvest the coffee. So, in that context, the students took it upon themselves to do the harvesting.

I had—well, because of my age they didn't take me as a literacy tutor.⁷ And, you know, this is something that really made me suffer because I wanted to participate and to teach people to read, but I was just coming out of primary school so I wasn't the right age to be able to go teach literacy. So since I couldn't be involved in the literacy campaign of the '80s, well I became assistant to the literacy teacher in my *barrio*. So then in my house, it was a house where they—where they taught literacy to those in the *barrio*, in particular—the majority were women, there were about 20 or 22 women—men and women from my *barrio* who were taught—who learned to read and write in the *barrio*. So I helped the official literacy teacher, I supported him in every aspect of the, the literacy—I mean I'm not officially registered as a brigadier in that context, but I did participate in my own way, pretty much still as a child, in the literacy brigades of the '80s.

And as I told you, I was mobilized during the harvest season. I was—I participated in many events. I was—I also received military training, with the combat context, well, women, we also had to learn to use the weapons and I went when I was really young, well I also participated in that process. I was mobilized in war zones, you know, picking coffee. This was a very difficult experience because it meant living very close to the war and what that implies, well, being in a process of war. And well I also had to say goodbye to some very young friends of mine who went to war in that context. Some went voluntarily, but later when the war heightened, well others were forced to go; and all those contradictions, I also—they all impacted my life too, developing in me a sense of justice in my life because I don't think anybody well, can be forced to do what they don't want to do. I mean freedom should be wide enough so that every person can decide what to participate in and what to build towards or construct, or in what things not to participate.

And for me it was very hard when they started forceful recruitment in Masaya and it coincided with a one-year absence because as a student leader in the Revolution, I was sent to Cuba to study—for ideological studies. Then upon my return from Cuba in 1986—in 1986 I discovered that the youth weren't going voluntarily, they were refusing to go to war, the mothers didn't want their children to die and I learned about the forced recruitment.

⁷ She is referring to the National Literacy Crusade, a huge Sandinista campaign between March and August 1980. The illiteracy rate in Nicaragua dropped from 50.3% to 12.9% in five months. (Hanemann, Ulrike. "Nicaragua's Literacy Campaign" *Literacy for Life*, UNESCO Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2006. Hamburg, 2005.)

And in that context, Monimbó, which had been a strategic *barrio* in the fight against Somoza, when I returned in 1986, Monimbó was now against the Revolution.⁸ This was a very tough reality for me to understand because, well, one asks what happened. What happened is that, well, the project which was being sold as a project in favor of the majority, but in the context of war, the intention of the Revolution quickly became sidetracked and the population felt that they were being forced into a situation that the people didn't agree with.

So Monimbó, a *barrio*—as I told you, an indigenous *barrio*, well, it rebelled also against this other type of oppression and for me this was very, very difficult because of the ideas, and because I believed in the revolutionary process; but it also gave me lessons about what freedom means and what oppression is, and also what a dictatorship is. I mean if this town resisted Somoza's dictatorship, it was also resisting a military dictatorship that was, in that context, forcing young people to go and defend the Revolution. So then this also gave me a very important life experience.

[15:05]

Family, Motherhood, Politics, Activism

Grabe: And you said your daughter was born in 1990, at the time of the electoral defeat.⁹

Jiménez: Yes, well loss for some but it was also a triumph for the others who were the majority. It's been hard for me to learn this—now, many years later, I've realized this: for those of us who were betting on the revolutionary project, we lived through it as a terrible loss; but the truth is that for the majority of the Nicaraguan population this was a victory, right? To have been able to achieve a peaceful country and free itself from the war, which was very difficult. I didn't want my daughter to be born into war and well, it was by chance, the truth is that I didn't plan it but it turned out that my daughter was born during the peace process and this also gave me a lot to think about and a lot of inspiration also, particularly because of her. Well, the need, you know that she also deserves a better world. She deserves a country where we can all really live together, without exclusions.

Grabe: In what kind of activities did you start to get involved in the early '90s?

[16:28]

Jiménez: No, in '90 particularly because of the birth of my daughter, I was still officially in the army's structure because I was part of the military courts that had broad authority, well everything had—they could process common crimes there, military crimes because they were courts that had a very, very broad scope. So then I—it wasn't until '92 when I officially left the military structure and began to work independently as a lawyer.

⁸ The Revolution officially triumphed in 1979, but it is very common in socialist revolutions to not consider the revolution complete until all of the ideals and demands of the revolution are implemented, even then there are ways to improve and make the revolution better. The persistence of the revolution implies an eternal goal of improvement.

⁹ In 1990, the FSLN (led by Daniel Ortega) lost the presidential election to a coalition led by the UNO party (National Opposition Union) and Doña Violeta Chamorro became president until 1997.

I had the peculiarity of, well, in that context, my husband was named Judge of a city in Nicaragua that is in the center of Boaco and in this city, well, there was—the IXCHEN Women’s Center¹⁰ was there, which is a women’s organization, founded—that also came out of the structure of the Amanda Espinoza Women’s Movement¹¹ and they—well they were looking for a lawyer to help women victims of violence or cases related to violence. So I accepted that job, first because I mean I was arriving in a town that, well—it seemed to me that I was underutilized as an independent lawyer or stay-at-home mom, so then I saw this as motivation, I mean, in some way I had to help people. So, in this organization I found a way to help people and particularly women.

In the military courts I had already had experience for how—well, the different ways in which the judicial system treats women. So I was more or less aware of the inequality within the scope of justice. So arriving at IXCHEN was like an opportunity to work to improve injustices. I don’t know where this inspiration came from but I think that it’s part of what marked my life from very early on, the whole issue of inequality and the difficulties that I saw because of the contradictions that I told you about in my own family. So got I started in Boaco and in a short time I was already taking cases as a lawyer and, well, I stood out for really doing justice, representing cases of violence, of sexual abuse, cases of alimony. But also some cases of social injustices that existed in that town. For example it is a town that has a very large territorial reach, there are many ranchers or farmers and many people are stripped of their land in unjust ways. For example, for a—because they didn’t have access to a loan, so they would borrow from someone and then they ended up having their land taken away. And women were victims of this as well. So then aside from what we’ll call strictly conjugal violence or sexual violence, I also became interested in this other type of injustice and I was winning civil cases, penal cases and this also made me well known as a lawyer in that city, one that worked not only for the poor, for women. Well, I ended up standing out. I think that was my first encounter with feminism because it was through this organization that I participated in educative and reflective processes and studies of feminism.

[20:36]

Grabe: And who was organizing those workshops or those studies on feminism?

Jiménez: Well IXCHEN, the IXCHEN Women’s Center has within its philosophy, it’s philosophical base always had—has been feminism; so then they organized—here, in Managua along with the people of its affiliates, like in Boaco, they organized workshops. So they even had women go through a series of workshops about self-esteem, about self-recognition of violence, so there was a whole program about—there was a strong

¹⁰ Founded in 1989, IXCHEN is a foundation operating throughout Nicaragua to help women claim their rights, particular in issues of domestic violence, family planning and women’s health.

¹¹ Asociación de Mujeres Nicaragüenes Luisa Amanda Espinoza, English: Luisa Amanda Espinoza Association of Nicaraguan Women. This was the original Sandinista women’s movement. Due to its close links to the FSLN, feminist issues such as abortion and women’s rights were pushed aside to organize around FSLN issues. (Bayard de Volo, Lorraine. *Mothers of Heroes and Martyrs: Gender Identity and Politics in Nicaragua, 1979-1999*. The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore. 2001.)

investment on the educational side in this—in the organization. Today it's less, but, well, in that context it was very strong because the emphasis was on the tension, not just within the scope of justice, but also within sexual and reproductive rights. And then in that, as an organization they constantly had educational programs. Well, I began participating in those programs.

But for me—like I said, for always standing out, I—well, and doing an analysis from a legal perspective of the things that should be just or how the law should be applied. I mean we're talking about '83—about '93 when there weren't special laws, we had earlier, older laws. But nonetheless, in the scope of those laws that we had, I was able to bring justice in favor of women despite all the difficulties that existed with the decision-makers in the judiciary system. At that time the police—there weren't women-focused police stations,¹² and they treated women very badly, and they came out beaten up. So then I took on that fight because it doesn't matter whether it was the husband. I mean this is a woman who has been beaten, the law establishes it as a crime and the aggressor must be sanctioned. Clearly, I also had the strength of knowledge from having been in military courts, right, from having worked with judicial officials. This may have given my demands more strength. I think that's why I stood out in that context.

And later I was asked if I could—since I came, I returned to Managua, so they offered me a position in Managua. And in Managua, well, it was different because with IXCHEN Managua I had the opportunity to participate more directly in the process of creating the Network of Women Against Violence, in all of the process of—of creating the special units like the police stations. That's to say the first police station—I mean I worked in one of the police stations because I was one of the lawyers in this IXCHEN district. So the first police station, the first commission—well I had the luck of participating in the process of starting to organize with police authorities. And later since I was practicing—

[22:43]

Activism, Work & Research

Grabe: And what year was that, that you started to organize the women's police precincts?

Jiménez: The stations were founded in '93; the first station was created in Managua's Fifth District. Then that year, well, I was in Managua so then I participated in this process as part of the IXCHEN organization. And I'd say I think that was where I became involved in the feminist movement and also deepening my theoretical understanding of feminism, but in daily practice I think I'd say I always had this vocation or calling for justice, for justice when it comes to inequalities, and to me gender inequality is the cruelest form in society because well even though there are institutions, even though there are laws, there is still that mentality well, I mean they don't accept women as equals. And these are strong cultural barriers and you have to fight against it, using litigation, for example, or through political action.

¹² Police stations that focus on women's issues.

So I worked as a lawyer with IXCHEN for almost fifteen years in Managua, directly taking cases. I mean I can credit on my resume that I was the first person to win a case for psychological damage. You know, it could be perceived as absurd but if the law—well they had reformed the law and psychological harm had been included, so I said well yes, there's a law and it has to be upheld. So then the judges wanted to align themselves as if there weren't precedence but well yes, for the new law establishes that it could be processed in the same manner as a case due to physical harm. So then I was the first to press charges, the first accusation for psychological damages. I think it also served to take a breath and well, to encourage women to report this other type of harm, which is often invisible, but many times it is crueler.

Well I think that is where I was most recognized in this work, for contributing to this, and it was easier being here in Managua. I actively participated in the Network of Women Against Violence¹³ and even in the—in the—I was, being in IXCHEN, well, I was a delegate in the Network of Women so I was elected to do—to participate in the technical committees that were the projects with the police stations, and to participate, I mean I was elected by the Network's assembly to be one of the delegates on the commission that fights against—the National Commission for the Fight Against Violence and I participated because of my technical knowledge of the processes to create awareness among the justice officials and this pushed me to participate in a series, well to work on a series of training processes with the judges, prosecutors, police officers.

And because of the same—this mandate from the Network, well in the scope of dialogue with the government, I have participated in putting together manuals for everything those programs did—what exists as far as protocols, manuals for survivors of violence, and the little that has progressed at the national level, well even though it's not upheld, but the programs on violence, the national plan against violence, I have participated in all that with some other colleagues.

In the Network I was in the position of executive at the beginning and later, with the change in structure, I ended up in the coordinating commission of the Network. There I was elected to be responsible for the area of political participation and so my involvement in the process of political participation and the processes of reforming the laws and all the processes that the movement has been involved in, come from me taking this position.

[28:06]

Grabe: Were there major issues or cases that stood out for you that you worked on while you were with the Network?

Jiménez: Yes, I always took specific cases. I mean, in cases of sexual abuse, of sexual violence, I pressed charges directly. In my opinion—I think that only a few cases were lost, right, almost all—I mean I don't have a complete list of all the cases that I took, but I

¹³ The Network of Violence Against Women is an organization that has been active in pushing for policy and cultural changes to reduce domestic violence in Nicaragua. Triumphs have included passing laws that outlaw domestic violence, creating women's empowerment workshops and women's police stations that permit women to be comfortable reporting abuse.

pressed charges directly. So then I represented, in a context when there still wasn't a public defense, when the office of the district attorney didn't exist, and the victims either arrived alone or were accompanied if and when that was possible through the centers for women. So, in Managua, I helped many cases of sexual violence and conjugal violence that led to injuries, death threats. The threats were a crime that weren't—were almost never punished when they were dealing with partners or spouses, right, but I made it happen, I mean a death threat is just as serious whether it comes from a neighbor or from a spouse, should be even more serious.

Later with the reforms to the penal code it was possible for these crimes to have a more specialized treatment. There are very sad cases of sexual violence directed to little girls. I think those are the cases that have impacted me most. I mean sexual abuse is, I believe, one of the cruelest because it marks your life and even though you learn to survive, well, I mean it obviously marks your life and your private sphere, your development. Then when you're a little girl, in the cases that I worked on, I think that many of them are now grown women, but well I know it wasn't easy, you know, surviving. And it's true that I contributed to a sense of justice because the aggressors were convicted, but I think there is still a lot to do so that these women—the system in general or society in general, really can open itself up to guarantee better conditions and assimilation or rehabilitation processes after such a serious wound.

Other cases that were also very difficult, like sexual abuse cases that are cases of incest because they involve the fathers, or the grandfathers, these kinds of cases were also very difficult for me to represent. They were all indicted, but well, the processes, well they were—I mean it was like they say sometimes, and still currently, there is a lot of stigma towards the victim, a lot of blame. And it is very hard for the families, I mean I have seen how families confront it, they go between believing the victim and believing the aggressor and in the end, those are ways of denying the violence and the abuse. Sometimes denying it means not believing it. Not necessarily because they don't agree or aren't shaken up. Many family members have denied it or sometimes even the mothers of the victims, when they are young or adolescents, but those are—I think—mechanisms they use to overcome the damages. So then in my life I have this kind of experience and well I think that it has given me the wisdom to understand some emblematic cases.

[32:05]

Activism, Politics

Grabe: Juanita, did you specifically ever experience any threats or consequences for positions you took on certain issues or cases?

And have you received any specific threats because of your perspective on any cases?¹⁴

Jiménez: Well before no, I mean the only statement that has been really direct has been in the context of the current government. I mean I have been subjected to two investigations

¹⁴ A translation of the interpreter is included here to help understand why Jiménez answers the questions the way she does.

with the intent of criminalizing me. The first for the crime of abortion, right, I'm part of the list of nine feminists who were accused for illicit association to commit a criminal offense of aiding and abetting the crime of abortion.

Grabe: Can you tell me about what that experience was like for you personally?

Can you tell me about that personal experience?

Jiménez: Well, it was a very difficult experience because, well, I think that Nicaragua's feminist movement, right, the women in general in Nicaragua have been very strong. That is to say we've—our strengths and our fights and our battles. But I mean it's not the same when you are leading a struggle as when you are defending yourself because of this struggle. Because this has a very negative impact for women so, for me personally, it was hard because it didn't only put us at risk of losing our individual freedom and the possibility of being imprisoned. That's hard, right, for someone who normally—I mean you are in search of justice and soon you feel like the mechanism for justice is being used against you. This puts into question the whole process that, well in a country that supposedly should be democratic, where the authorities respect the laws. But it's a bad example, you know, for the women, and it also has a negative effect on the society and well particularly on—I mean ultimately it exacerbates machismo because if—let's say an authority, or the powers of the justice system don't respect rights and run over women who defend rights, then an aggressor in his house feels he has the liberty to attack because the law won't do anything.

So for me, to be in this context, well, that political persecution that we have spoken against internationally, I mean more than the individual risk, it also puts Nicaraguan women at risk.

And the other is because of crimes, right, that they are crimes that we, as in the case of abortion—because we were accused of aiding and abetting abortion, because we fought for the restoration of therapeutic abortion.¹⁵ So it's absurd because you are struggling to defend women's lives, because taking away therapeutic abortion means that you now are denied the possibility of terminating a pregnancy to save your life, in a case that cannot be questioned, but the law went backwards and criminalized it. So then, to accuse us for trying to re-establish this right or this section of the law, so that women can save their lives—and they want to criminalize you for this, then it's really hard. I mean it's very negative for the society, well it takes us back many years on the advances that, as a movement, we have accomplished.

[35:54]

Grabe: Juanita, for people unfamiliar with the case, can you explain what criminal charges were brought against you personally?

[The conversation is stopped to move the camera.]

[37:12]

¹⁵ Therapeutic abortion: Abortion for the purpose of saving the life of the mother.

So I'm going to ask her for people unfamiliar with the abortion case, what were the criminal charges brought against her personally. So I want her to talk about her and not the case.

[Things are still being moved.]

[38:14]

Okay. Thank you for being flexible. Sorry about the interruption. I wanted to ask you for people outside of Nicaragua that aren't familiar with the abortion case, can you tell us what some of the criminal charges were against you personally?

Jiménez: Well, Nicaragua's Penal Code had established a section, 169 years ago, that has been called therapeutic abortion, but what it is—it's the termination of a pregnancy when the life of the woman is at risk. This practice had a lot of support coming from conservative government. We are talking about 1937, when the first Penal Code had already established, as an exception, that when the life or health of the woman is in danger, a termination [of the pregnancy] was allowed.

Nicaragua entered into a process of modernizing the penal codes, supposedly with the idea of making them more humanistic, with more guarantees and in this process of debate—in this process of debate they began to discuss the complete criminalization of abortion. The arguments have never really been about legality, rather they were more religious and guided in particular by leaders of the Catholic Church. Nicaragua is a secular state. It's not constitutionally ascribed to any official religion and governed by the rule of law. This means that rights and the law prevail above any religious dogma.

Nonetheless, in 2006, with the framework of this debate about the new penal code, the party that is currently in the government began to negotiate with leaders of the Catholic Church and facilitated an immediate reform to the current code and eliminated the exception of therapeutic abortion from the code. In that context, the Nicaraguan feminist movement began, in the first place, to fight to keep the elimination from happening. Later we have been sought to argue, legally and nationally, about the necessity of reinstating this exception in the law. And particularly because we are talking about fundamental rights, the right to life, and this has required a lot of political mobilization from the movement and all of the Nicaraguan feminists and other social sections like the medical societies and human rights organizations have been involved.

So then in 2007 with the current government's arrival to power, and this particular accusation, well it's true that it was presented by a person from an organization connected to the Catholic Church, but it was—and we know that this accusation was drafted, well, in an office of the current government and so nine of us feminists were criminally accused of illicit association to commit a crime and for apology of the crime of abortion. And the actions they included in this accusation were any and all political action by the women's movement to make therapeutic abortion legal again. So, you know—if the intention is to punish your constitutional right of freedom of expression, because the Constitution also gives us the right to express ourselves and mobilize ourselves. So then, it's illogical that they try to criminalize political activism. Without a doubt, the intention was clear, right,

there was an intention to intimidate the women's movement and also in particular to socially discredit it.

[41:31]

Grabe: And what were you charged with?

And why did they accuse you?

Jiménez: They accused us of those crimes.

But, how—with what accusations?

Grabe: Nine of you were criminally charged. What was the issue they brought against you?

They accused nine of you, but what was the accusation?

Jiménez: It was, well, for being authors of this crime because the Penal Code establishes—I mean it's a criminal act, the crime of abortion is punishable. I mean, no kind of abortion is permitted in Nicaragua, so then it means that according to this allegation, if we were doing activism in favor of abortion, it was as if we were inciting others to commit this crime. This is absurd because the Penal Code was used to appeal to the Constitutional Court because well, the exception shouldn't be eliminated because it wouldn't only violate the fundamental human rights of Nicaraguan women but it would also contradict the obligations of the Nicaraguan government to international conventions that protect women's rights.

But the intention was to criminalize it, well the women's movement, as part of a general strategy against Nicaraguan civil society on behalf of the current government, but with an emphasis on the movement because it's been a very active movement with a history of relentless struggle. A movement of which part of its leadership declared itself in opposition to the initial candidacy of Daniel Ortega because he's someone who is suspected of abuse—for having sexually abused his daughter. Also, we always said that this accusation was a form of pay-back, because, well the movement, the leadership in particular, which I was a part of, well we supported Zoilamérica Narváez, Daniel Ortega's stepdaughter, when she accused him of sexual abuse.¹⁶ And the movement as a whole, to show unity and autonomy, supported those allegations even though he [Ortega] was the leader of the Sandinista Front and he had a history that went back all the way to the days of the Revolution, as did many of us.

Then in the imagination of the government's party, well the feminist leadership is seen as in an adversarial position, as a traitor to the Sandinista Front. So, once they got to power, it

¹⁶ In 1998 Zoilamérica Narváez, Daniel Ortega's stepdaughter, accused him of sexual harassment/misconduct from the time she was 11 years old until a few days before she filed the complaint. She went to court, was represented by Vilma Núñez of the Women's movement. (See Global Feminisms interview of Vilma Núñez.) Zoilamérica won the court case, decided to settle privately with Ortega, and later the family reunited. This was a pivotal moment in the FSLN, and the division of the FSLN is often partially attributed to these accusations.

was something like payback, to accuse us like this, to make up such things. Nothing came of this accusation but it meant two and a half years of investigation with the only intention of intimidating the feminist leaders. But this accusation happened and they had the intention of putting us in jail, but it led to national and international activism and there were also condemnations from different human rights committees. Amnesty International also carried out important activism to prevent the criminalization of the movement and of the leadership for a cause that, well, they wanted to detain us or take away our freedom.

[47:20]

Activism

Grabe: Juanita, I know that some of those efforts were to really shut down the movement, but can you say a little bit about how it impacted your own life? How did being—how did those criminal charges affect your personal life?

Did it have an impact on your daily life?

Jiménez: Well it has an impact because it entails risk for individ—as I told you, the biggest risk was the loss of freedom even though you—I mean we are willing to defend ourselves and if they jailed us for defending rights well we were going to go to jail. This is because our fight is based on conviction, because we are convinced that all women’s rights should be respected from the fundamental ones to other social, economic, and cultural rights.

For me, well, the solidarity gave me a lot of strength, the support of the women on a national and international level. This gave legitimacy to my work, but I can’t deny that it had an impact on my family, right, because the family feels at risk that you could be criminalized, that you could be detained. I mean I have a daughter that well, of course she wouldn’t have liked for her mother to go to jail, a mother that, yes, she admires my work but sometimes—well, she’s my daughter, and it hurts her, the threat that I could be imprisoned. So then it does have an impact on the family because well for me in general, in my—we’ll say in my life in feminism, in the feminist struggle, I’ve had lots of support and a lot of legitimacy because of what I do.

So the big contradiction, all of a sudden, for doing this, something that is right before society and something which people identify themselves with—with this struggle and that because of this they want to criminalize you, well it was like really contradictory, very difficult. So then it does have an impact because, I mean I felt that aside from the injustice, I mean it involved confronting power in a direct way and in a way that was disproportional for us. Because the only path we had was our cause for justice and being conscious that what we have done we did for women’s rights. But we were also conscious of the context of persecution that existed, or that persists in this country, well, it totally violates the institutionalism and denies any kind of action in the legal environment. Because the law isn’t valid, right, the only thing that matters is authoritarianism and the intention of using power against someone who you want to abuse, who you want to eliminate, or who you want to repress or sanction because you don’t like them or simply because they project themselves as someone who is opposed to your ideas or opposed to your government.

So that was—it was very difficult but for me it gave me a lot of strength, a lot of strength and many lessons about the cause, that it's a valid cause despite the risks and I think that's the primary thing—I mean this case was for me, I'll tell you that it was a case that was very emblematic, like I said, because it implied for the “defenders” to now defend ourselves. But I think that we won the battle and we won it positively, but we also weakened the image of absolute power that they wanted to set up in the country and that we—I think we feminists also gave a lesson that—that in this context well I don't think anybody, despite being so behind, despite machismo—which can be important, people aren't willing to give up their freedom even if this freedom still isn't enough—well isn't enough in the execution of rights and I think feminism has come a long way toward this.

[52:04]

That's the first, the second was worse because they invented terrible crimes they said we had committed. In the second accusation I was confronted with the accusation against MAM¹⁷ in particular, and against CINCO, the Center for Investigation and Communication, of which Sofia Montenegro¹⁸ is the executive director and she is another very important feminist leader. And in that accusation, the intention to criminalize the work that we did and to halt our struggle was more evident. In this accusation it was indicated that the women's movement was illegal and that we were, well we were in alliance and executing a governmental project that was the first project that we had achieved through the allocation of democratic governance funds. And what we promoted through this project was for women to exercise their rights as citizens. But you know, that can be very threatening to formal powers because you if give women tools and they begin to see that it's not only their particular rights, but that other rights—their political rights—are as important, such as the right to eat, the right to work. So this implied that there was also activism from the women around defending democracy.

So then I think that those in power didn't like this, particularly this government and it pressured and structured a new attack against all of civil society but with an impressive viciousness on the women's movement. In this context we were also accused of money laundering, or *triangulación de fondos*, and those are crimes that belong to organized crime. We are a legitimate movement, a movement that is based on a specific struggle, specific activism working for the common good, particularly women's rights. Then it was absurd and I think that it was also a show of power on the part of the state and on the part of the current government wanting to delegitimize the possibility that you obtain funds from the Cooperation for the development of this activism. This was very perverse and was tough because it implied the utilization of authoritarian power in a stronger way, well the different divisions of the state, particularly the justice system, it's very serious.

I had to confront the process of arbitrary search warrants to the offices of the Autonomous Movement. I mean we had a search warrant that was conducted with a—well a police display as if they were searching the house of a drug-trafficker. And it was very hard for the

¹⁷ Movimiento Autónomo de Mujeres (Women's Autonomous Movement).

¹⁸ Sofia Montenegro is a feminist activist and journalist who cofounded and served on the editorial board for a daily paper called *Barricada*. See Global Feminism interview of her.

citizens but I also think it was a—like a wake-up call for the Nicaraguan society and that it wasn't well seen. Even though some sectors don't identify with feminism or the topic of abortion, for example, but an outrage of this kind, which was in 2008, I think society was very coherent and said "No, this isn't right." And I also think it gave us a lot of strength to fight from a disadvantaged position because all the power is against you and because of things that, at the level of the application of the law, criminally are very strong like being accused of money laundering and *triangulación de fondos*.

Well they weren't able to carry it out because the intention was simply to run us over but the cost was high, particularly for those in power because the level of censorship, the level of national and international condemnation was also very strong and I think that this sounded the alarm so people realized that no authoritarian regime can be positive for the country and even less so for the Nicaraguan people who have fought so much for freedom and who have fought so hard to find a democratic model through which we can all coexist.

[56:50]

Work & Research, Activism

Grabe: Juanita, can you talk a little about how you went from your work with the Network¹⁹ at that time to making a decision to start here at the Organization for the Autonomous Movement?

Can you talk about your work at that time when you left the network and began to work with the autonomous movement?

Jiménez: Well I—as I said about working directly litigating specific cases of different types of violence, I went on to coordinate cases or commissions or spaces in the Network of Women Against Violence. Doing that, when I left, in this context—particularly after 2003 there was a very emblematic case in Nicaragua, which was the case of little Rosita who was a little pregnant girl from Costa Rica, the result of sexual abuse.²⁰ A little immigrant girl from Costa Rica and there was a debate precisely about therapeutic abortion. So that year was a very hard year when I was already in the office of the Network of Women. I became the spokeswoman of the Network because they had to argue on a legal level and I was elected, after that I was elected in this area of political participation in the women's network.

But at the level of the movement in general, they initiated a process of evaluation of the Women's Autonomous Movement, with the understanding that the Autonomous Movement included all of us who believed in autonomy, and who since the '90s had been working to reclaim the feminist agenda that had been ignored in the '80s. So then in that process of reorganization, of evaluating what had happened in the last ten years, we're talking about

¹⁹ Network of Women Against Violence.

²⁰ Rosa was a nine-year-old girl from Costa Rica who, as a result of the criminalization of abortion for any reason, was not permitted to have an abortion. This very public battle in 2006 ultimately led to Rosa having an illicit abortion. (Kampwirth, Karen. "Abortion, Antifeminism, and the Return of Daniel Ortega In Nicaragua, Leftist Politics?" *Latin American Perspectives*, 35.6: 2008, pp. 122-136.)

2003, which is when I participated in the Network of Women Against Violence and was responsible for the area of political participation at a meeting on compromise of the Women's Autonomous Movement where we made ourselves available for this evaluation but also to do a series of debates about what kind—how we wanted to organize ourselves, how we should strengthen our strategies and how to construct a document, a platform that we could share with the feminist logic and with the two fundamental axes which are the autonomy and equality for women.

So then I participated in that process after the—this process continued for almost three years of debate, analysis, and restructuring of the Women's Autonomous Movement and it concluded in 2006. In 2006 there was a re-founding—so on March 8th, 2006 the Women's Autonomous Movement was re-founded and it was decided to give it a public face. I mean because it was a movement that included all of us but that didn't have a specific spokesperson, a movement we all subscribed to but there wasn't a specific reference for society. So then we decided to create a minimum structure and in this minimum structure I was elected and so then I became part of the structure of the Women's Autonomous Movement in about 200—

[01:00:34]

Grabe: Why were you elected?

Jiménez: Well I understand that they elected me because I had been participating in different processes, because of my work in the different spaces of—of organizing the movement. I mean sometimes they tell me that one of my characteristics is that I like articulating and well I guess I like—I believe in collective processes, but they should be truly collective. It shouldn't be that one person decides for the rest. Then in the network, in that structure of the network I was—I wagered a lot in creating this structure that feminists wanted so much and that the rest of us resent in patriarchy: that verticalism, that authoritarianism that is reflected in their organizational structure. Then creating horizontal structures seems absurd but well it is possible to create mechanisms where we can all make decisions, where we can all decide about a platform for complete action. Then I think that this process where I have participated and I represented another, well, in the final process I was recognized before my peers and that's why I was elected in this—as part of the structure of the Women's Autonomous Movement.

Later then, the story is that I leave the coordination of the Women's Network and it coincides with this project that the movement had obtained through those funds for governability—this project of constructing citizenships for women and in this project, they anticipated having funds for a house, to have a physical space that would be a referral point for society, for the media. And since I left the Network they offered it to me, to be in a paid position and to coordinate this project. And since then I engage in executive tasks. For some it would seem that I'm the executive director but the reality is that in the structure I'm part of the executive commission, of a collectively coordinated authority and the only difference is that I'm a full-time paid employee with the projects that we are able to complete with the donors and with cooperation. Then in that context I have now stayed as an executive because, well, to guarantee a spokesperson and to continue strengthening that

space a bit with the coordination of different requests and different organizational forms for the movement.

[01:03:23]

Activism, Feminism

Grabe: And what are some of the current issues women are facing that the organization is trying to address now?

Jiménez: Well, today the biggest—let’s say one of the principal challenges that we see is simply the existence of the movement. And from this perspective, you find yourself in a position of resistance or resisting the intentions of, we’ll say the formal political powers of wanting to delegitimize you or of wanting to politically eliminate you. So one of the biggest challenges of the movement is its own subsistence, continuing to keep yourself in a key position. But the other key aspect for us is actually the struggle for democracy. The struggle for democracy and institutions is because I think that a person only realizes the risks and values of the processes they’re—either when you lose them or when you are at risk of losing them. And I think that this is what is happening here in Nicaragua.

As I said, we initiated a peace process in ‘90 and wanted to begin to construct a model that wasn’t um, “revolutionary” in its essence because it had different ideological intersections, but was projected in the necessity of a democratic model where we could all participate. But also a democratic model where we could have clear rules and everything and a legal security for all. In that context of peace building, women advanced because, if we were constructing democracy for all, then we also demanded democracy for women and that was what the movement was wagering on. I mean how to construct institutionalism so that at a formal level this institutionalism guarantees rights for women. That’s the idea—thinking of it through the logic of the fight against violence, from the logic of the struggle for equality.

So we had been advancing that. With the situation, um, well with the current government that has practically ignored us and suspended the whole process and when you realize that when you think you have progressed a little, it turns out that you’re at risk of losing it when you lose the institutionalism. And the concrete proof was the loss of the exception for therapeutic abortion. Then when there isn’t institutionalism that secures fundamental rights, this happens. I mean how is it possible that in 22 days you abolish a law with an exception that implies the recognition of fundamental rights for women? And with this exception, well eliminating this one article, implied reversing women’s legal position of 169 years. So for us, who believe in equality and believe in democracy – we believe that the current priority is recovering, as they say, the path toward democracy and, in this context, the power of the fight for democracy to position our feminist agenda as one of the interests of the women’s movement.

[01:06:56]

Grabe: What are some of the strategies that you’re using to rescue democracy for women?

Jiménez: We—in our strategic plan, one of the clear strategies has been the construction of citizenship, citizenship for women, because there's a big deficit in Nicaragua. I mean, in Nicaragua because of its different contexts, that's to say, the society even at an educational level hasn't guaranteed the understanding of fundamental rights. Here people don't even know that everything—even at the professional level—they don't know the text of the political constitution. So you can't defend your rights if you don't appropriate those rights. And you're imprisoned we'll say by leaders or you're imprisoned by populism when you aren't sure that—that the right to eat or the right to education aren't handouts, they aren't charity from anyone, but they're fundamental rights and the government has to guarantee those rights. So then we have made strides toward this.

I mean, we achieved—we'll, in the different territories we've facilitated a lot of information through workshops, forums, and debates about what the institution of democracy is. We are distributing it in text, that is, we have created the initiative to—well, it's the political constitution in small format that we call it pocket or purse edition, because we want women to be able to have it, to know what people are talking about when they mention the constitution, what people are talking about when they mention rights. And they are right there, I mean, it's not that someone is doing you a favor regarding a right, but rather that rights are already established there, and that you have to understand to be able to defend them.

We'll say this is a fundamental strategy; the other is to promote the organizational part. I mean, Nicaragua has the characteristic that for adverse contexts, whether it's war or natural disasters, people are able to come together to you improve their environment. So, how do we enhance all of these abilities using those same women? I mean, women can lead, yes, but we also want women to be recognized for this leadership capacity, from their own potential in the community. So then, to work on women's leadership is another important axis for us and we have been developing these processes at a territorial level, we have been guaranteeing with the organizations.

[01:10:01]

Feminism, History, Politics

Grabe: Juanita, I know you've written an entire book on this but could you tell us very briefly about the history of the Women's Autonomous Movement?

Jiménez: Well, I was telling you that the women's movement in Nicaragua is very big, it has different organizational forms, the Autonomous, as a movement currently, is the organizational expression of the feminist movement in general in Nicaragua. And the analysis of this study that we did for ten years about the fight about women's rights, well it was very clear that the movement is strong. It has a lot of strength, included in its strength is an organizational capacity that it has and the other is that it is a recognized authority within our own society, despite machismo.

Grabe: Can you back up and tell us and tell us how the movement started?

Jiménez: Well, the movement has its origins in the context of the revolution, with the peculiarity that in that context [a lot of noise, a truck with loud speakers passes by]. Look, those never go down this street, I don't know why now, they might be boycotting us!

Grabe: So she said the movement has its history in the Revolution?

Jiménez: The—well the organizational part, I mean, well the revolutionary context made it easy for people to organize. The difficulty in that context is that you organized, but it was around a single model that was the party of the Sandinista Front and the org—the logic of mass organizations. So then the Luisa Amanda Espinoza Movement, for example, we'll say is like the organizational predecessor of the women's movement. It was a movement totally—let's say within the logic of the FSLN's mass organizations. And despite being a very rich movement—it allowed women to organize—the whole agenda was in function of the agenda of the Sandinista party where women's rights were never the priorities. It was always said that since we were at war, later they were going to look into the rights that women demanded, for example, because of the whole problem with violence.

In the same revolutionary context, there were conditions to widen the considerations for abortion, for example. Nevertheless, although these problems could have been dealt with within that context, the Sandinista party said that they needed to wait because it wasn't the right time and the priority was the war and the priority was to defend the Revolution and make yourself available to another type of program that wasn't specifically directed to women. But that it then—at the organizational level, that's where its base is.

Then at the end of the '80s there was a process of autonomy, or we'll say that the women's leadership had more influence over the feminist movement. And there was a demand for the particular feminist agenda and since it never took off with the revolutionary model, many leaders of the movement that were organizing around the Revolution started the process of creating other types of organizations apart from the Luisa Amanda Espinoza Movement. They started forming collectives from there, and in 1992, with the Revolution, they held a big meeting that was called the Festival of the 52%, that was what it was called publicly, but behind the scenes it was about a declaration of autonomy, a search for its own identity as a movement. And that's where they begin to talk about the women's autonomous movement. In the logic that autonomy is the principal issue to be able to progress as its own movement, as an indigenous and independent movement, as a movement that follows the agenda of its own women. This implied many political costs, right, because many leaders were expelled from the party, others were demonized for ideologically wanting to focus on neo-liberal ideas, for example. But undoubtedly the movement decided to organize in its own way. [Lots of noise.] Imagine that, this is strange. [Side comments about what is happening outside.] Is it okay if we keep talking even with all this noise?

[01:15:51]

Grabe: Yeah, it's okay that we can take some sound out and keep the voices when we edit it.

Jiménez: They're going to play music, of course, something's happening in the park. They're not going to be able to turn it off. [Loud music]

Grabe: Well, we can wait.

[Inaudible.]

Grabe: She said the music's in the park and it's not going to be shut off—

Jiménez: But it going to be more difficult with the music—

Grabe: But the music's okay?

Yeah, the music's okay. It's okay because it's more—because you're using microphones.

Jiménez: Well, you're the experts about that. But it distracts me.

Grabe: So you were in the middle of telling us about how the movement was becoming autonomous in the early '90s.

Jiménez: Yes, starting in '92 they decided to take on different organizational forms. There were two possibilities, one was more organic and the other was by networks. The majority decided to organize in thematic networks, and that's where the Network of Women Against Violence, the Network of Women for Health—these were developed. There were like ten networks for education—different topics, different axes, you know, within the platforms of the feminist movement. Others decided to articulate themselves organically in what was the National Feminist Committee, of which Sofia Montenegro was one of the leaders and you know, from their logic, beyond the thematic work, they believed it was necessary to work around strengthening the feminist identity with the platform. [Female voice shouting, selling buñuelos; the vendor comes by.]

Grabe: Would she rather go inside? 'Cause it's not gonna—it's only going to keep on going. Ask her if she'd prefer to go inside. We only have about 15 minutes, do you think we can deal with the noise.

Jiménez: Well it's up to you guys, it doesn't bother me.

Grabe: Okay, let's keep going.

I have a hard time following.

Oh you do?

No, just 'til they pass a little bit.

[Pause]

We need to leave in 15 minutes so we should...we actually need to leave right now so...

[The conversation stops.]

Jiménez: [To the *buñuelos* vendor] No, we're not going to buy today, could you not ring the bell? We're recording.

Thanks.

[Pause.]

[01:19:33]

Grabe: Sorry, so you were telling us about the creation of the autonomous movement after 1992.

Jiménez: Generally, all of the expressions that were used by feminists and were autonomous of whatever kind of expression, whether it's a party, church, or any group with power, this autonomy—and the emphasis was on autonomy from the Sandinista Front. So then we took this on as an Autonomous Women's Movement in its distinct organizational expressions—be that networks, specific organizations or groups or collectives, specifically feminist or women's rights groups. Later, as I was telling you, we were working all these years without any particular structure, not even a little. The work was more about positioning ourselves in terms of specific situations. I mean, positioning ourselves regarding specific cases, also positioning ourselves regarding policies projecting negatively on women or we'll say fundamentalist positions in the case of previous governments with the topics of abortion, or sexual and reproductive rights. So then under this umbrella, the autonomous movement subscribed to all those organizational expressions. And those who didn't subscribe and felt, well, like the Luisa Amanda Espinosa Movement, it has always remained closely aligned with the Sandinista Front. So then even if they identify with some of the issues, like violence, they won't present themselves in a position against the Sandinista Front. But well this is respected because they are part of the movement, what we'll call the broad women's movement, in that one person could easily subscribe to the feminist platform or she can actively subscribe to specific topics in the struggle. And at the end, we bring everything together.

You know that in '98 there was a kind of a fork in the road because, well the accusation of Zoilamérica Narváez against the leader of the Sandinista Front was in '98. Then in that context, '98 is pretty important for us because the coherence of the movement was proven. It's a movement that, whether we like or not, has its ideological force aligned with the ideas of the progressive left, we'll say organizationally developed in the revolutionary context. So for it to accuse the leader of the Sandinista Front of sexual abuse wasn't easy. This involved the movement taking a stance.

So then I think this was a test of the autonomy of the feminist leadership in Nicaragua and I think we passed the test. Because, well, in that context we decided to support the accusation and back the accusation and push for justice in the case of Zoilamérica and we demanded that Daniel Ortega had to be put through the justice system because if he had committed such a serious crime, well then he had to face justice. And in that context I think the movement came out much stronger and much more legitimate in the eyes of other sectors of society that probably identified with the right or ideologically identified with their faith and that weren't very close to the movement. But with this position I think that

the movement won legitimacy. And that's how—the strength and the autonomy from the Sandinista party, as they say, is made evident. Despite the consequences of the attacks and the outrage that we've gone through in the current situation, I think that what happened in '98 is, well, a period that marks and definitely strengthens what would be the autonomy of the women's movement.

As I already explained, the autonomous movement, as an organizational space that was founded in 2006, before the particular necessity of having a small organic space and at the same time, also strengthening the base, the feminist platform and that's the organizational expression that we work for, well, from this space of the Autonomous Women's Movement. This doesn't delegitimize the Network of Women Against Violence or the Regional Networks or other parts of the movement that consider themselves feminists and that assume autonomy, they form part of the richness of the movement as a women's movement and a feminist movement here in Nicaragua.

And I think the study that I worked on analyzing the ten year history of the movement, it's very clear that the movement, despite not needing to have a strategic plan, I mean we clearly share space with a feminist platform. Its axis of struggle is clearly identified, we'll say its biggest strategy being the fight for equality, the fight against violence is also important and everything that is involved with the feminist identity because it's what makes it a very coherent, strong movement. What perhaps is seen as a dispersal—that would be all of the organizational diversity that in the end is very—it's positive as far as making it easy for women to ascribe to different parts of the organization, it doesn't matter if you can be in a community if you are there connected with other women in a specific organization and you fight for your rights, all of this contributes to this collective feminist identity in Nicaragua.

[01:25:47]

Feminism

Grabe: Juanita, I'd like to ask you to talk about feminism a little bit, but not feminism from the perspective of the movement. Can you tell me what feminism means to you?

Jiménez: Well for me—I'll tell you, for me feminism is an inspiration to fight for equality. Feminism is like a platform for concrete action and well it seems to me that it's—it's—we'll say the strength of the inspiration for social justice. As I said, I assumed my identity as a feminist in practice, in the search for justice for women. But later I realized that this justice, well it's not going to be complete if there isn't social justice and if society doesn't recognize us women as equal. So in the end I see it as an inspiration for this fight in favor of equality for rights and in favor of justice, in general, for women.

Grabe: And are you a feminist?

Jiménez: I now consider myself a feminist.

Grabe: You've talked a lot about the different organizations and networks that are linked together in Nicaragua. Are you also organized with regional networks or feminist organizations in other countries?

Jiménez: Of course, I mean feminism in Latin America is—has been—has strengthened in the last decade. I think that feminism, even though it isn't socially recognized in Latin America, has played an important role in different social changes that have been promoted in the region from the perspective of the military dictatorships to the peace processes and the search to strengthen democratic institutionalism. In a region where one of its deficits has been institutionalism and the rule of law. I mean, I don't think the governments have ever, except some countries in the south, but I think that Latin America has suffered from not having a government—well in the sense of a government that guarantees rights and in the sense that you find solid democratic bases. This also has to do with the deficit of citizenship that I was explaining to you. So then feminism in this context has contributed to strengthening all of these processes that have been developing. So then in Latin America we are very connected, very connected, we have the possibilities that—before, you know when the internet didn't exist, for example, we had been organizing a series of regional meetings that allowed us to physically meet but also to renew debates, analysis and to value political action or the difficulties on exercising our rights that we women have in the region.

And this has also allowed us to strengthen feminism from the logic of Latin Americans because it's not the same to be a feminist in our countries that are lacking so much, as it is in a country with guarantees and strong institutionality. So it's harder. So then I think that we have been constructing a feminism through practice and through the Latin American reality and since they coincide, it's what brings us together and that's why I told you that I hadn't measured this relationship because I've probably met some women in the events that I've participated in over the years but when they attacked us Nicaraguan feminists, well to see women from other countries firm in their repudiation of Daniel Ortega's visit to their country—uh throughout the world and particularly in Latin American. And they repudiated him for attacking us, for attacking feminism and for wanting to criminalize us. It was very nice for me because it meant that we are related and that despite the borders, feminism can—it's not only an abstract solidarity, but also a coherent activism that we share.

So then we are very connected as I say to feminism, I mean we have very strong connections with the Mexican [feminists] and with the South American [feminists]. We are a bit closer with the Central American [feminists] because of regional issues and this has also allowed us to experiment with different organizational forms on a regional level. This also projects us to Europe and the United States as a strong grassroots feminism and very coherent on the level of its proposals. And I think that it's in this context where forces that have traditionally been of a Latin American leftist nature have gained power. I mean, feminism is like the Achilles Heel because feminism has liberating ideas and it shares a vision for social justice and justice for women has been very—it's controversial and has been very critical of how those governments that have been identified as leftist in the region have used their power and this also indicates a contribution from feminism about

the coherence for alternative models to which we have aspired for decades, but there is still a lot missing.

[01:32:00]

Grabe: I think that's a perfect note to end on. I want to thank you again, Juanita, for your time today and for participating with the Global Feminisms Project.

Jiménez: Well, thank you because you've allowed me to share my story.

Grabe: It was an honor to hear your history.

Jiménez: No, for me, sometimes I say I have been very privileged that in my 44 years I can have different stories and a very diverse perspective on life and that brings a lot of paradigms for women.

Grabe: Muchas gracias.

Jiménez: And now what do we do?

We'll drink wine.

We're going to go have wine.

[End of interview. Conversation continues about plans for a party that evening.]