

UC Santa Barbara

Journal of Transnational American Studies

Title

“Si Nicaragua Venció”: Lesbian and Gay Solidarity with the Revolution

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/9hx356m4>

Journal

Journal of Transnational American Studies, 4(2)

Author

Hobson, Emily K.

Publication Date

2012

DOI

10.5070/T842015749

Copyright Information

Copyright 2012 by the author(s). All rights reserved unless otherwise indicated. Contact the author(s) for any necessary permissions. Learn more at <https://escholarship.org/terms>

Peer reviewed

“Si Nicaragua Venció”: Lesbian and Gay Solidarity with the Revolution

EMILY K. HOBSON

In March 1988, tens of thousands of people filled U.S. city streets to protest President Ronald Reagan’s intensification of the *contra* war.¹ Amidst a week of demonstrations in San Francisco, one contingent particularly stood out: lesbians and gay men held two protests of 2,000 and 4,000 strong and were prominent in the week’s 5,000-member concluding march. Writing in a local gay paper, activist Tede Matthews noted that the “magnitude” of the lesbian and gay presence “caught many observers, both gay and straight, by surprise.”² Yet terming the protests “no overnight phenomenon,” he detailed fifteen years of Bay Area lesbian and gay support for the Latin American left. One rally speaker, Kate Raphael, reminded straight listeners: “Since 1980, gay men and especially lesbians have been in the leadership of the Central America solidarity movements. We have fought with you in meetings, we have worked with you in the fields of Nicaragua, and we have been with you in jail.”³ While Raphael noted the longevity of lesbian and gay solidarity, AIDS activist Guillermo Gonzalez cited its racialized stakes of recognition. Frustrated because “gay people of color are invisible to the left,” and feeling pressured to choose “between a predominately white male gay movement and involvement in our own national liberation struggles,” he defined lesbian and gay solidarity as an alternative to both “a one-issue gay movement” and left homophobia.⁴

Lesbian and gay solidarity with Central America remained a “surprise” if one assumed that sexual freedom and socialist revolution stood at odds or that same-sex identities were alien to Third World sites. Yet lesbians and gay men—people of color and white, U.S.-born and immigrant—were significant participants in the Central American solidarity movement. They not only joined the largest, ostensibly straight efforts, but also formed lesbian and gay groups, particularly in support of the Nicaraguan Revolution of 1979 to 1990. Lesbian and gay solidarity was especially

strong in the San Francisco Bay Area, and became centered in San Francisco's Mission District—a rapidly gentrifying neighborhood where Latino, immigrant, and lesbian and gay communities both overlapped and diverged.⁵ Activists organized work brigades and material aid, mobilized against the *contra* war, and called for a socialist sexual politics diverse by race, class, and national origin. Amid its concrete work, lesbian and gay solidarity was at its core a movement of aspiration and desire. Its participants sought to find themselves included as revolutionaries and to locate their gendered and sexual selves in revolutionary rhetoric. Through fliers, posters, and similar materials, activists visualized the Revolution and their solidarity through female masculinity and women's affection. Lesbians outnumbered gay men in solidarity work, yet even mixed-gender groups centered images of women and celebrated women's revolutionary leadership through a lesbian homoerotic. Moreover, many U.S. lesbians spoke about the affective pull of the Revolution and of Sandinista women in highly charged terms—"seduction," "gorgeous," falling "madly in love."

Why did U.S. lesbian and gay radicals find the Nicaraguan Revolution so attractive? What were the pitfalls as well as the potential of mobilizing solidarity through a homoerotic, specifically lesbian, desire? In this article, I address these questions in three parts. First, I situate the radical imagination of lesbian and gay solidarity through Herbert Marcuse and Michel Foucault, arguing that activists looked to the Revolution as a vehicle for a transnational eros and a queer heterotopia.⁶ Second, I argue that activists' erotic, heterotopic visions became particularly evident in their representations of female masculinity and women's affection. I draw on activists' visual materials and personal reflections to analyze how U.S. allies imagined both the Revolution and themselves. Finally, I consider transnational differences in sexual politics, asking to what extent and under what constraints lesbian and gay Sandinistas directed solidarity activists' radical imagination. I conclude that more serious attention to the ways desire motivates transnational activism could sustain more powerful solidarities across borders.

Eros and Heterotopia

Lesbian and gay solidarity developed amidst and against the longstanding left claim that homosexuality was bourgeois, counterrevolutionary, and aberrant to national liberation. Perhaps most clearly elaborated by the Cuban Revolution, left homophobia also shaped the Nicaraguan Revolution and FSLN (Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional, or Sandinista National Liberation Front).⁷ The FSLN ejected some gay and lesbian militants from the Sandinista army, countered Somoza-era commodification by closing heterosexual brothels and gay bars, and briefly arrested lesbian and gay activists in 1987.⁸ Yet Sandinista homophobia was uneven and sporadic. Perhaps most significantly, lesbian and gay Sandinistas promoted, and U.S. activists repeated, the idea that the Revolution could foster sexual freedom. In 1988,

when the FSLN backed an AIDS prevention program, San Francisco allies praised Nicaragua as “the first country in the world to include the active participation of gays at every level of its AIDS program . . . Contrast Nicaragua’s approach with that of our own government.”⁹

This statement asked U.S. lesbians and gay men to question whether their country provided the most ideal site for sexual freedom. In locating the Nicaraguan Revolution, instead of the U.S. state, as a vehicle for radical sexual politics, lesbian and gay solidarity activists challenged not only left homophobia but also the developmentalist geography of sexuality that dominated the lesbian and gay movement. One key source for that geography could be found in Herbert Marcuse’s theorization of “Eros” as a political force. In 1966, Marcuse, the German-Jewish philosopher sometimes called the “father of the New Left,” held that “the revolt in the backward countries has found a response in the advanced countries”—that is, movements towards decolonization across the Third World had become mirrored by the sexual revolution, counterculture, and student left in the U.S. and Europe.¹⁰ Marcuse further suggested that because “backward” nations had not seen their “libidinal energies” fully “sublimated” through capitalist relations, sexual diversity remained less relevant in the Third World transformation of work into “free play.”¹¹ From the 1960s forward, radicals of many sexualities mapped the world in much the same terms, seeing decolonizing nations as both less repressed and more sexually conservative (e.g., naturally heterosexual). Whether hostile or friendly to lesbian and gay liberation, many understood homosexual identities as impossible without extensive urbanization and economic privilege, agreeing explicitly or implicitly that homosexuality was always already bourgeois.

Though these ideas held wide purchase, some activists held a more multi-sited view of what Lessie Jo Frazier and Deborah Cohen term the “erotics of 1968.”¹² The leaders and founders of lesbian and gay solidarity groups included immigrants from Latin America, where the New Left and sexual revolution were hardly foreign. United States solidarity brigades coordinated their work through Nicaraguan contacts, some of whom were lesbian or gay. The objects of solidarity were also its agents, and solidarity entailed multi-directional circuits of exchange. Further, lesbian and gay radicals in both Nicaragua and the U.S. shared a socialist-feminist sexual politics that posited sexual freedom as product and agent of a transformed society. They sought a sexuality organized by something other than capitalism, urban mobility, or liberal rights, and imagined *Sandinismo* as a vehicle to discover that potential. None of this erased the legacies of developmentalist or imperialist thought; on the contrary, outsiders’ faith in the Revolution built on a broader history of U.S. desire for Latin America, and solidarity enabled the privileged to define themselves through victimized others.¹³ Yet lesbian and gay solidarity pushed forward an ongoing debate about the geography of sexuality, challenging views that fixed homosexuality in the urbanized, white, wealthy U.S. or that defined the Third World, peasants, or people

of color as inherently straight. They revised rather than simply repeating—or rejecting—Marcuse’s conception of Eros.

Lesbian and gay solidarity activists of the 1980s were old enough to remember the “1960s,” yet by and large too young to claim themselves as its veterans. They were party to a broader transition between intellectual and political generations, one that can be marked in part as a shift from the idealism of Marcuse to the anti-idealism of Foucault.¹⁴ On the one hand, activists approached sex, love, and desire as productive forces within (and experiences that might be expanded by) socialist revolution. They expressed both universalist and minoritarian ideas of sexual freedom, calling for lesbian and gay inclusion alongside a transformation of pleasure and family forms.¹⁵ Though Foucault cast doubt on the promises of liberation, his concept of heterotopia describes how lesbian and gay radicals revised Eros.

For Foucault, a heterotopia is a site of multiplicity and difference rather than singularity or perfection. While a utopia remains “fundamentally unreal,” heterotopias are many and varied, and include “all the other real sites that can be found within the culture”—locations of deviance, travel, and cultural and geographic juxtaposition (the prison, asylum, ship, museum, and formal garden).¹⁶ A heterotopic politics can replace a unitary political subject with multiple actors whose variation becomes commonplace. This is because a heterotopia stands as a mirror directing the viewer to “reconstitute myself there where I am,” rather than, as in a utopia, “where I am not.”¹⁷ Many observers have read the Nicaraguan Revolution in virtually the same terms. Roger Lancaster, for example, holds that Sandinista laws that removed distinctions between “legitimate” and “illegitimate” children, recognized common-law marriage, and codified responsibility for children and the elderly “simply recognized the Nicaraguan family – in its diversity and as it really existed.”¹⁸

Importantly, this heterotopic potential appealed to many solidarity activists, not only those who identified as lesbian or gay. Many U.S. radicals praised the Nicaraguan Revolution as flexible, populist, and committed to women’s rights—in other words, as including a diverse range of political subjects. By 1969, the FSLN platform opposed sex discrimination; by 1979, women were 30% of the insurrectionary militia. In the 1980s, women constituted about a quarter of the army, 40% of the National Assembly, and dominated local Sandinista Defense Committees. Early FSLN laws included women’s right to equal wages, paid maternity leave, and a ban on sexually exploitative advertising.¹⁹ Gender equality was never defined as a central goal of the Revolution, nor was the Association of Nicaraguan Women Luisa Amanda Espinoza (AMNLAE) ever autonomous from the FSLN. Yet feminist gains were significant and extended well beyond cosmopolitan elites. Beyond this, allies admired the FSLN for bringing together multiple “tendencies: liberal, nationalist, social-democratic, Leninist, Guevarist, and radical Christian,” and collaborating with many social formations.²⁰ Founded in 1961 and guided throughout the 1960s by Marxist-Leninist and *foquista* (guerrilla vanguardist) thought, by the late 1970s the FSLN appeared to shift “beyond a vanguardism that saw the party as creating a mass

movement and adopted a vanguardism that saw the party in a supporting or coordinating role for the mass movement.”²¹ This appealed to many U.S. leftists who were then reeling from revelations about abuses in the Cultural Revolution and Khmer Rouge.²² Solidarity with Nicaragua became a means to reemphasize democratic, non-sectarian, and feminist goals. This becomes only more apparent when we consider that, across race, class, and gender, many solidarity activists overlooked exclusions of indigenous and Black people in Nicaragua’s “revolutionary process.”²³

United States lesbian and gay radicals supported the Sandinistas for many of the reasons straight radicals did, but their heterotopic investments were also distinctly queer. Lesbian and gay solidarity activists placed themselves in the struggle’s slogan “*Si Nicaragua venció, nosotros venceremos*,” explaining: “The FSLN . . . are an inspiration to all oppressed peoples that we CAN win.”²⁴ Further, they suggested the Revolution might materially enable lesbian and gay rights. As activist Rebecca Gordon put it at one of the 1988 protests: “As a lesbian, I’m not involved out of altruism. I’m in it for my own good.”²⁵ Her claim reflected the Marxist sexual politics grounding the 1970s and 1980s “gay and lesbian left.” Gay and lesbian leftists defined homophobia, rather than homosexuality, as a tool of capitalism and empire, and lesbians and gay men as targets of a global right wing.²⁶ They worked to challenge gentrification, organize gay and lesbian caucuses in local unions, and defeat John Briggs’s initiative against gay and lesbian public school teachers, among other campaigns.²⁷ In June 1978, Bay Area Gay Liberation termed Nicaragua’s Somoza, California’s Briggs, and Rhodesia’s Ian Smith all “fascists . . . the last gasp of empire. . . . WE HAVE A COMMON ENEMY.”²⁸ In the 1980s, activists argued that spending on the *contra* war led to cuts in social services, making it harder for working class women to live apart from men and inhibiting funding to fight AIDS.

While drawing on this materialist analysis, lesbian and gay solidarity activists made their erotic and heterotopic visions particularly apparent in their visual and representational language. Hector Perla Jr. finds that the solidarity movement in general was founded and directed by Central American immigrants and refugees who mobilized their own “revolutionary mystique.”²⁹ Similarly, a lesbian Nicaraguan immigrant and Chicano gay man founded the first lesbian and gay solidarity group and used images of female militants to promote its work. Such images indicated the constraints of revolutionary gender norms, which opened the door to female masculinity while tightening the lock against effeminate men.³⁰ But representing solidarity through female masculinity and women’s affection mobilized new political sentiments and made evident the connection between activists’ pragmatic commitments and ephemeral desires.

Falling “Madly in Love”

Two main discourses framed gender and sexuality in the Nicaraguan Revolution. Like radicals across the hemisphere, Sandinistas sought to remake Nicaraguan subjectivity through the “New Man,” a concept formulated by Che Guevara in the Cuban Revolution. In contrast to the aspirations of lesbian and gay solidarity, the New Man was erotic but not heterotopic, defining political commitment through an “ascetic, not hedonistic” masculinity.³¹ As Ileana Rodriguez observes, many leaders in the Latin American left narrated the New Man’s love for the “people” through both heterosexual and homosocial bravado, linking “woman” to the mass, base, or subaltern.³² This both enlarged and contracted the “personal” (including sexual) possibilities of revolution. Che envisioned the New Man as a more truly “human creature, once the chains of alienation are broken,” yet in Cuba this justified anti-gay repression, with sexual dissidents consigned to work camps to reform their decadence through labor.³³ Josefina Saldaña-Portillo adds that the “revolutionary subjectivity” of the New Man characterized race, ethnicity, and even class as individual concerns to overcome; Nicaragua’s Black and indigenous communities, as well as land-poor farmers, were largely excluded from the FSLN’s political vision.³⁴

Meanwhile, women were incorporated into the Nicaraguan Revolution through a different, perhaps no less restrictively gendered role: that of the militant mother. AMNLAE was named for the first woman to die in the insurrectionary “Triumph,” and the FSLN worked to organize women whose sons or daughters had died in combat as “Mothers of Heroes and Martyrs.”³⁵ This maternalism was exemplified by a famous photograph of a smiling young woman with an AK-47 on her shoulder and an infant at her breast. That image of a female combatant, mothering the nation in the field rather than at a distance from battle, circulated across Nicaragua and internationally in an AMNLAE poster captioned “Nicaragua debe sobrevivir/Nicaragua must survive.”³⁶ Notably, in 1983 AMNLAE sought to have women included in the national draft; when the FSLN rejected this goal they more clearly tied women to motherhood and combat to sons.³⁷ Feminist self-representation only became “more diverse, less traditional” after the Sandinistas’ 1990 defeat.³⁸

Lesbian and gay Sandinistas moved both within and against dominant gendered frameworks to approach the Revolution as a vehicle for sexual liberation. Though networks of same-sex culture had existed under Somoza, especially among men, lesbian and gay activism first arose in the 1980s and carried a distinctly leftist flavor. According to one gay Sandinista, many “cochónes were very active in the Sandinista movement from the very beginning,” because “naturally we identified with the vanguard of the oppressed.”³⁹ (*Cochón* is a Nicaraguan term indicating the receptive partner in anal sex, effeminacy, or the “passive.”⁴⁰) Many lesbians also participated or came out in the Revolution. Millie Thayer suggests that same-sex environments in the army and volunteer brigades encouraged new sexual and

romantic possibilities for young women.⁴¹ While the Revolution's anti-gay practices remained little known, conservative opponents publicly faulted the Revolution for upsetting gender and family norms, and several women who rose to FSLN leadership "were rumored to be 'cochonas'" (e.g., dykes).⁴² Cymene Howe argues that all these forms of visibility, both positive and negative, encouraged the growth and radical orientation of Nicaraguan lesbian and gay activism in the revolutionary era.⁴³

Globally, the feminist and queer potential of the Revolution became particularly apparent through Margaret Randall's widely read volume *Sandino's Daughters: Testimonies of Nicaraguan Women in Struggle* (1981), featuring interviews by Randall and photographs by Alfonso Zamora.⁴⁴ Randall narrates the Revolution's changes for women as a "dramatic shift away from the traditional mother-daughter relationship," with the younger generation modeling newly public roles.⁴⁵ One such daughter, Dora María Tellez, stands out by hinting at possibilities beyond heteronormativity. Tellez was "Comandante Dos" in the FSLN's assault on the National Palace in 1978, a central FSLN leader throughout the 1980s, and remains the most famous female leader of the Revolution.⁴⁶ She has long been colloquially referred to as "la cochona," a nickname that some suggest has been both disparaging and affectionate.⁴⁷

Zamora photographed Tellez in shadows, slouched in a chair, holding a cigarette in her left hand. Tellez wears her military uniform, light glinting off her belt; her face is partially obscured and her close-cut hair disappears into the dark. She appears quiet but focused, gazing slightly to the side. The undeniably romantic image is accompanied by Tellez's letter to her mother, in which the Comandante—like Che Guevara, trained as a doctor—describes her first attendance at childbirth and defines the Revolution as her surrogate child. Among all the portraits in the volume, Tellez's is the most serious, enigmatic, and shot in the lowest light. Further, among Randall's subjects, Tellez is the most self-sacrificial figure with the highest level of political power. The portrait and narrative solidify Tellez's womanhood yet allow her to break its rules, forestalling discussion of her widely rumored sexuality while permitting a contained butch persona. Indeed, Tellez offers a new kind of "New Man."

Two years before *Sandino's Daughters*, Gays for the Nicaraguan Revolution (GNR) presented a similar portrait that suggested the image of a butch hero sprang from many sources. The cover of GNR's grainy, uncredited 1979 brochure depicts a female soldier standing against mountain brush (see Figure 1).⁴⁸ Slender, fair-skinned, and with wavy chin-length hair, she carries a serious and focused expression with her eyes cast to the distance (does she glimpse her comrades? victory? death?). Dressed in uniform, she holds an assault rifle in her right hand and rests her left hand on her leg, as if poised to run into battle. The portrait is framed by the words "Lesbians & Gay Men: Stand for Nicaragua/ Support the Revolution/ Anti-Gay Leaders Support Somoza," calling on readers to identify with the soldier on the basis of sexual identity. Inside the brochure, text proclaims the need to connect gay and lesbian

politics to a “worldwide struggle” for socialist change, and declares that the FSLN consulate has extended GNR “full support.”

GNR was San Francisco’s—and almost certainly, the nation’s—first lesbian and gay solidarity group. Founded in summer 1979, it began as a caucus within Casa Nicaragua, led by Central Americans in San Francisco’s Mission District. GNR’s founders, Nicaraguan immigrant Rita Arauz and Chicano playwright Rodrigo Reyes, were also leaders in the Gay Latino Alliance, which promoted solidarity in both gay and lesbian and Latino parades.⁴⁹ Throughout its work, GNR centered images of women; one flier featured a photo of young women in a Sandinista literacy brigade, smiling and with arms draped around one another.⁵⁰ GNR sent material aid to the FSLN, joined pro-Sandinista demonstrations, and in January 1981 sent a member to Nicaragua’s First International Solidarity Conference. Rita Arauz’s role in the group reveals transnational sources and effects. Arauz left Nicaragua in the mid 1960s when her father, a *Somocista* diplomat, took a job in the San Francisco consulate; she completed high school in San Francisco, was briefly married and divorced, and by the early 1970s came out as a lesbian and a leftist.⁵¹ Working to undo the “stigma” of her father’s politics, Arauz became active with the United Farm Workers and Puerto Rican Socialist Party before being recruited in 1977, an “open lesbian feminist,” to the FSLN’s international network.⁵² In 1984 she moved back to Nicaragua with her daughter, coordinating international brigades and becoming a leader in local lesbian, gay, and HIV/AIDS activism.

Reflections from various activists underscore the attractions called up by the Tellez portrait and GNR flier. In 1984, a feminist delegation named *Somos Hermanas* visited Nicaragua and met with the “Comandante.” Participant Carmen Vázquez reported that Tellez “did not come out to us as a lesbian, but several of the women came out of the meeting wanting her baby, I’ll tell you that.”⁵³ Another delegate, Pam David, recalled that “we all had crushes” on Tellez: she was not only “gorgeous,” but had become a doctor, led a revolution, and rebuilt a nation.⁵⁴ Marcia Gallo remembered that women who met Tellez fell “madly in love. Because she was smart and hot and strong and funny and incredibly human.” Again, Tellez’s leadership itself was sexy: Tellez revealed the Revolution’s potential to “deal with capitalism, and . . . feminism or sexism at the same time . . . that was the other reason to get excited.”⁵⁵

This multilayered excitement—ideological, sexual, and in both aspects romantic—fed a number of lesbian, gay, and lesbian/gay-inclusive solidarity groups in the Bay Area. In 1984, the Gay and Lesbian Task Force of the Proposition N campaign, which divested San Francisco from business with El Salvador, morphed into Lesbians and Gays Against Intervention (LAGAI).⁵⁶ That network then helped to generate the first entirely lesbian and gay contingent to Nicaragua, the Victoria Mercado Brigade. This group traveled to Managua in May through June 1985 with 13 participants, a majority people of color and a greater majority women.⁵⁷ The Brigade drew its central support from the Bay Area’s women of color cultural scene, raising \$17,000 through a

salsa dance party.⁵⁸ Once in Managua, participants built a neighborhood center and held informal meetings with Nicaraguan lesbians and gay men. A few months later, a similar brigade traveled from Philadelphia and helped to construct a school for agricultural workers; among their key contacts was Simeon White, a Black gay man from San Francisco living in Managua and coordinating solidarity work.⁵⁹ Somos Hermanas emerged during this same time frame, and invites special notice for its visual imagery.

Somos Hermanas (“we are sisters”) began in San Francisco in 1984 when the Alliance Against Women’s Oppression, a successor to the 1970s Third World Women’s Alliance, organized a delegation to Nicaragua to meet with women’s groups.⁶⁰ The group sent eighteen women to Nicaragua in September 1984 and organized a five hundred-person conference in San Francisco in March 1985. About seventy-five women became core members, and at its height the group held chapters in New York, Boston, Louisville, and Santa Cruz-Watsonville as well as San Francisco. Active through 1990, Somos Hermanas defined itself as a “national, multi-racial organization of women, lesbian and straight, who are committed to organizing ourselves and others to promote peace and stop U.S. intervention in Central America and the Caribbean.”⁶¹ The group was largely Latina and white, about half lesbian or bisexual, and many lesbians of color served as local and national leaders.⁶² Defining its racial and sexual diversity as central to its feminist analysis of the Revolution and *contra* war, Somos Hermanas provided a welcoming space for lesbians of color to stage a radical identity politics. For Carmen Vázquez, the 1984 delegation “finally brought the . . . Latina activist part of me, the socialist, communist part of me and the lesbian part of me all together.”⁶³

Somos Hermanas reprinted several photos from *Sandino’s Daughters* in their newsletters and other materials. Even more prominently, the group’s logo represented solidarity with an image of two women embracing (see Figure 2).⁶⁴ The viewer sees one woman from the back and focuses on the face of the other, whose eyes are closed in emotional warmth. These figures mirror one another in their yellow-beige skin tone, wavy black hair, and overlapping arms, heads, and bodies. One woman might be North American and the other Central American, but a visual circularity invites the viewer to see herself as either woman or both. Indeed, as Chandra Mohanty has critiqued of universalist feminisms generally, the image obscured racial, national, and geographic differences among women with the aim of inspiring transnational support.⁶⁵ It incorporated U.S. women of color into a collective “Third World,” even as the slogan “embracing our sisters in solidarity” fixed its perspective in the United States. Somos Hermanas’ logo was disseminated as a full color poster and on black and white t-shirts, buttons, and calendars; it proved a successful fundraising tool and was well-loved by members of the group.⁶⁶

Somos Hermanas used affection to link women across the Americas, yet held back from emphasizing a specifically sexual embrace. That said, female masculinity—especially Latina butchness—proved key to members’ experiences in the group.

Carmen Vázquez, who is Puerto Rican and butch-identified, recalled a 1984 party in Managua held to celebrate Somos Hermanas and a delegation of male Cuban musicians. Vázquez and another Somos Hermanas member, Lucrecia Bermudez, began to dance together. As Vázquez remembered, “the [Cuban] men thought, ‘Well, that’s just wrong,’ and came to help us out here. And Lucrecia and I looked at each other. I mean, Lucrecia’s a butch, too, but whatever. And said, ‘No, thank you.’ . . . so, then it was clear women were going to dance.”⁶⁷ The two were not interested in each other romantically, but their evident gender transgression opened the door for other women to dance that evening, and won recognition from the Cuban delegates, Nicaraguan hosts, and in Somos Hermanas itself. Bermudez saw it as a “turning point” for Vázquez—“after that, she began to wear ties.”⁶⁸ Vázquez added that the party sparked a relationship between herself and delegate Marcia Gallo: “we danced right off the floor into the woods and had wild, you know, making out sessions that didn’t stop for twelve years . . . talk about loving in the war years.”⁶⁹

Images of *guerrilleras* and affectionate embraces served as heterotopic mirrors, means to “reconstitute myself there where I am,” as Foucault put it. While ostensibly representing their Nicaraguan allies, solidarity activists revealed themselves as U.S. subjects—as U.S. women of color, lesbians, and/or butches, but U.S. subjects nonetheless. At times activists expressed concern about the images they used. As Somos Hermanas cautioned, “romanticizing Third World women with guns . . . only serves to sever these women from historical context.”⁷⁰ Yet the group responded through redirection to their own U.S. “context.” They held that solidarity had an “objective” basis—that it went beyond “moralism”—because intervention justified cuts to domestic U.S. spending, which in turn produced “racism, sexism, and gay-bashing, all of which disproportionately affect poor people and women and especially women of color.”⁷¹ Here, Somos Hermanas gestured towards analyzing the intersections of homophobia and racism and emphasized that gay and lesbian people included working class women of color.⁷² Yet they obscured the transnational, racial, or class differences that shaped their desires for the Revolution, and implied that lesbian and gay politics remained U.S. concerns.

Did Nicaraguan gay men and lesbians see the Revolution as U.S. activists did? The growth of Nicaraguan lesbian and gay activism in the 1980s suggested that erotic and heterotopic visions may have been, as Cymene Howe claims for feminist investments in the Revolution, a “two-way street.”⁷³ Still, some U.S. activists—including some who were lesbian or gay—remained convinced that homosexual identities were “foreign” to Nicaragua. Meanwhile, others either willfully or unknowingly obscured stories of Sandinista homophobia in order to back their claims of the Revolution’s potential. Lesbian and gay Sandinistas modeled this response so that, ironically, the most transnational dimension of lesbian and gay dialogue about the Revolution rested on silence.

The Break-Up

One of the clearest elaborations of the idea that homosexuality was “foreign” to Nicaragua came through the writing of Rebecca Gordon, a white lesbian from San Francisco and co-editor of the journal *Lesbian Contradiction*. From May through December of 1984, Gordon worked in Nicaragua with Witness for Peace. That group was initially reluctant to accept Gordon because she was publicly out; though they relented, this revealed that Gordon worked as a lesbian in the solidarity movement rather than through a lesbian/gay-inclusive group. While in Nicaragua, Gordon sent a series of letters home to friends and her partner Jan Adams. In 1986, she published these as *Letters from Nicaragua*—“a love story about a revolution and a marriage.” Throughout the volume Gordon both romanticized the Revolution and critiqued her own impulses—worrying, for example, that Nicaragua threatened a “seduction” away from “the poor women of my own country.”⁷⁴

In light of such language, it is fascinating that Gordon sought to express her solidarity by staying in the closet. Gordon held that, though Nicaraguan women might enjoy “close emotional and even, when it is possible, sexual connections” with each other, homosexual identities could not exist in Nicaragua because it was not a site of advanced capitalism.⁷⁵ She stated that if homosexual identities did exist in Latin America, they appeared only in cities as part of a “genuinely mixed bag of other cultural imports – from tractors to dictatorships – to which Latin Americans understandably have mixed reactions.”⁷⁶ Gordon came out to virtually every North American she met in Nicaragua but remained closeted to all Nicaraguans, defining this as a gesture of support for self-determination. Black lesbian feminist Barbara Smith’s introduction to *Letters* serves as reminder that Gordon’s views were not only widely accepted, but understood as challenges to racial and global privilege. Smith praised Gordon for traveling with “humility, not to pass judgment on the Nicaraguan people, especially in regard to gay and women’s issues, but to try to find out how a totally different history affects a people’s relationship to everything, including sexual politics.”⁷⁷

Nonetheless, Gordon struggled with her decision to remain closeted to Nicaraguans. She wondered whether she displayed “cowardice as well as cultural sensitivity” and whether many Nicaraguans saw past her silence.⁷⁸ Interviewed recently, she joked that she invested so much energy into not communicating her sexuality that perhaps those who did not realize she was lesbian assumed she was a nun.⁷⁹ In sections of *Letters* written after returning to the U.S, Gordon noted that other solidarity activists had met lesbian and gay Nicaraguans; in 1998, she acknowledged that perhaps the strategy of a respectful closet had limited her solidarity.⁸⁰ Yet, as a whole, *Letters* posited that the categories of lesbian, gay, and Nicaraguan were incompatible. Gordon wrote to Jan about a telling dream:

I was kissing a woman who was not a lesbian. She was a North American who had lived for many years in Nicaragua. As we were kissing (her first kiss from a woman; she was nervous) into the room came a Nicaraguan man. I felt terrible, because I'd led her into a situation in which she risked losing the respect of her Nicaraguan friends. You don't have to dig too deep to understand that one.

Living closeted is *hard*, harder than I'd remembered. I don't want to do it anymore. But . . . it's a small sacrifice, compared to the *entrega de vida* (the gift of one's life) so many are making here.⁸¹

Gordon found it difficult to imagine a Nicaraguan lesbian even in her dreams and struggled with silence about her sexuality as a seemingly necessary gesture of revolutionary commitment.

Asked about perspectives like Gordon's, Lucrecia Bermudez—dance partner to Carmen Vázquez in the Somos Hermanas delegation—responded with frustration. Like Rita Arauz, Bermudez was a Latin American immigrant; she came from a working class family in Peru and was active in a leftist lesbian and gay group in Lima before she moved to the United States. While Arauz recalled 1970s San Francisco as “the gay mecca of the world,” Bermudez saw Lima as its South American counterpart, with many lesbian and gay (as well as leftist) bars.⁸² Bermudez came to the Bay Area not to find gay life but because she heard about Berkeley's La Peña Cultural Center—a performance venue founded by leftist Chilean exiles.⁸³ She settled in San Francisco in 1980 and became active in Gays for the Nicaraguan Revolution, the San Francisco Women's Building, La Conexion Latina (a group of Latina lesbians), Amaranto (gay and lesbian Latin American immigrants), and Somos Hermanas, among other groups.

Bermudez acknowledged that some immigrants experienced the U.S. as a destination of sexual freedom. But she was insulted by the idea that U.S.-born activists would deny their sexuality as a gesture of solidarity. Rather than a mark of cultural respect, “I think it's the opposite – to assume . . . that what you have in front of you is underdeveloped, uncivilized . . . that their minds are so small they can't conceive [of homosexuality].”⁸⁴ Both on the Somos Hermanas delegation and on a trip she made with a girlfriend in 1985, Bermudez met lesbian, gay, and straight Nicaraguans, women and men, eager to discuss sexuality and sexual politics. She found that her nonconforming gender made such conversations organic: “I don't hide anything about myself, and so there is a lot of space for straight women to kind of play with me. . . . We all understand, we don't need to say ‘Hey! I am such-and-such.’”⁸⁵

By contrast, Gordon's joke that she might have been perceived as a nun suggests her investment in a verbal, rather than embodied, framework for sexual recognition. Relatedly, *Letters* obliquely critiqued butch-femme gender. Noting the

negative associations between prostitution and male homosexuality in revolutionary Cuba, Gordon held that “The only recognizably lesbian women I saw in Nicaragua were also prostitutes, a butch-femme couple working in the port city of Corinto.”⁸⁶ She juxtaposed that couple against the possibility of “Nicaraguan lesbians in Managua . . . [who] support the revolutionary changes.” By this framework, visually decipherable “lesbians in Nicaragua” were gender differentiated and confirmed Gordon’s belief that homosexuality in Latin America was a cultural import or sign of exploitation. Politically radical “Nicaraguan lesbians” stood without class or gender markings, but remained only mythic figures since Gordon never saw them.

Gordon and Bermudez represent two voices within a multi-sided, longstanding debate about the stakes of queer visibility and recognition. Sexual politics are highly localized yet embedded in globalization; U.S. and European concepts of sexuality have not only been disseminated around the world, but also held as the model against which sexual minorities elsewhere must organize their identities and agendas. Further, the binaries of mind versus body, verbal declaration versus physical performance, and gender similarity versus difference have been mapped onto a geography of developed versus underdeveloped sexualities. This has shaped sexual identities in the U.S. as well: female masculinity has been most commonly ascribed to Black, Latina, and working class women, surely feeding activists’ portraits of and identifications through Sandinista women. If Gordon defined sexuality in developmentalist terms, Bermudez lived with a kind of double consciousness or bilingualism. More generally, lesbian and gay solidarity groups stood in a middle ground: GNR cited the FSLN consul’s appreciation of its work, and Somos Hermanas asked AMNLAE members about lesbian and gay rights while opening space for butch expression and, in San Francisco, supporting the lesbian S/M group Samois.⁸⁷

Yet the history of lesbian and gay activism in the Revolution sheds light on solidarity’s transnational limits. In 1986, a group calling itself the Nicaraguan Gay Movement began to gather in Managua in clandestine meetings of sixty people and more.⁸⁸ The attendees were lesbian and gay Sandinistas, accompanied by some solidarity activists; some meetings were held at the home of a U.S. citizen living in Managua.⁸⁹ Among the participants was Rita Arauz, who later held that the group had “decided to fight for that little piece that was missing in our liberation. In the Soviet Union, in Cuba, the gays were never ever to get completely liberated in the revolutionary process. And we thought that in Nicaragua that we had that historical responsibility.”⁹⁰ Arauz identified the Revolution as “the seed, the source” of lesbian and gay activism, adding that Nicaraguans sought “a gay and lesbian movement of the Left. . . . We didn’t want to be separatists . . . [as] in the developed countries.”⁹¹ Thus lesbian and gay Sandinistas sought not to follow a U.S. lead but to set themselves apart. As Cymene Howe has observed, they were less interested in rights-based inclusion than in broader social transformation—a “sexuality free from prejudice.”⁹²

Having encountered anti-gay practices in the FSLN, many lesbian and gay Sandinistas remained “afraid of being separated from their militancy unless they stayed in the closet.”⁹³ The most dramatic instance of repression occurred in March 1987. State Security forces arrested key gay and lesbian leaders, briefly jailed and interrogated them, and told them to end their activism.⁹⁴ Following this, those who had been targeted and others aware of the events kept silent so as not to threaten international support for the FSLN. In 1992, Arauz held that they had made “a collective decision not to talk about it publicly. . . . We were a country at war, in a state of national emergency; and we were Sandinistas.”⁹⁵ Amy Bank, a white U.S. lesbian living in Managua, added that “In many parts of the world solidarity with Nicaragua was headed by lesbians and gay men, and we knew that the reaction could be terrible.”⁹⁶ A few months later, Somos Hermanas representatives Carmen Vázquez and Diane Jones visited Nicaragua. They discussed lesbian and gay concerns with AMNLAE, but heard nothing about the arrests and reported “no visible sign of an official effort to politicize” homosexuality.⁹⁷ The State Security incident remained undiscussed until the FSLN’s 1990 defeat, largely unknown until 1991 in Nicaragua and 1993 in the United States.⁹⁸

Amidst the state’s harassment and their own silence, lesbian and gay Nicaraguans found a different route to state approval through the framework of public health. Members of the Sandinista health ministry (MINSA)—then led by Dora María Tellez—began to voice concerns about AIDS prevention, and an activist from the Nicaraguan Gay Movement met with Tellez.⁹⁹ Tellez learned about the State Security arrests, chastised the person who had ordered them, and formalized safer sex efforts through a state program called CEP-SIDA (AIDS Popular Education Committee).¹⁰⁰ CEP-SIDA allowed lesbians and gay men to “put their sexual politics in Sandinista literature” and compelled more reluctant Sandinista leaders to recognize “a political, ideological argument for our struggle.”¹⁰¹ San Francisco AIDS activists, some of whom had participated in the 1985 Victoria Mercado Brigade, contributed condoms, safe sex fliers, and assisted with trainings.¹⁰² CEP-SIDA proved instrumental in helping lesbian and gay activism resurface within the Revolution as well as continue after the Sandinistas’ defeat.¹⁰³

Reflecting on all of this history in 1992, Rita Arauz sought to distinguish productive international support from interference. Using a thoroughly verbal definition of sexual identity, she stated that she appreciated it when allies asked AMNLAE and FSLN representatives about sexual politics in Nicaragua. “We’d always tell our foreign sisters, ‘Please keep asking about us. Ask about the lesbians. Ask for us by name.’”¹⁰⁴ But Arauz was critical of a few solidarity activists who sought to discuss state harassment while the FSLN remained in power.¹⁰⁵ Another Nicaraguan lesbian, Lupita Sequeira, narrated global sexual politics as flowing in the opposite direction from the one typically assumed. Insisting that homosexuality was “not imported from San Francisco, from England, from any other country,” she painted a mural portraying lesbian and gay activism in Nicaragua through a pre-colonial

“goddess of the revolution,” adding, “this revolution is . . . of all the people in the world who feel identified with us.”¹⁰⁶

Together, lesbian and gay Sandinistas and lesbian and gay solidarity activists shared a faith in the Nicaraguan Revolution as a socialist vehicle for sexual freedom. Yet while Nicaraguans claimed *Sandinismo* as their own, for U.S. radicals the Revolution remained a distant object of desire, and solidarity a “seduction,” “crush,” or embrace. Mobilizing through yet failing to examine such desire reinforced a U.S.-centric vision that undermined the relationship activists sought with revolution itself. For Lucrecia Bermudez, the idea that lesbian or gay identities were “foreign” to Nicaragua reminded her of another story: a town hall held in San Francisco to discuss the Sandinistas’ 1990 electoral defeat. As she recalls, most of the speakers were white U.S. citizens who—through tears—asked: “‘Why the Nicaraguan people did this to us? . . . What is it we did wrong? If we were giving all our support and our lives to the Nicaraguan people, what happened? They don’t understand what we are going through!’”¹⁰⁷ In Bermudez’s memory, the town hall speakers sounded like nothing less than jilted lovers, unable or unwilling to consider Nicaraguans’ point of view. While not describing all solidarity activists, her story suggests the blind spots of an unexamined romance.

The solidarity movement—lesbian, gay, and straight—dissolved after the Sandinistas’ defeat. Meanwhile, despite betrayals by the contemporary FSLN, feminist and LGBT activism today constitutes some of the most vibrant politics in Nicaragua and the party’s chief rival for claims to “Sandinista” heritage.¹⁰⁸ With Nicaragua one of the poorest countries in the hemisphere, its feminist and LGBT organizations address not only reproductive justice, HIV/AIDS, and transgender rights but also neoliberalism and “free trade.” In the U.S., the picture is different. Lesbian and gay solidarity helped open space for activism by LGBT people of color and immigrants and subverted heteronormative narratives of national liberation. It carried echoes in queer protests against the first Gulf War and in contemporary queer anti-imperialist critique.¹⁰⁹ Yet Nicaragua, Central America, and even Latin America hold little to no place in contemporary U.S. queer politics, resonating as not just off the radar, but out of style—indeed, unsexy. This only underscores the centrality of desire to transnational movements: allies move on emotionally and affectively while the underlying conditions of empire barely change. Perhaps by paying closer attention to desire as simultaneously transformative, uneven, and fleeting, we can begin to organize solidarity in more powerful and lasting ways.

Figure 1.

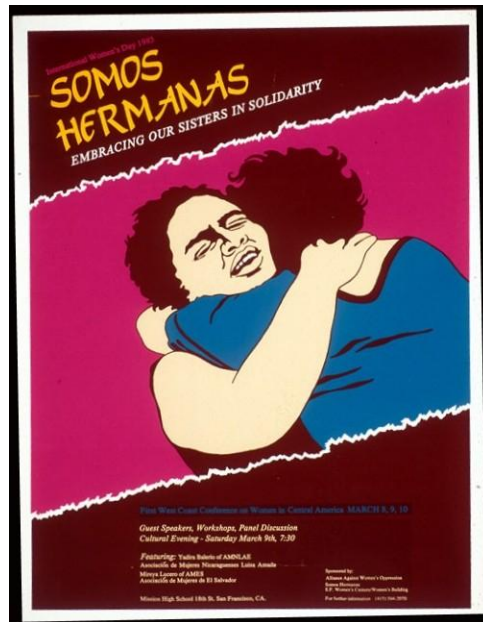
Lesbians & Gay Men: Stand for Nicaragua Support the Revolution



Anti-Gay Leaders Support Somoza

Brochure cover, Gays for the Nicaraguan Revolution/Gay People for Nicaragua, 1979.
Image courtesy of the GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco.

Figure 2.



Conference poster, Somos Hermanas, 1985. Art by Juan R. Fuentes.
Image courtesy of the GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco.

Notes

Many people helped me move this essay forward; I offer all of them my deep thanks. Lessie Jo Frazier, David Sartorius, and Micol Seigel extended generous and insightful guidance. Josefina Saldaña-Portillo, Amy Sara Carroll, Christina Hanhardt, Sarah Seidman, and an anonymous reviewer offered invaluable editorial critiques. Participants and audiences at the Tepoztlán Institute for the Transnational History of the Americas, American Historical Association, American Studies Association, and the Center for the Study of Gender and Sexuality at the California State University of Los Angeles expanded my thinking. I owe special personal thanks to Laura Briggs, Margot Canaday, Wendy Cheng, Carlos Decena, Dionne Espinoza, Ruthie Gilmore, Lucinda Grinnell, Robin Kelley, Felicia Perez, David Román, George Sánchez, and Ben Sifuentes-Jauregui. Finally and most importantly, Lucrecia Bermudez, Pam David, Marcia Gallo, Ellen Gavin, Rebecca Gordon, James Green, Luz Guerra, Margaret Randall, and Bob Siedle-Khan opened up their time and memories for personal interviews. I hope this essay does them justice.

¹ On March 16, President Reagan mobilized 3,200 U.S. troops in Honduras to fight Nicaraguan forces. Activists staged over 200 protests in 150 U.S. cities. See Christian Smith, *Resisting Reagan: the U.S. Central America Peace Movement* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 85; and Doyle McManus and David Lauter, “Statements on Honduras Stir Skepticism in Congress,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 19, 1988.

² Tede Matthews, “Coming Out for Peace: Lesbians and Gays Play Major Role in Protests,” *San Francisco Sentinel*, April 8, 1988, 8; and “Gays, Lesbians Spearhead Peace Demos,” *Sentinel* March 25, 1988, 3.

³ Raphael in Matthews, “Coming Out for Peace,” 14. Matthews dated gay and lesbian support for the Latin American left to Gays in Solidarity with the Chilean Resistance, 1973.

⁴ Gonzalez in Matthews, “Coming Out for Peace,” 14.

⁵ See Christina B. Hanhardt, “Butterflies, Whistles, and Fists: Gay Safe Streets and the New Gay Ghetto, 1976-1981,” *Radical History Review* 100 (2008): 61-85; Horacio N. Roque Ramírez, “‘That’s My Place!’: Negotiating Racial, Sexual, and Gender Politics in San Francisco’s Gay Latino Alliance, 1975-1983,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 12, no. 2 (2003): 224-258; and Ramírez, “Claiming Queer Cultural Citizenship: Gay Latino (Im)migrant Acts in San Francisco,” in *Queer Migrations: Sexuality, U.S. Citizenship, & Border Crossings*, ed. Eithne Luibhéid and Lionel Cantú Jr. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 161-188.

⁶ Lesbian and gay solidarity activists did not describe themselves or their politics as queer. In this article I use queer to indicate my own analysis or to refer to contemporary sexual politics.

⁷ Cuba placed effeminate men in UMAP camps and in 1971 defined homosexuality as counterrevolutionary. See Lillian Guerra, "Gender policing, homosexuality, and the new patriarchy of the Cuban Revolution, 1965-1970," *Social History* 35, no. 3 (2010): 268-289.

⁸ Margaret Randall, "To Change Our Own Reality and the World: A Conversation with Lesbians in Nicaragua," *Signs* 18, no. 4 (1993): 916; Cymene Howe, "Gender, Sexuality, and Revolution: Making Histories and Cultural Politics in Nicaragua, 1979-2001," in *Gender, Sexuality, and Power in Latin America Since Independence*, ed. William E. French and Katherine Elaine Bliss (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 230-260; and Linda Broadbent, director, *Sex and the Sandinistas* (Women Make Movies, 1991).

⁹ "AIDS Education Nicaragua Style," Reception invitation c. 1988, Instituto Familiar de la Raza, Ephemera – Organizations, Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Historical Society, San Francisco (hereafter GLBTHS). See also Ellen Gavin, personal interview by author, December 15, 2010; Arauz in *Sandino's Daughters Revisited*; and "Health: Taking AIDS Seriously," *Envío* 92 (March 1989).

¹⁰ Herbert Marcuse, "Political Preface 1966," *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry Into Freud* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966), xvi. The volume was first published in 1955.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 214.

¹² Lessie Jo Frazier and Deborah Cohen, *Gender and Sexuality in 1968: Transformative Politics in the Cultural Imagination* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 20.

¹³ Ana Patricia Rodriguez, "The Fiction of Solidarity: Transfronterista Feminisms and Anti-Imperialist Struggles in Central American Transnational Narratives," *Feminist Studies* 34, no. 1-2 (2008): 199-226.

¹⁴ Thanks to Lessie Jo Frazier for helping me develop this point.

¹⁵ See Eve Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); and Marc Stein, "'Birthplace of the Nation': Imagining Lesbian and Gay Communities in Philadelphia, 1969-1970," in *Creating a Place for Ourselves: Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Community Histories*, ed. Brett Beemyn (New York: Routledge, 1997), 253-288.

¹⁶ Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (1986): 24-25.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹⁸ Roger Lancaster, *Life is Hard: Machismo, Danger, and the Intimacy of Power in Nicaragua* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 18.

¹⁹ In addition to Randall and Howe, key scholars on gender and feminism in the Revolution include Millie Thayer, Norma Stoltz Chinchilla, and Maxine Molyneux.

²⁰ Lancaster, *Life is Hard*, 4. See also Josefina Saldaña-Portillo, *The Revolutionary Imagination in the Americas and the Age of Development* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

²¹ Saldaña-Portillo, *The Revolutionary Imagination*, 111.

²² Max Elbaum, *Revolution in the Air: Sixties Radicals Turn to Lenin, Mao, and Che* (New York: Verso, 2002), 270.

²³ For an especially cogent critique, see Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, *Blood on the Border: A Memoir of the Contra War* (Cambridge: South End Press, 2005).

²⁴ “Lesbians & Gay Men: Stand for Nicaragua, Support the Revolution – Anti-Gay Leaders Support Somoza,” GNR (Gay People for Nicaragua), c. 1979. Ephemera – Organizations, GLBTHS. The Spanish translates to “if Nicaragua won, we will win,” and adapted the slogan “*Si Nicaragua venció, El Salvador vencerá,*” or “if Nicaragua won, El Salvador will win.”

²⁵ Matthews, “Coming Out for Peace,” 9.

²⁶ See for example “On Our Identity as Faggots,” *Magnus: a journal of collective faggotry*, #1, summer 1976, 8.

²⁷ Emily K. Hobson, “Imagining Alliance: Queer Anti-Imperialism and Race in California, 1966-1990” (PhD diss., University of Southern California, 2009).

²⁸ BAGL Newsletter, June 1978. Ephemera – Organizations, GLBTHS.

²⁹ Hector Perla, Jr., “Si Nicaragua Venció, El Salvador Vencerá: Central American Agency in the Creation of the U.S.-Central American Peace and Solidarity Movement,” *Latin American Research Review* 43, no. 2 (2008): 154-155. Also see María Cristina García, *Seeking Refuge: Central American Migration to Mexico, the United States, and Canada* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), and Van Gosse, “‘El Salvador is Spanish for Vietnam’: A New Immigrant Left and the Politics of Solidarity,” in *The Immigrant Left in the United States*, ed. Paul Buhle and Dan Georgakas (Albany: SUNY Press, 1996), 302-329.

³⁰ Thanks to James N. Green for helping me develop this point.

³¹ Lancaster, *Life is Hard*, 253.

³² Ileana Rodríguez, *Women, Guerrillas, and Love: Understanding War in Central America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

³³ Ernesto (Che) Guevara, “Socialism and Man in Cuba” (1965), in *Che Guevara Reader: Writings on Guerrilla Strategy, Politics & Revolution*, ed. David Deutschmann (Melbourne: Ocean Press, 1997), 205. For critiques, see Guerra, “Gender policing,” as well as work by Ruby Rich and Lourdes Arguelles and by Ian Lekus.

³⁴ Saldaña-Portillo, *The Revolutionary Imagination*; Mirna Cunningham in Randall, *Sandino’s Daughters Revisited*, 67-84; and Dunbar-Ortiz, *Blood on the Border*.

³⁵ Lorraine Bayard de Volo, *Mothers of Heroes and Martyrs: Gender Identity Politics in Nicaragua, 1979-1999* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001).

³⁶ This poster can be viewed online in the “Feminisms” exhibit of the Center for the Study of Political Graphics, www.politicalgraphics.org, specifically http://www.politicalgraphics.org/cgi-bin/album.pl?photo=33fword%2F450_PG_03858.jpg (Accessed May 18, 2011).

³⁷ Bayard de Volo, *Mothers of Heroes and Martyrs*, 36-37.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 38.

³⁹ Lancaster, *Life is Hard*, 254.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 237-245.

⁴¹ Millie Thayer, “Identity, Revolution, and Democracy: Lesbian Movements in Central America,” *Social Problems* 44, no. 3 (1997): 386-407.

⁴² Cymene Howe, “Undressing the Universal Queer Subject: Nicaraguan activism and transnational identity,” *City & Society* 14, no. 2 (2002): 254.

⁴³ Howe, “Undressing,” 241-243.

⁴⁴ Randall, *Sandino’s Daughters: Testimonies of Nicaraguan Women in Struggle* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1995; original edition Zed Books, 1981). Also published in Spanish in 1981 and 1983, Portuguese in 1983, and Turkish in 1985.

⁴⁵ Randall, *Sandino’s Daughters*, 186.

⁴⁶ Tellez broke with the FSLN in 1995 to found the MRS (Movimiento Renovador Sandinista).

⁴⁷ Howe, “Undressing,” 254.

⁴⁸ “Lesbians & Gay Men: Stand for Nicaragua, Support the Revolution – Anti-Gay Leaders Support Somoza,” GNR (Gay People for Nicaragua), c. 1979. Ephemera – Organizations, GLBTHS. The group’s name frequently changed; I cite it as “GNR” with the relevant name in parentheses.

⁴⁹ Arauz in *Sandino's Daughters Revisited*, 268-269. On GALA and Reyes, see Ramírez, "That's My Place!" and "Claiming Queer Cultural Citizenship."

⁵⁰ "Celebrate – Demonstrate – March," July 19, 1981, John Kyper File, GLBTHS.

⁵¹ Arauz in *Sandino's Daughters Revisited*, 267.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 267.

⁵³ Carmen Vázquez, interview with Kelly Anderson, May 12-13, 2005 and August 25, 2005 (Voices of Feminism Oral History Project, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College), 49.

⁵⁴ Pam David, personal interview by author, August 13, 2010.

⁵⁵ Marcia Gallo, personal interview by author, August 16, 2010.

⁵⁶ Matthews, "Coming Out for Peace." The Proposition N campaign was led by CISPES in 1984. In fall 1987, LAGAI (which exists today as QUIT, Queers Undermining Israeli Terrorism) funded a Nicaraguan delegation to the first Encuentro of Latin American lesbians.

⁵⁷ Of the thirteen participants, there were ten women (four white, four African American, two Latina) and three men (one white, one Latino, one Native American). Ellen Gavin and Marisa Perez (Monasterio) were the Brigade's central organizers within the United States. Ellen Gavin, personal interview by author, December 15, 2010. See also Gavin, "Nicaragua: Front Line Report," *San Francisco Sentinel*, July 18, 1985.

⁵⁸ Gavin, personal interview by author.

⁵⁹ The Philadelphia Lesbian & Gay Work Brigade was sponsored by the Philadelphia American Friends Service Committee and financially supported by lawyer Bob Sutton and doctor Walter Lear (both gay men). Bob Siedle-Khan, personal interview by author, June 13, 2007.

⁶⁰ TWWA dissolved in 1979 and its West Coast chapter became AAWO, which was also part of the Marxist-Leninist network Line of March. On TWWA, see Kimberly Springer, *Living for the Revolution: Black Feminist Organizations, 1968-1980* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007). On Line of March see Elbaum, *Revolution in the Air*.

⁶¹ Somos Hermanas brochure, c.1986, SFWC/WB 50/6, GLBTHS.

⁶² Vázquez, interview by Anderson, 49.

⁶³ *Ibid.* Vázquez had worked in the Puerto Rican Socialist Party in New York, the League of United Latin American Citizens in San Francisco, and from 1980 to 1984 served in the central leadership of the San Francisco Women's Building.

- ⁶⁴ Conference poster, 1985. Somos Hermanas, San Francisco Women's Centers/Women's Building (SFWC/WB) 50/6, GLBTHS. The poster was created by artist Juan R. Fuentes.
- ⁶⁵ Chandra Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses," *boundary 2* 12, no. 3 (1984): 333-358.
- ⁶⁶ Marcia Gallo has taken the poster everywhere she has lived or worked since 1985. Gallo, personal email correspondence with author, July 6, 2010.
- ⁶⁷ Vázquez, interview by Anderson, 50.
- ⁶⁸ Lucrecia Bermudez, personal interview by author, December 7, 2010.
- ⁶⁹ Vázquez, interview by Anderson, 51.
- ⁷⁰ AAWO/Somos Hermanas Newsletter, Fall 1984, SFWC/WB 35/1, GLBTHS.
- ⁷¹ Somos Hermanas mailing, 1989, SFWC/WB 50/11, GLBTHS.
- ⁷² Vázquez, interview by Anderson, 65 and "Draft Somos Hermanas Year Plan – 1988," SFWC/WB 50/8, GLBTHS.
- ⁷³ Howe, "Undressing," 243.
- ⁷⁴ Rebecca Gordon, *Letters from Nicaragua* (San Francisco: Spinsters/Aunt Lute Press, 1986), 100.
- ⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 42.
- ⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 43. See also Jan Adams's statements in Gordon, 26-27.
- ⁷⁷ Smith in Gordon, *Letters from Nicaragua*, 16.
- ⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 43.
- ⁷⁹ Rebecca Gordon, personal interview by author, September 24, 2010.
- ⁸⁰ Gordon, "The Price of Visibility: Book Review of *Queers in Space: Communities, Public Places, Sites of Resistance*" (by Gordon Brent Ingram, Anne-Marie Bouthillete, and Yolanda Retter), *The Women's Review of Books* 15, no. 6 (1998): 7-8.
- ⁸¹ Gordon, *Letters from Nicaragua*, 153.
- ⁸² Arauz in Randall, *Sandino's Daughters Revisited*, 267; Lucrecia Bermudez, personal interview by author, December 7, 2010.
- ⁸³ Lucrecia Bermudez, "Me siento marginada," in Juanita Ramos, ed., *Compañeras: Latina Lesbians* (Routledge, 1994): 227-231.
- ⁸⁴ Bermudez, interview by author.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Gordon, *Letters from Nicaragua*, 43. Emphasis in original.

⁸⁷ Gallo, interview by author.

⁸⁸ See Arauz in *Sandinino's Daughters Revisited*, as well as Thayer, "Identity, Revolution, and Democracy."

⁸⁹ Gavin, interview by author.

⁹⁰ Arauz, in *Sex and the Sandinistas*.

⁹¹ Arauz in Randall, *Sandinino's Daughters Revisited*, 275. See also Randall, "To Change," and Howe, "Undressing."

⁹² Howe, "Undressing," 241-243.

⁹³ Carmen in Randall, "To Change," 918.

⁹⁴ Arauz in Randall, *Sandinino's Daughters Revisited*, 271-274. The harassment was justified by citing anti-contra "emergency measures" against independent organizing.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 274. Arauz argues that this confrontation (rather than Stonewall) is the best anniversary for the LGBT movement in Nicaragua.

⁹⁶ Bank in Randall, "To Change," 913.

⁹⁷ "AAWO/Somos Hermanas summary of August 1987 Trip to Nicaragua," SFWC/WB 35/1, GLBTHS.

⁹⁸ Bank in Randall, "To Change," and Randall, interview by author.

⁹⁹ Arauz in *Sandinino's Daughters Revisited*, 275.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Arauz, in *Sex and the Sandinistas*.

¹⁰² Howe, "Undressing," 244.

¹⁰³ In 1992, the Chamorro government criminalized homosexual sex and its political "promotion"; this policy was not overturned until 2008 when the FSLN again held power.

¹⁰⁴ Arauz in *Sandinino's Daughters Revisited*, 277.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 278.

¹⁰⁶ Lupita Sequeira, in *Sex and the Sandinistas*.

¹⁰⁷ Bermudez, interview by author.

¹⁰⁸ Emily K. Hobson, "Stepdaughters of Revolution: Women Against Violence and Nicaraguan Feminism," *make/shift: feminisms in motion* 4 (2008): 7-8.

¹⁰⁹ Nadine Naber has theorized a "queer anti-imperialism" in recent activism among Arab American feminists and LGBT/queer people, as in Naber, "Articulating Arabness: Beyond Orientalism and Anti-Orientalism," paper given at the annual conference of the American Studies Association, November 19, 2010 (Albuquerque, NM).

Selected Bibliography

Babb, Florence E. "Out in Nicaragua: Local and Transnational Desires After the Revolution." *Cultural Anthropology* 18, no. 13 (2003): 304-328.

Bayard de Volo, Lorraine. *Mothers of Heroes and Martyrs: Gender Identity Politics in Nicaragua, 1979-1999*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001.

Bermudez, Lucrecia. "Me siento marginada." In *Compañeras: Latina Lesbians*, edited by Juanita Ramos, 227-231. New York: Routledge, 1994.

Broadbent, Linda. Director. *Sex and the Sandinistas*. Women Make Movies, 1991.

Chinchilla, Norma Stoltz. "Revolutionary Popular Feminism in Nicaragua: Articulating Class, Gender, and National Sovereignty." *Gender and Society* 4, no. 3 (1990): 370-397.

———. "Revolutionary Popular Feminism in Transition in Nicaragua: 1979-1994." In *Women in the Latin American Development Process*, edited by Chris Bose and Edna Acosta-Belen, 242-271. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995.

Dunbar-Ortiz, Roxanne. *Blood on the Border: A Memoir of the Contra War*. Cambridge: South End Press, 2005.

Elbaum, Max. *Revolution in the Air: Sixties Radicals Turn to Lenin, Mao, and Che*. New York: Verso, 2002.

Foucault, Michel. "Of Other Spaces." *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (1986): 22-27. From a lecture in 1967, translated by Jay Miskowiec.

Frazier, Lessie Jo and Deborah Cohen. *Gender and Sexuality in 1968: Transformative Politics in the Cultural Imagination*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

García, María Cristina. *Seeking Refuge: Central American Migration to Mexico, the United States, and Canada*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006.

Gosse, Van. "'El Salvador is Spanish for Vietnam': A New Immigrant Left and the Politics of Solidarity." In *The Immigrant Left in the United States*, edited by Paul Buhle and Dan Georgakas, 302-329. Albany: SUNY Press, 1996.

- Gordon, Rebecca. *Letters from Nicaragua*. San Francisco: Spinsters/Aunt Lute Press, 1986.
- Guerra, Lillian. "Gender policing, homosexuality, and the new patriarchy of the Cuban Revolution, 1965-1970." *Social History* 35, no. 3 (2010): 268-289.
- Guevara, Ernesto (Che). "Socialism and Man in Cuba." In *Che Guevara Reader: Writings on Guerrilla Strategy, Politics & Revolution*, edited by David Deutschmann, 197-214. Melbourne, Ocean Press, 1997. Originally published in *Marcha* [Uruguay], March 12, 1965.
- Hanhardt, Christina B. "Butterflies, Whistles, and Fists: Gay Safe Streets and the New Gay Ghetto, 1976-1981." *Radical History Review* 100 (2008): 61-85.
- Howe, Cymene. "Gender, Sexuality, and Revolution: Making Histories and Cultural Politics in Nicaragua 1979-2001." In *Gender, Sexuality, and Power in Latin America Since Independence*, edited by William E. French and Katherine Elaine Bliss, 230-260. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007.
- . "Undressing the Universal Queer Subject: Nicaraguan activism and transnational identity." *City & Society* 14, no. 2 (2002): 237-279.
- Lancaster, Roger. *Life is Hard: Machismo, Danger, and the Intimacy of Power in Nicaragua*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992.
- Lekus, Ian. "Queer Harvests: Homosexuality, the U.S. New Left, and the Venceremos Brigades to Cuba." *Radical History Review* 89 (2004): 57-91.
- Marcuse, Herbert. *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry Into Freud*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1966.
- Mohanty, Chandra. "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses," *boundary 2* 12, no. 3 (1984): 333-358.
- Molyneux, Maxine. "Mobilization Without Emancipation? Women's Interest, State, and Revolution in Nicaragua." *Feminist Studies* 11, no. 2 (1985): 227-254.
- Perla Jr., Hector. "Si Nicaragua Venció, El Salvador Vencerá: Central American Agency in the Creation of the U.S.-Central American Peace and Solidarity Movement." *Latin American Research Review* 43, no. 2 (2008): 136-158.
- Ramírez, Horacio N. Roque. "Claiming Queer Cultural Citizenship: Gay Latino (Im) Migrant Acts in San Francisco." In *Queer Migrations: Sexuality, U.S. Citizenship, & Border Crossings*, edited by Eithne Luibhéid and Lionel Cantú Jr., 161-188. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005.
- . "'That's My Place!': Negotiating Racial, Sexual, and Gender Politics in San Francisco's Gay Latino Alliance, 1975-1983." *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 12, no. 2 (2003): 224-258.

- Randall, Margaret. *Sandino's Daughters: Testimonies of Nicaraguan Women in Struggle*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1995. Original English edition by Zed Books, 1981.
- . *Sandino's Daughters Revisited: Feminism in Nicaragua*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1994.
- . "To Change Our Own Reality and the World: A Conversation with Lesbians in Nicaragua." *Signs* 18, no. 4 (1993): 907-924.
- Reyes, Migdalia. "The Latin American and Caribbean Feminist/Lesbian Encuentros: Crossing the Bridge of Our Diverse Identities." In *This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Visions for Transformation*, edited by Gloria Anzaldúa and Analouise Keating, 463-470. New York: Routledge, 2002.
- Rodriguez, Ana Patricia. "The Fiction of Solidarity: Transfronterista Feminisms and Anti-Imperialist Struggles in Central American Transnational Narratives." *Feminist Studies* 34, no. 1-2 (2008): 199-226.
- Rodriguez, Ileana. *Women, Guerrillas, and Love: Understanding War in Central America*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996.
- Rich, B. Ruby, and Lourdes Arguelles. "Homosexuality, Homophobia, and Revolution: Notes toward an Understanding of the Cuban Lesbian and Gay Male Experience, Part I." *Signs* 9, no. 4 (1984): 683-699.
- . "Homosexuality, Homophobia, and Revolution: Notes toward an Understanding of the Cuban Lesbian and Gay Male Experience, Part II." *Signs* 11, no. 1 (1985): 120-136.
- Saldaña-Portillo, María Josefina. *The Revolutionary Imagination in the Americas and the Age of Development*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2003.
- Sedgwick, Eve. *Epistemology of the Closet*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990.
- Smith, Christian. *Resisting Reagan: the U.S. Central America Peace Movement*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.
- Springer, Kimberly. *Living for the Revolution: Black Feminist Organizations, 1968-1980*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2007.
- Stein, Marc. "'Birthplace of the Nation': Imagining Lesbian and Gay Communities in Philadelphia, 1969-1970." In *Creating a Place for Ourselves: Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Community Histories*, edited by Brett Beemyn, 253-288. New York: Routledge, 1997.
- Thayer, Millie. "Identity, Revolution, and Democracy: Lesbian Movements in Central America." *Social Problems* 44, no. 3 (August 1997): 386-407.