

## **Women's Work: Photographers of the Sandinista Revolution**

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## **Women's Work: Photographers of the Sandinista Revolution**

This article focuses on the early careers of Margarita Montealegre and Claudia Gordillo, both of whom produced substantial photographic documentation of Nicaragua during the Sandinista Revolution (1978-1990). Working around the ideological strictures of that moment, I propose reading their work against inherited notions on how political imagery should operate in a revolutionary context. Rejecting the demand for sensationalist images, Montealegre and Gordillo turned their gaze towards fellow citizens, using the camera as a means to observe Nicaraguan society up-close. Aesthetically and politically, each pursued different, yet intersecting directions, exploring how revolutionary ideals and social change intertwined. The Revolution marked a moment of profound historic change, whereby identities were shaped and political imaginaries formed in ways that remain consequential to date. Revisiting these photographers' archives now, across the span of four decades, reveals previously overlooked contingent details and an ample range of interpretative possibilities.

Keywords: documentary; photojournalism; political aesthetics; revolution; Latin America.

The article seeks to provide a critical introduction to the work of Margarita Montealegre and Claudia Gordillo, both of whom began their careers as photographers during the late nineteen seventies and early eighties in Nicaragua, a period of tumultuous revolutionary change. Outside of Nicaragua, and Central America, they are less well-known than their North American, European, even Latin American counterparts; yet of the Nicaraguan photographers who were active during that period, these two women produced perhaps the most substantial body of documentary work around the Sandinista Revolution. And I write "around" deliberately, to emphasize my particular interest in events, encounters and social realities that often took place on the side of the most celebrated, decisive or so-called iconic moments of that struggle.

Furthermore, to preface central questions that featured prominently in debates of the time *around* (again) the representation of the revolution itself, rather, questions as to how the revolution should or shouldn't be re/presented. The work of Gordillo and Montealegre, I will argue, provides other angles, other positions of viewing, a slight change within the frame, which now – forty years later – speak differently to the overwhelming transformations that took place back then. Surely, there is an additional argument to be made about a gendered gaze, about the ways in which being a woman and a photographer in Nicaragua at the time, conditioned them. But for now, I want to propose that we think of them primarily as *auteurs*.

This approach, I should further note, goes against the grain of the more militant positions from that period, which associated authorship with bourgeois values.<sup>1</sup> Debates concerning the extent to which the cultural sector should be involved in the production of ideological work to further the ideals of the revolution became salient during the seventies and eighties in Nicaragua, as elsewhere.<sup>2</sup> Credits for individual pictures published in newspapers, magazines, and across media, were frequently relinquished in favour of collective attribution. As explained by Montealegre, who worked for the official Sandinista newspaper *Barricada* and for the Departamento de Propaganda y Educación Política or DEPEP (Department of Propaganda and Political Education), this was part of the ethos of the moment, a recognition of journalistic and creative output as

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<sup>1</sup> I have written about this issue previously, in particular with regards to accusations levelled against Claudia Gordillo's practice, her stated interest in photographic aesthetics over and above direct ideological engagement (Selejan 2017).

<sup>2</sup> Craven (2002), Aguirre (2009) and Quintanilla (1993, 2019) have addressed the wider context around cultural production during these years in their respective publications.

a collective contribution towards achieving the goals of the revolution (Montealegre 2019a).<sup>3</sup>

Most of the professional photographers active in Nicaragua were “empirically” trained, as Montealegre explained, meaning they trained on the field and with the help of their peers rather than in formal settings. During the eighties, a majority thereof were employed as photojournalists, while others worked for various ministries and state-sponsored institutions or as embedded army photographers. *Barricada*, for instance had its own war division (corresponsales de guerra) which included photographers – Claudia Gordillo was the only female member of the group.<sup>4</sup> Foreign photographers such as Susan Meiselas (United States), Pedro Meyer (Mexico) and Marcelo Montecino (Chile) visited the country repeatedly, participating in local networks of exchange. Colombian photojournalist Arturo Robles, Newsweek’s Central America correspondent, was based in Nicaragua between 1985 and 1995. Likewise, Italian Paolo Bosio was living in Nicaragua while covering developments in Central America for various press agencies including Reuters, Agence France Press and Gamma. Other photographers moved to Nicaragua with the specific purpose of aiding the revolution, working as photographers

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<sup>3</sup> In addition to *Barricada* and its cultural supplement “*Ventana*,” the Nicaraguan Ministry of Culture and the DEPEP produced a number of journals and publications that featured picture-heavy content.

<sup>4</sup> In my forthcoming monograph, I discuss the work of several Nicaraguan photojournalists and war correspondents including Mario Tapia, Miguel Alvarez, and Oscar Navarrete. A notable exception was film-maker and photographer Maria Jose Alvarez, founding member of Instituto Nicaragüense de Cine or INCINE (Nicaraguan Institute of Cinema), who independently began a long-term project to document the Nicaraguan Caribbean towards the end of the revolutionary decade.

or in publishing and design – such was the case indeed of Paolo Bosio, as well as Adriana Angel (Colombia), and Cordelia Dilg (Germany). The local context was anything but isolated from the outer world.

### *Fotógrafa comprometida*

INSERT Fig. 1.

The Sandinista revolution succeeded in toppling the regime of Anastasio Somoza Debayle in July of 1979, following a country-wide popular insurrection led by the previously clandestine Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN).<sup>5</sup> One of the rare colour photographs from that period (Figure 1) shows Dora María Téllez and Leticia Herrera Sánchez, two of the main *commandantes* of the Sandinista Front, photographed by Margarita Montealegre, a fellow *militante* from within the Front. I place additional emphasis here on a pronoun that is usually misplaced by gender – the feminine *las* commandantes, instead of the usual *los* commandates, masculine – since the memory of the Sandinista revolution has to a great extent side-stepped women’s contributions, assigning them to secondary roles.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The Somozas had established a hereditary dictatorship, starting with Anastasio Somoza García, commander-in-chief of the National Guard, who assumed power in 1937. He ordered the assassination of Augusto César Sandino, leader of the 1927-1933 rebellion against the U.S. Marines occupation, who later inspired the founding of the Sandinista Front.

<sup>6</sup> Undoubtedly, one of the greatest failures of the revolution was its inability to acknowledge women’s contributions, gradually stripping away their hard-earned privileges, diminishing their

The picture was taken the day after the dictator fled and victory was declared, as all fighting squadrons from the Frente Interno [Internal Front] were heading from their posts around the country towards the capital city of Managua, in celebration.

Responding to the predominance of black and white photography in surviving archives of the revolution, Montealegre explained that colour film was difficult to find in Nicaragua at the time (Montealegre 2019b). However, because she had been appointed as press contact for the foreign media by the FSLN, she was in direct and frequent contact with well-equipped correspondents and thus had an alternative source of colour film, albeit infrequently.<sup>7</sup>

Montealegre had started her career in 1977 as a young photo-reporter for the national newspaper *La Prensa*, the first woman to assume such a role (Montealegre 2015). She joined the revolutionary movement soon thereafter, operating underground in Managua, with major risks involved. In those days immediately after Somoza left, “hubo una explosión de alegría de la población” (there was an explosion of happiness within the population), you “could feel it in the air,” she recalled, contemplating the

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roles and ability to participate in governance, particularly in leadership roles. Women’s movements (some of which preceded the revolution) nonetheless survived and thrived, and feminist groups are representative of the few organized efforts that have consistently challenged power to date.

<sup>7</sup> As an anecdotal detail, she noted that the slide film she shot on that day was given to her by Susan Meiselas, whose book *Nicaragua: June 1978 - July 1979* (published in 1981) was innovative precisely through her use of colour film instead of the classical documentary black and white (Montealegre 2019b). Material considerations such as these become substantial in contexts where conflict and economic scarcity impact the availability of materials, and thus the type of work that photographers are able to make.

series of images she took that day (Figure 2) (Montealegre 2019b). All were taken from the sides of the convoy as revolutionary leaders and combatants were speeding towards Managua. The film registers the rush of the moment: “People would approach, they were seeing these people [the revolutionaries] for the first time in the flesh... *me conmovió*, it moved me, *fue algo tan espontaneo*, it was something so spontaneous, and raw” (Montealegre 2019b).

INSERT Fig. 2.

The participation of Nicaraguan women in the revolution was significant in the years leading up to the insurrection, and in its aftermath during the 1980s. It was especially during this later decade that women assumed important roles *trabajando por la revolución*. As Margaret Randall, a US-born poet, feminist, photographer, and activist who spent many years “working for the revolution” in Nicaragua wrote: “Women fought in the front lines as FSLN militants, participated in support tasks, worked undercover in government offices and were involved in every facet of the anti-Somoza opposition movement... By the final offensive, women made up 30% of the Sandinista army and held important leadership positions, commanding everything from small units to full battalions. In fact, the contribution of women, both in kind and in quantity, has been an essential component of the Nicaraguan Revolution” (Randall 1981).

Montealegre continued to work as a photojournalist during this period, although no longer affiliated with *La Prensa*, and was frequently embedded with the Sandinista army in the Northern regions of Nicaragua, during the Contra War. She documented countless events of historic significance, and took portraits of the majority of the

political protagonists of that era. One of her most iconic, and most recognized images showed farmers from around the town of Jinotepe marching in celebration after a historic *toma de tierra* (land grab) in March 1980 – the image was later featured on the 20 Nicaraguan Cordobas bill. The banner they carry reads: “Nosotros no somos peces para vivir del mar. No somos aves para vivir del aire. Somos hombres para vivir de la tierra.” (We are not fish to live off the sea. We are not birds to live off the air. We are men to live off the earth.) The phrase, quoting Bernardino Díaz Ochoa, a syndicalist and leader of the Nicaraguan peasant movement, also became a slogan for the Land Reform and land redistribution campaign pushed forth by the Sandinista government.

INSERT Fig. 3.

Many similar episodes were captured by Montealegre, who acted simultaneously as witness of and participant within the revolutionary process, having held various governmental posts throughout this period. She worked as photographer and editor for a number of official publications, and was later the director of the *Museo de la Revolución* (Museum of the Revolution) in Managua.<sup>8</sup> In the past, such images may have illustrated the pages of news or magazine articles, they may have been turned into posters or incorporated into revolutionary brochures. Yet once removed and placed side by side within the photographer’s reconstituted archive, they can be re-contextualized as

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<sup>8</sup> Amongst the many Nicaraguan publications to which she contributed, one might list “Un Pueblo alumbra su historia” (1981) and “Y se rompió el silencio” (1982), as well as “Nicaragua: A Decade of Revolution” (1992) which compiled the work of a number of Nicaraguan and foreign photographers who had documented the 1978-79 insurrection.



part of a greater oeuvre, and by relation to the entirety of the timespan they describe. Through the lens of history, an array of new details is thus brought to light. Consider Figure 3, for instance, a photograph taken at a mass officiated by Pope John Paul II in Managua during his visit in 1983.<sup>9</sup> It shows a procession of revolutionaries and guerrilla fighters carrying symbolic artefacts. At the front is Gladys Báez, a historic FSLN combatant, who survived the battle of Pancasán from 1967 when troops of Somoza's National Guard ambushed the armed resistance group that she was a part of. On her arms rests the "wounded" Nicaraguan flag from that battle. In the background to her right is Carlos Fonseca Terán, son of FSLN founder Carlos Fonseca Amador, carrying some of his father's effects. The Pope, as the missing protagonist of the picture, is about to sanctify artefacts that already carried a heavy symbolic toll, as secular relicts. The seeming paradox of the Catholic Church's leader bestowing his blessings upon these revolutionary items illustrates one of the many contradictions of that moment. Nicaraguans welcomed a Marxist-inspired revolution, notwithstanding the deep roots Catholicism had within their society; at least in part, this was due to the influence of Liberation Theology and the participation of charismatic leaders such as Ernesto Cardenal in the revolution.

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<sup>9</sup> The visit was controversial due to the Pope's anti-communist stance, and also because of his disapproval of Liberation Theology in Latin America. One of the movement's key exponents, Ernesto Cardenal, a Nicaraguan priest and revolutionary, was a long-term supporter of the FSLN, and Sandinista Minister of Culture at the time of this visit. He was suspended by the Vatican the following year, a measure that was only lifted in 2019. Nicaragua was a majority Catholic country, and the Pope's visit was seen as harbouring disguised political motives. The prelate's presence in the country was certainly divisive, and it is alleged that the Sandinista government prevented Catholics from attending some of the planned events.

Historic images such as those above were circulated throughout the years of the revolution, their legacy kept alive within the public imagination through acts of commemoration thereafter. Most recently, with the proliferation of digital technology, and the widespread availability of the Internet, they became detached from paper-based media and transferred onto blogs and social media accounts where they may be reengaged by newer publics. Nonetheless, as I have noted upon my travels to Nicaragua since 2011, it is rare to see historic images such as these enter contemporary public discourse. The FSLN, since its return to power in 2006, has tended to sample from a rather restricted repertoire of well-known and immediately recognizable pictures and film fragments from the 1978-79 insurrection, generally avoiding content from the eighties. Based on conversations with a range of interlocutors, it appears as though the visual record of the revolution, albeit expansive, is mostly unknown to the general public. A scarcity of resources, and the centralization of local institutional archives greatly hinders access to this material. Furthermore, in speaking of an expansive visual record, one must thus keep in mind that many of the surviving photographs from this period are scattered throughout the archives of international photo agencies, of photojournalists and documentarians who came to Nicaragua on assignment for international news media, or to pursue independent projects.

INSERT Fig. 4.

As previously mentioned, Montealegre continued to document the revolutionary process throughout the eighties, a decade dominated by the Contra War, a highly-mediatized conflict due to the Cold War dynamics of the time, and the United States' interventionist stance. Rejecting the demand for sensationalist images at the time, Montealegre drew towards photographing the impact of the Contra war on civilians, as

well as the difficult conditions under which soldiers, women especially, were operating on the front. Many of the soldiers portrayed in her pictures would have been recently conscripted, especially after a draft was instituted in 1983. Yet despite the revolutionary impetus, and comradeship amongst troupes, even within military ranks, women's perceived roles did not necessarily change (Figure 4).<sup>10</sup>

INSERT Fig. 5.

One of her most striking photographs (Figure 5) shows mourners gathered for a funeral in the village of Ayapal, a community located in Northern Nicaragua, in what was mainly indigenous territory, caught in the crossfire between the Sandinista army and the Contras. In one of the most tragic accidents from the war in December 1982, seventy-five Miskitu children were killed when a military air transport crashed. Compositionally, the image reminds one of Gustave Courbet's monumental canvas "The Burial at Ornans" (1849–50) except the focus here is less on the hierarchy of values, and rather on the simplicity of the event, the gestures of women (mothers?) whose bodies bend over, collapsing in pain, overwhelmed by the event. Montealegre's camera moves off script, expanding the frame. The viewer's eye becomes distracted, since alongside the human tragedy we notice the great number of cameras present,

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<sup>10</sup> The Servicio Militar Patriótico (Patriotic Military Service) was passed into law in September 1983, in order to increase the ranks of the Ejército Popular Sandinista (Popular Sandinista Army)

despite the remoteness of the site.<sup>11</sup> Stepping slightly aside from a more straightforwardly voyeuristic narrative of pain, Montealegre reveals the picture-making event in progress.

INSERT Fig. 6.

A similar gesture, a movement really, has revolutionary leader Daniel Ortega (yet to be elected president) captured at a podium while giving a speech, yet seen from behind (Figure 6). The focus is once more the context *around* the primary event, *around* the occasion for the gathering. I read this picture through its future projection, as a premonition if you'd like, of the increasing disconnect of the revolutionary leadership from the people who – at least from that elevated perspective – are turned into a mass.

### *Embedded Within the Everyday*

INSERT Fig. 7.

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<sup>11</sup> The episode is remembered as one of the most controversial from the Contra War, since the Sandinista government outspokenly claimed the aircraft was downed by enemy fire, although the accident was due to a technical error, as would later be revealed. The flight was part of a disputed campaign to forcibly relocate members of several Miskitu communities from the Río Coco as part of the government's efforts to uproot resistance and collaboration with the Contra along the Honduran border (Mendoza 2016).

Having spent a few years studying abroad in Europe, Claudia Gordillo returned to Nicaragua soon after the revolutionary victory of 1979. She began her career working as staff photographer for the Sandinista newspaper *Barricada* (from 1982 until 1984), where she was assigned to the war correspondents' division. Later, she served as staff photographer and member of the *Centro de Investigación y Documentación de la Costa Atlántica* (Centre for Research and for the Documentation of the Atlantic Coast), CIDCA in short. Working with a team of anthropologists, she was tasked to document communities living along Nicaragua's Caribbean Coast. Many of her pictures were featured on the pages of *Wani*, the Centre's multilingual publication, in print starting in 1984.

The magazine published documentary work, portraits (Figures 11 and 12) and types of pictures that might loosely fit under the rubric of ethnographic documentation of everyday life and custom. *Barricada* on the other hand, focused on contemporary events, and occasionally scenes from everyday life. Unpublished pictures, and the sporadic contact sheet, are illuminating in terms of editorial operations, showing for the most part a concerted effort in shaping the image of the revolution, with an emphasis on militancy, heroism, comradeship, and gestures of solidarity. In analysing the newspaper archives, comparing the photographs chosen to illustrate its printed issues with the material that was cast aside, it becomes evident that the newspaper's editors mainly sought to present positive, complimentary images, demonstrative of the advancements of the revolution, its idealism, and the overall support of the population. They shied away from anything that might have been interpreted otherwise. The archival record thus illustrates the extent to which the revolution was *imagistically* produced, and the carefulness with which those responsible with its mediated presentation operated within a highly politicised, ideologically charged environment. Within this context, any

auterrial gaze would have been deliberately “neutralized” by the editors of the various upfront political and propagandistic publications where photographic work was featured.

INSERT Fig. 8.

Gordillo has repeatedly referred to the types of photographs published by *Barricada* as pamphletary, and commented that this was really the only “style” permitted by editors, who disavowed viewpoints that may have been interpreted as critical of the regime and the revolution (Gordillo 2011). Nonetheless, if one is to expand the photographic corpus she authored across her personal archive, an amplified field of vision ensues. As I have written elsewhere, while on assignment, she carried two cameras, and only used a portion of her film quota for *Barricada* assignments (Selejan 2017). Journeys outside of Managua, even when embedded (Figure 8), became opportunities to observe, from the side, the unfolding of greater narratives: the war, aspirations about the future of Nicaragua, how the greater majority of people lived under given conditions. “Fear,” she stated in reaction to this image. Everyone was afraid, herself included, since there was always a chance of walking right into an ambush (Gordillo 2011). Fear, the great leveller, across the picture plane... a glimpse, a quick frame, captured through the truck’s scratched window-pane.

INSERT Fig. 9.

INSERT Fig. 10.

Instead of protagonists, Gordillo chose to focus her lens on her fellow citizens, many of whom remain unknown to history. This interest in the quotidian would become clearer as the eighties progressed, shaping her photographic aesthetic during the war years and thereafter. Gordillo's "style" may have irritated some of the cadres, even her peers. Nonetheless, it indelibly permeated the quality of her assignments (Selejan 2017). Her subsequent posting with CIDCA was more productive in this sense, since the focus of her assignments shifted from the documentation of the revolution to the portrayal of civilian life. She felt supported in pursuing her vision, confident to suggest subjects and stories that interested her. In effect, she worked as a visual researcher, being able to move with relative ease along the Coast, with logistical support from the centre (Gordillo 2019). Other photographers received commissions from CIDCA, yet Gordillo, alongside María José Álvarez who was also a film-maker, produced considerable bodies of work bearing witness to the ways in which the revolution impacted the lives of communities from the Coast (Gordillo, Álvarez 2008). Both photographers initiated long-term projects during this period, which continued throughout the 1990s. In retrospect, given the greater sociological focus of the work, the revolution becomes somewhat of a marginal subject, just one of many issues that preoccupied Creole, Miskitu, Sumo and Rama people at the time.<sup>12</sup>

Gordillo's interest in portraiture is evident even within a small selection of work, as seen in the examples included in this article. Yet the characters that pose in front of her camera are rarely static. Rather, they reveal themselves to the camera, whether in a public setting (Figures 7, 9, and 10) or within the intimacy of their domestic realm

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<sup>12</sup> For an in-depth discussion of the work of both photographers by relation to CIDCA during the eighties, see Gurdian and Kauffman (2002).

(Figures 11, 12). The street becomes an improvised backdrop, all movements brought to a temporary halt. Rich black and white tonalities infuse the scene, emboldening the geometric interplay between forms. Cinematic frames open up the separate worlds inhabited by men and women, even during leisure time (Figures 9 and 10). Small gestures bring attention back to more immediate, quotidian actions and needs: the way two women hold cups of *fresco* (fruit juice) at the market in Masaya; the manner in which two girls from Bluefields comb each other's hair; a young woman from Karawala leaning softly onto an older woman's shoulder.

INSERT Fig. 11.

INSERT Fig. 12.

### ***Looking Askance***

Drawing upon the work of their precursors in Latin America and beyond, Gordillo and Montealegre rooted their practice within greater trajectories of documentary photography. They developed highly idiosyncratic approaches in reaction to the different yet intersecting directions of fine art photography and photojournalism, while sharing important ground. Both photographers, for instance, identified Mexican photography as an important influence, although interestingly they pinpointed the work of earlier masters such as Manuel Álvarez Bravo, Tina Modotti, and less so that of their own contemporaries. This might seem surprising, given the number of Mexican photographers and photojournalists who had visited Nicaragua during the insurrection and in the revolutionary years, such as Pedro Meyer and Pedro Valtierra to name just two. On the one hand, such observations are indicative of the extent to which the work



of earlier generations still carried weight in photographic circles at the time. On the other, they highlight how the work of contemporary Latin American photographers was little known cross-regionally.

It was only during the late seventies and eighties that regional meetings for photographers, occasioned by initiatives such as the *Coloquio Latinoamericano de Fotografía* (Colloquium of Latin American Photography) started to take place. To a Nicaraguan audience, no matter how specialized, the work of contemporary Latin American photographers was still new and relatively inaccessible in the absence of sustained local exchange.<sup>13</sup> Cuban photography came up in conversation, although most references emphasized the continued relevance of the work of European photographers from the interwar and post-war generation, and that of documentarians from the United States. Again, this might seem to contradict the regional dynamics of the period, and the political commitment expressed by many photographers working within Latin America, as they sought to align themselves in opposition to Reagan-era interventionist ambitions, and neo-colonialism. Such incongruities, as I have come to learn, duly characterized that period in Nicaraguan history.

In the years since, Montealegre has continued working as a professional photographer, although she distanced herself from politics in the aftermath of the 1990 elections, when the FSLN was voted out of office. Most recently, she has collaborated with human rights organizations and local NGOs on documenting cases of femicide in Nicaragua, as part of an effort to raise awareness about this tragic issue. Since the

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<sup>13</sup> The Colloquium was organized in 1977 and 1981 in Mexico City, and in 1984 in Havana, by the *Consejo Mexicano de Fotografía* (Mexican Council of Photography). Gordillo and Montealegre attended the Havana meeting, although neither exhibited work.

nineties, Gordillo has dedicated herself to the preservation of one of Nicaragua's main institutionally-held photographic archives, and has, like Montealegre, recently returned to photographing on the street, during the 2018 anti-government protests in Managua.<sup>14</sup>

The selection included in this article represents only a small section from sizeable bodies of work, spanning barely a decade from these photographers' careers. It is important to note that Montealegre and Gordillo, like many fellow photographers who were active during that time, have been for several years painstakingly trying to recover their pictures (or negatives) from various state archives. As I sought to argue, both photographers worked within state institutions, and hence their photographic output was produced and published under the specific ideological parameters (and expectations) of those institutions, within the context of a revolutionary decade. Yet, despite this being the case, Montealegre and Gordillo were able to generate bodies of work that were not fully circumscribed by the revolutionary project, and which can be read in a more "independent" auteurial vein. I propose thus, that the work be read against the grain, by identifying contingent details and perspectives that were side-stepped in their historical moment, yet which can nonetheless be revelatory when observed through the lens of the forty years passed.

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<sup>14</sup> In April 2018, large scale protests began against the FSLN government led by former revolutionary Daniel Ortega and first lady and vice-president Rosario Murillo. The regime reacted forcefully, which led to persistent non-violent actions staged by students and civic groups around Nicaragua. The stand-off lasted until July, when police and paramilitary forces violently repressed all resisting groups. A comprehensive report published by the Interdisciplinary Group of Independent Experts GIEI Nicaragua on December 21, 2018, thoroughly documents human rights abuses committed by the government while the protests were ongoing (between April 18 and May 30).

Indeed, these women's work can be reconstituted in retrospect, from the few surviving archives – work that they have undertaken in more recent years. To my eye, it is essential to recognize their work from the revolutionary period as contributing towards the making of greater bodies of photographic work. The revolution was a “totalizing” endeavour, nonetheless while it provided the context for their practices, it does not circumscribe them entirely. Alternative narratives underwrite this documentary material, and may be revealed by looking askance, towards the margins of the frame, or behind it.

*The article is dedicated to the victims of state repression in Nicaragua in the aftermath of the April 2018 civic protests, to those who are wrongly, and illegally imprisoned as these words go into print; to the memory of Álvaro Conrado, and the more than 300 citizens who were killed while protests were ongoing. It should not be interpreted as affirmative or in support of the current regime which is responsible for committing severe crimes against the Nicaraguan people.*

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