The background is a solid teal color. Overlaid on this are several thick, irregular orange lines that meander across the page, creating a network of organic, vein-like shapes. These lines are most prominent on the left side and bottom, framing the central text.

BREAKING THE BODY, BREAKING THE SOUL

CHANGES IN THE LANDSCAPE
OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

*The reconfiguration of violence
against women in Nicaragua
2018 – 2021*

Elvira Cuadra Lira



Dedicated to

*Suyen, Cristiana, Carolina, Ana Margarita,
Tamara, Maria Fernanda, Esperanza, Violeta,
Nidia, Jeannine, Samantha, Evelyn,
Maria del Socorro, Dora Maria, Julia, Karla
and the anonymous women political prisoners.*



CONTENT

6	Presentation
8	Introduction Approach and methodology
10	Multiple crises and the situation of women
13	Systemic violence
15	The characteristics of institutional violence
17	The dynamics of direct violence
19	Exacerbated political violence
21	Trans, Afro-descendant, indigenous and exiled women
22	“Leave no one behind:” strategies for protection and defense
23	Conclusions
26	Bibliography

PRESENTATION

This research is committed. Committed to the Nicaraguan women who have experienced, and continue to experience, different forms of violence inside and outside the country; to the mothers and relatives of people killed during the protests; to the thousands of exiled women who have had to leave abruptly their homes to preserve their lives and their safety; to the women displaced to protect their families and find better subsistence opportunities; to the women imprisoned from 2018 to date and their female relatives who have suffered along with them torture and ill-treatment. To the thousands of girls, adolescents and young women who suddenly saw their lives completely upended by unbridled violence and state repression, who have seen their dreams and projects plunged into uncertainty. To the women journalists and human rights defenders, young cyber activists, feminists; and all those who from their own spaces and in their own ways resist every day with courage, resolve and hope.

Doing research in a police state such as the one in Nicaragua is, in many ways, a challenge. Firstly, because the setting in which the research is conducted is marked by authoritarianism, insecurity and state violence, so that the people participating in the research process see their safety exposed and may be subject to repressive and violent acts. Secondly, because many times the sources of information are scarce, outdated, restricted. Likewise, direct sources cannot always express themselves freely. The Covid-19 pandemic and the overexposure to digital media added a further element of complexity to the difficulties derived from the feeling of uncertainty, fear and exhaustion that is created among all participants.

As in most research, this report with its findings is unable to capture the full richness of the voices and contributions of participants. I very much regret that I cannot quote the participants and that their names remain anonymous to preserve their safety. I also regret that I cannot publicly acknowledge the people who collaborated with the research by searching for data, contributing ideas, reading, reviewing and editing. Of course, the shortcomings and omissions are my responsibility.

The research's title, "Breaking the Body, Breaking the Soul," attempts to synthesize one of the main findings. It means that the structures of power and violence against women have the purpose of breaking their bodies, either through direct, physical and psychological violence or political violence to subdue them, turning them into subordinate and controlled subjects.

However, Nicaraguan women have developed an enormous capacity for resistance, ranging from open political defiance to small domestic and daily resistance. This resistance was consistently reiterated by all participants in the study and

is the center, the driving force that makes them recognize themselves as protagonists of a momentous change for Nicaragua.

This research is in honor to the twenty-one women political prisoners who remain in Nicaraguan prisons, subjected to torture and degrading treatment: Suyen, Cristiana, Carolina, Ana Margarita, Tamara, Maria Fernanda, Esperanza, Violeta, Nidia, Jeannine, Samantha, Evelyn, Maria del Socorro, Dora Maria, Julia, Karla and the anonymous women political prisoners. To their immense capacity for resistance.

Committed to the Nicaraguan women who have experienced, and continue to experience, different forms of violence inside and outside the country; to the mothers and relatives of people killed during the protests; to the thousands of exiled women who have had to leave abruptly their homes to preserve their lives and their safety

INTRODUCTION

Identify the different forms of violence experienced by Nicaraguan women in the period 2018-2021, differentiating those related to systemic, institutional and direct violence that affects them

Women in Nicaragua represent half of the population and almost 70% of them are under 39 years of age. Just as in other societies where the patriarchal system predominates, violence against women is socially accepted and practiced because it is part of a structure of power relations in which women occupy a subordinate position. This situation has worsened since 2018 when a socio-political crisis erupted as a result of numerous and widespread citizen protests. The government responded with a policy of repression and lethal violence on a large scale, which has continued to the present day and even has resulted in the “institutionalization” of a police state since the end of 2020, whose main consequence is the annulment of fundamental rights and freedoms. Added to this scenario are the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic and hurricanes Eta and Iota, which mainly affected the Caribbean Coast.

In this complex scenario, other forms of violence have soared and reshaped in such a way that women live in an environment of diverse, severe and multidimensional forms of violence. According to data from different women's organizations, femicides have increased significantly, as have sexual aggressions and abuses. Machismo behavior patterns have been reinforced, thousands of women are unemployed or forced to increase their workdays to cover the basic needs of their families, and thousands more have been forced to move or emigrate for political and economic reasons. Their situation has worsened significantly, and the lack of public information does not allow us to measure their scope, characteristics and effects, especially in terms of their living conditions and particular rights.

Approach and methodology

The purpose of the study is to identify the different forms of violence experienced by Nicaraguan women in the period 2018-2021, differentiating those related to systemic, institutional and direct violence that affects them, as well as the political violence that has worsened in recent years. It analyzes the cornerstones and the strategies that women themselves have developed, their role as peace and democracy builders.

The key questions it attempts to answer is: how has violence against women in Nicaragua been reconfigured in the period 2018-2021? What impact has the socio-political crisis and the Covid-19 pandemic had on these new configurations? And what defense strategies have women adopted?

It was conducted with an action-research approach, with participation of the protagonists; the review of quantitative sources from public institutions and other records made by social organizations, qualitative sources and data triangulation to validate the findings at different moments of the process. Field work consisted of six (6) focal groups and fourteen (14) interviews with activists and leaders of social organizations, feminists, human rights defenders, experts, journalists, exiled women, women who were political prisoners, relatives of murdered people and women political prisoners, defense lawyers, women from indigenous and Afro-descendant communities, the LGBTIQ community, youth and cyber activists, among others.

Approximately sixty (60) women linked to twenty-seven social spaces and organizations participated in the process. It is necessary to mention that most of the activities were conducted in virtual spaces and it was required to protect the identity of the participants considering the high risks associated with this type of activities, especially for people in Nicaragua, due to the high levels of repression and governmental violence. In the case of some focus groups that were conducted in person, the women participants had to “conceal” the meeting to avoid surveillance by the police or pro-government paramilitary groups, as well as other violent repressive actions.

MULTIPLE CRISES AND THE SITUATION OF WOMEN

In 2021, the Ortega government unleashed an escalation of repression and violence against the civic movement organized in the wake of the protests to control all variables of the presidential elections scheduled for November of that year.

In April 2018, a massive wave of social discontent emerged in Nicaragua following the government's announcement of social security reforms that especially affected senior citizens, as well as contributors and employers. The first actions took place at the beginning of the month when university students and environmentalists called for marches to protest the government's negligence in managing the fire in the Indio-Maiz biological reserve, one of the most important in Central America (Salazar, 2018). But they intensified when the government announced the social security reforms, and a group of elderly protestors were assaulted by government sympathizers (Rivas, 2018). Demonstrations and marches spread throughout the country and government violence was not long in coming, escalating to become lethal. Consequently, more than 350 people were killed, thousands injured, several hundred were arrested, and it is estimated that approximately 200,000 have been forcibly displaced (IACHR, 2018; OHCHR, 2018; Amnesty International, 2018; GIEI Nicaragua, 2018).

The pandemic caused by Covid that began in 2020 added an element of complexity to Nicaragua's sociopolitical crisis due to the governmental health policy that contravened instructions and preventive measures from international health organizations. This caused countless contagions and deaths of people that the government has concealed until today, while the World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that there were between 12 and 16 thousand deaths in the country due to the pandemic (Confidencial, 2022). At the end of that year, two consecutive hurricanes hit the country, mainly the Caribbean Coast, and caused an emergency situation in numerous communities, many of which disappeared (BBC, 2020).

In 2021, the Ortega government unleashed an escalation of repression and violence against the civic movement organized in the wake of the protests to control all variables of the presidential elections scheduled for November of that year. The result was the arbitrary detention of more than 50 people including presidential candidates, leaders of social organizations and movements, journalists, human rights activists, private businessmen, among others; the banning of three political parties and a new wave of exiles.

Elections were held on November 7, 2021, as scheduled, but without conditions or guarantees for clean and fair elections, so citizens decided to abstain from going to the polls (Arciniegas, 2021). The Supreme Electoral Council (SEC) declared Daniel Ortega the winner for a fourth consecutive term as president, and Rosario Murillo for a second term as vice president. From that moment on, the Ortega-Murillo regime moved towards the “institutionalization” of the police state through the approval of a set of laws that restrict fundamental citizen rights, and also intensifying the persecution against some key groups and actors such as the Catholic Church (Molina, 2022). The international community has widely rejected the electoral results, as well as the permanence of the Ortega-Murillo family in power.

In this context, Nicaraguan women, according to ECLAC estimates for 2020 (2022), constitute a little more than 3 million people. Of these, girls and adolescents between 0 and 19 years of age represent 39%, young women between 20 and 29 years of age represent 18.5%, and young adults between 30 and 39 years of age represent 15%. The latest household poverty measurement report conducted by FIDEG (2020) shows that the percentage of women in condition of general poverty for 2019 was 43.4 and extreme poverty 8.9; both percentages increased 3 and 1 percentage point respectively compared to the previous measurement in 2017.

In the same period, the activity rate for women decreased from 48.2 to 44.2; they endure an unemployment rate higher than men (51.7 %), they are mainly in economic activities of the informal sector (78.1%), almost 40% perform self-employment work and 18.1 % perform unpaid family work. According to the latest Living Standard Measurement Study (INIDE, 2014), 36.4 % of women between 15 and 49 years old were engaged in household chores compared to 1.1 % of men.

In the social sphere, women show a slight improvement in indicators related to education, as there is a slight variation in the illiteracy rate from 16.2 in 2017 to 14.8 in 2019. However, the average number of years of study in the population over 10 years of age remains constant at 6.7 for 2019 (FIDEG, 2020, pp. 32-35). Women are the

head of households in 40.2% of the cases and 76% of them were single for different reasons. Another characteristic of female head of household is that they work in the tertiary sector (73.4%) and are self-employed (63.5). Early unions and teenage pregnancies are two situations with high rates in Nicaragua. In the case of early unions, 43% of women between the ages of 20 and 24 were united before the age of 18 in the period 2000-2011.

In terms of political participation, women in Nicaragua have a long history of struggle for their rights. The women's movement is one of the oldest and most dynamic since the 20th century with the demands of the suffragette movement (Montenegro Z., 2012), passing through the struggle for the overthrow of the Somoza dictatorship in 1979 and political participation during the time of the Sandinista Revolution (La Corriente; Santamaria, 2005), the strengthening of the university autonomy movement in the 1990s, the struggle for specific women's rights and the prevention of violence (Cuadra and Jimenez, 2010; Divergentes, 2022).

During the last few years, some of the major banners of political participation are related to equal opportunities, the prevention of violence against women and the restoration of democracy. Many advocacy actions of the women's movement were conducted around 2008 in the framework of the approval of the Law of Equal Rights and Opportunities (Law 648). Later on, new advocacy and participation actions were developed around the approval of the Comprehensive Law Against Violence Towards Women (Law 779).

Since before his return to the presidency in 2007, Daniel Ortega's government showed its hostility towards the women's movement for the support given to his stepdaughter Zoilamerica Ortega when she denounced him for sexual abuse in 1998 (Envio, 1998). From then on, the government kept under surveillance, persecuted and impeded women from carrying out activities related to the exercise of their rights. This practice was further exacerbated during Ortega's second presidential term when the police harassed and prevented marches on important commemorative dates such as March 8 and November

25 (Mendoza, 2014; La Prensa, 2017; La Lupa, 2022). Under these conditions, Nicaraguan women experienced different types of violence, including:

- Systematic, which is expressed in a framework of structures, beliefs, norms and social practices that reproduce and reinforce asymmetrical power relations between men and women, and the patriarchal system.
- Institutional, comprised of a set of norms, policies and institutional practices promoted and executed by the State that obstruct the full exercise of women's rights.
- Direct, expressed in femicides, injuries, sexual aggression, robberies, human trafficking, psychological violence, discrimination and social exclusion, economic and patrimonial dispossession.
- Political, expressed in discrimination and exclusion from the decision-making process, impediments to the exercise of their leadership and public positions, threats, intimidation, attacks, imprisonment and trials.

Since before his return to the presidency in 2007, Daniel Ortega's government showed its hostility towards the women's movement for the support given to his stepdaughter Zoilamerica Ortega when she denounced him for sexual abuse in 1998

SYSTEMIC VIOLENCE

These stereotyped gender images are accentuated in certain women, so that being a young woman, student or uneducated, lesbian, from outside the capital and low income, become categories of discrimination for women's political participation.

Between 2018 and 2021, the convergence of sociopolitical crisis, effects of the Covid-19 pandemic and economic crisis has meant a strengthening of the structures of violence, the reinforcement and reproduction of beliefs, representations and gender stereotypes in which women must submit to the authority of men. They had to dedicate themselves to the care of their families and households, and in many cases, be responsible for their sustenance through exhausting work and domestic workdays, migration and forced displacement due to direct violence, fear, uncertainty and lack of opportunities. In general terms and mainly due to the context, machismo is perpetuated, as well as the system of beliefs, images, social representations and gender stereotypes.

The participants in the study considered that violence against women has been normalized in Nicaraguan society. It is minimized and socially accepted. But, in this context there is also an established consent to violate women's bodies and "manly power" has been promoted. Besides the context of the sociopolitical crisis, the Covid-19 pandemic became an additional factor that reinforces gender stereotypes and roles, by forcing women to play the role of caregivers. The prolonged stay of women inside the house gave rise to an increase of domestic violence in all aspects, both physical and psychological violence and sexual violence as can be seen in official data itself. Girls and adolescents are among those who have experienced this type of violence the most.

These stereotyped gender images are accentuated in certain women, so that being a young woman, student or uneducated, lesbian, from outside the capital and low income, become categories of discrimination for women's political participation. Women human rights defenders also experience these forms of discrimination and are denigrated both by those in power and by other sectors of society.

In the case of women from the Caribbean Coast, Afro-descendants consider that there is a structured system of discrimination and racism in the country that translates into a stereotyped image of them, while women from indigenous communities experience "collective violence." The effects of the pandemic combined with the devastation caused by hurricanes Eta and Iota that impacted the region in late 2020. Indigenous communities and particularly women, were the most affected by the destruction of their property, food shortages, lack of access to medical services and medicines, among other things. In addition, they lost their jobs and were unable to fish.

In the labor area, the situation is critical, because there is no access to employment opportunities, and in the event that vacancies are found, women are required to comply with standards and biases of beauty, appearance customs and work experience, which young women do not always have. There is agreement among the participants that the combination of the sociopolitical crisis and the effects of the pandemic have seriously affected the economic situation of families in general, but especially of female-headed households. The lack of job opportunities is particularly affecting young women. Poverty in rural communities has increased and there are more dangers for women.

These conditions combine with a very strong feeling of uncertainty and ontological insecurity in relation to the future and their own security, especially if they have any political participation, so that thousands of women have to forcibly move to escape state repression or in search of security for themselves and their families.

During this period, the image and role of women as resource managers (poverty), breadwinners and responsible for supporting the family has been reinforced. And the roles and images of women as society's caregivers—insofar as teachers, nurses, social workers, psychologists, advocates, doctors—have also been boosted. Other areas are forbidden or limited to them, without taking into account their capacities or inclinations. On the political level, women are the ones in charge of helping the victims of repression, whether it be attending the wounded, arranging funerals, inquiring the whereabouts of missing people, visiting political prisoners, or reporting on their situation. In exile they have assumed the responsibility of caregivers, taking care of other displaced people, their own families including children and the elderly, as well as their families within Nicaragua.

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF INSTITUTIONAL VIOLENCE

The government dismantled the mechanisms for protection, defense and prevention of violence such as police units for women, shelters, inter-institutional commissions and special courts.

The institutional violence exerted by the state is expressed in the creation of a judicial framework that places women in a vulnerable situation, as in the case of the reforms to the Comprehensive Law against Violence Towards Women (Law 779), the Foreign Agents Law and the Special Law on Cybercrimes. The government dismantled the mechanisms for protection, defense and prevention of violence such as police units for women, shelters, inter-institutional commissions and special courts. It also hides important information on indicators to know the situation of women. For example, since 2012 it does not report data on unmet needs on family planning and since 2014 it does not report data on the index of femininity in poor households. It also does not conduct information or prevention campaigns on violence and other aspects related to their rights.

Recently, the government ordered the reopening of police units for women, but the type of attention they receive is not comprehensive. The staff is not trained and has instructions to send them to mediate with their aggressors through family counselling. Social organizations and women's rights defenders are not allowed to accompany the victims. The few shelters that exist are controlled by the police and partisan influences so that women do not feel safe or protected. The lack of access to justice is another expression of institutional violence because there is no genuine will to apply the law, political and economic influences prevail, complaints are not addressed opportunely and are not processed properly, promoting impunity for the aggressors. The most critical cases are femicides, frustrated femicides attempts and sexual violence.

The situation of women in the Caribbean Coast is not very different from that found in the Pacific. It is considered that instead of advancing women's rights, there has been a step backwards with the Equal Opportunities Law, called Law 50-50, and family counselling offices¹. There are no mechanisms of accompaniment and protection for women and girls of indigenous communities. The precarious state institutional framework in the Caribbean Coast, or its absence, especially in communities farthest away from urban centers, has a

¹ Family counselling centers were created by the government in 2014 with the supposed purpose of preventing violence. When a woman goes to the authorities to report a situation of violence, public institutions, especially the police, promotes her to participate in four mediation sessions with the aggressor and they expect that a mutual agreement is signed at the end (Judiciary, 2014).

critical effect on the prevention of and attention to violence against women.

Women in exile, particularly those in Costa Rica, also experience different forms of public and private institutional violence. For example, officials of key institutions such as Migration and the Social Security Fund often mistreat them. The bureaucracy is not accessible to them because they are not familiar with it, and they do not have adequate accompaniment.

The conjunction of systemic and institutional violence has become a dynamic factor of multiple expressions of direct violence, so that women live in environments of diverse, severe and multidimensional forms of violence. On the other hand, there is a close relationship between the weakening of democratic institutions, violence against women and violence against women's rights defenders. In this chain there are key symbolic elements that reinforce institutional violence against women and encourage public officials to attack them.

The precarious state institutional framework in the Caribbean Coast, or its absence, especially in communities farthest away from urban centers, has a critical effect on the prevention of and attention to violence against women

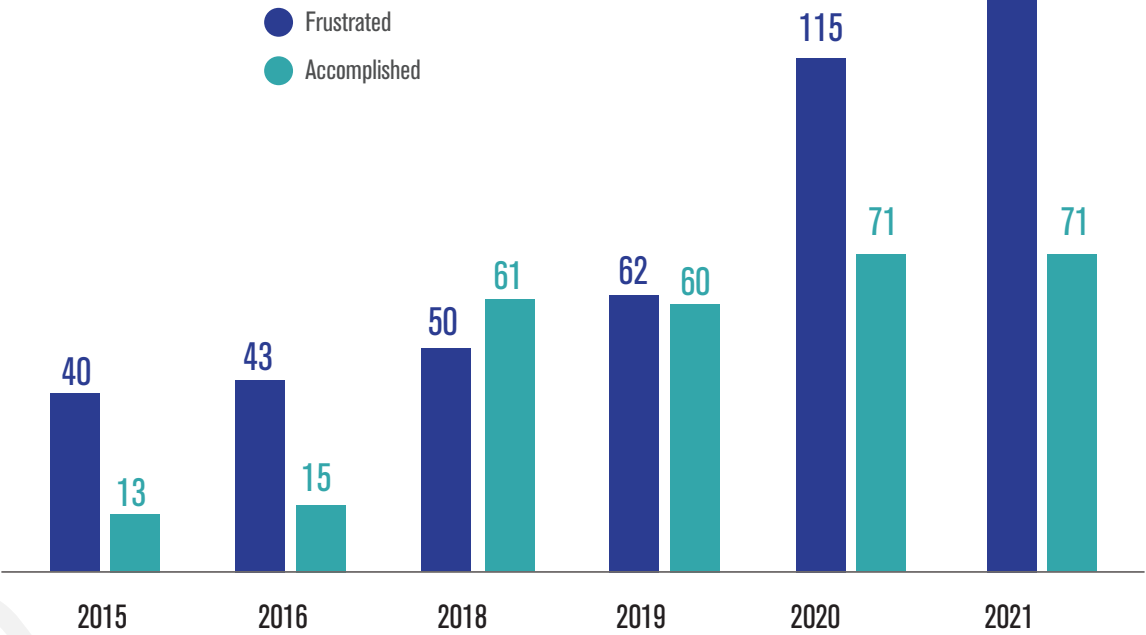
THE DYNAMICS OF DIRECT VIOLENCE

In Nicaragua, as in the rest of the world, women experience diverse and continuous forms of direct violence, both in the private and public spheres. Old practices have been reconfigured in the context of crisis and pandemic, pretending their normalization. Femicides represent one of the most serious expressions of this normalized violence. During this period, they have increased from 61 in 2018 to 71 in 2020 and 2021, while frustrated femicides attempts increased from 50 in 2018 to 115 in 2020 and 140 in 2021. In both cases there is an increasing trend. Something similar happens with sexual assaults and abuse, since the same data from public institutions such as the police and forensic medicine show girls and adolescents are the victims in 80% of the cases. Crimes related to intimidation or threats and psychological violence have also increased.

Digital violence already existed before 2018. According to a study conducted by FUNIDES (2019), it increased from that year going from 57.6 to 73.1% in 2019. Young women are the most exposed to harassment or lynching, mansplaining, memes, gifs, screenshots, photos, images. The pandemic became an additional factor due to the prolonged use of virtual platforms, affecting mainly young women and girls. Consequently, they have to be careful of their content and self-censor themselves, weakening public debate.

Digital violence, especially in the forms in which it is currently expressed in Nicaragua, is both direct violence and symbolic violence considering that it has visible expressions and other more subtle, concealed ones that seek to humiliate, belittle, discredit, blame, make women invisible and make them feel the patriarchal power through massive dissemination in social networks, its continuance in society and families, and the lack of definitions or ways to name it.

Graphic 1: Femicides 2015 – 2021



Source: Católicas por el Derecho a Decidir.

EXACERBATED POLITICAL VIOLENCE

At the high point of the social outbreak 15 women were killed; between July 2018 and May 2020, 342 were arbitrarily arrested and there are currently twenty-one (21) female political prisoners

Women have actively participated in the protests that took place in 2018 and the resistance actions sustained until today performing multiple tasks of communication, accompaniment of victims and their defense, medical assistance, logistical support. They have also played a leading role in organizing and leadership. This has placed them as direct targets of governmental repression, in such a way that a significant group has suffered arrests, imprisonment, torture and degrading treatment, sexual violence, unfair trials, surveillance, persecution, harassment and aggression of various kinds by agents of government repression. In addition, the relatives of political prisoners, especially women, are victims of psychological torture and degrading treatment. At the high point of the social outbreak 15 women were killed; between July 2018 and May 2020, 342 were arbitrarily arrested and there are currently twenty-one (21) female political prisoners.

Sexual violence has been used as a form of torture, presenting distinct patterns at least in three relevant moments: a) in the first months of 2018, women prisoners who were taken to clandestine prisons suffered physical assaults, systematic and multiple rapes, and they and their relatives were forced to remain silent; b) female political prisoners, 2018-2019, experienced physical and verbal assaults, denigrating, cruel and abusive treatment; and c) current women prisoners and female relatives are exposed to physical and verbal assaults, groping, degrading treatment.

They have also experienced virtual political violence in various forms: limited access to the internet and the ease with which they can be identified, basic equipment or devices, low digital knowledge and security skills, tracking and digital surveillance, hacking attempts, threats from fake accounts, wiretapping, bot attacks, fake news, phishing, reporting websites, public and private harassment, as well as stigmatization campaigns. More recently, they are threatened by the approval of the Special Law of Cybercrimes which is used to legalize digital surveillance, accuse, prosecute and sentence cybernauts or those who dare to express their opinions on social networks.

Political violence and repression have been aimed at specific groups of women, including young urban women through violent disciplining; women leaders of opposition groups; women at the forefront of denouncing human rights

violations, journalists, defense lawyers of women political prisoners, among others. Indigenous and Afro-descendant women have experienced censorship and threats.

Among the specific forms are persecution, assaults, attacks, threats, intimidation, kidnappings, stigmatization campaigns and imprisonment, constant harassment by the police and paramilitary groups. Many female university students who got involved as activists in the social mobilizations and take-over of campuses in 2018 suffered reprisals with expulsion and disappearance of their academic records (Perez, 2020). A report made by the Mesoamerican Registry of Attacks against Women Defenders, confirms that between January and November 2021, 2,625 assaults against women's rights defenders took place, among them: arbitrary detentions, sexual violence, threats, forced entry, smear and/or stigmatization campaigns and constant police and/or paramilitary harassment.

Women journalists in independent media have also been subjected to aggressions, threats, persecution, imprisonment and exile by the government. According to the research "Security of women journalists in El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua, 2021 (Garrido, 2021), more than 80% of journalists participating in the study asserted to having experienced some attack or threat related to the

exercise of their profession between January 2020 and July 2021. More than 60% were subjected to physical surveillance, another 60% experienced some attack or threat, 28% stated that the threats included their relatives and 12% claimed that the attacks or threats were directed against their workplace.

Political violence is experienced in civic movement groups and social organizations where men assume hierarchical and power positions intending to subordinate women. There, they usually try to relegate women to activities that are considered less risky, which limits their participation, especially in leadership positions. Young women feel that in those spaces there are misogynistic and adult oriented attitudes, so that their participation faces double obstacles.

From 2018 to the first half of 2022, the government has cancelled the legal status of more than 135 women's organizations, most of them human rights defenders and protection of victims of violence. Several organizations have had their assets arbitrarily confiscated and due to the extensiveness and swiftness with which the cancellations have been done, the scope of their consequences in terms of the number of women who will be left unprotected is not yet known.

TRANS, AFRO-DESCENDANT, INDIGENOUS AND EXILED WOMEN

The state is absent in the region so there are no protection and defense mechanisms. Economic violence is expressed as lack of work and means of subsistence, pushing them to leave their communities to migrate

Specific groups of women also experience specific forms of violence. Such is the case of trans, indigenous, Afro-descendants and exiled women. Trans women represent another group that suffers specific violence because they do not fit the traditional gender definitions and roles imposed by the patriarchal system. According to reports by the Observatory of Violations of Rights of LGBTIQ+ People for 2021 and the first semester of 2022, the most frequent forms of violence they experience are psychological, sexual, physical violence, threats, hate speech, digital violence, rejection by family and workplace violence (La Corriente, 2022).

Women in the Caribbean Coast are exposed to high levels of discrimination and exclusion. The state is absent in the region so there are no protection and defense mechanisms. Economic violence is expressed as lack of work and means of subsistence, pushing them to leave their communities to migrate to other locations inside or outside the country as an expression of the crisis, the pandemic and the destruction caused by the hurricanes of 2020. The most frequent forms of direct violence are physical assaults; sexual, economic and patrimonial violence; commercial sexual exploitation and human trafficking that mainly affects girls and adolescents. Femicides are considered to occur less frequently than in other communities, but there are more cases of sexual abuse that are generally silenced.

In indigenous communities, women suffer the consequences of settler invasions. In many cases they are threatened, assaulted, raped, kidnapped and expelled from their localities. In addition, they are exposed to domestic violence, which goes against their worldview and traditions. In the political sphere they are subject to persecution against activists, have limited access to the media, and are fired for participating and organizing social activities or for the mere suspicion of being a women's rights defender. There is harassment for being a woman, leader and black.

Forced displacement and exile is another form of political violence. It is estimated that between 2018 and 2021 approximately 150,000 Nicaraguans have left the country bound for Costa Rica, the United States and Spain. By June 2020, women represented 39% of the exiles in Costa Rica. Most of them are in precarious conditions with their families, face multiple difficulties to legalize their immigration status, find jobs, receive care and psychosocial support, resume their studies, besides facing discrimination and xenophobia. In the place of arrival, they have no protection mechanisms, nor do they have support networks, while in Nicaragua their families are targets of governmental reprisals.

“LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND:” STRATEGIES FOR PROTECTION AND DEFENSE

In a highly hostile and violent context, women have launched various strategies for their protection and defense. One of the most important is the reorganization of the movement after the closure of numerous organizations and the persecution of their leaders and activists. Another strategy is the sisterhood between women and organizations to reinvent themselves every day, to maintain the advocacy work and democracy building, to sustain the collectives, security spaces and vital support networks. The small domestic and daily resistances have allowed them to share experiences and spaces, both in-person and virtual, which have been important for support and accompaniment.

In the political sphere, feminists are trying to influence the civic movement with their views and discourses on democracy and women's rights. While in the field of cyber-activism, a defense strategy is the use of the internet, proximity with other women, digital security workshops, the use of tools and secure software, the use of pseudonyms and accompaniment by other women experts in digital technologies. On the emotional level, one of the strategies has been to lower the profile to protect oneself and continue doing advocacy and activism work, to have security plans, to have support networks, including older feminists and exchange of experiences with young women.

CONCLUSIONS

The uncertainty, insecurity, fear and psycho-emotional burden of unprocessed grief that weight on women and turn them in the pillar of the family are forcing thousands to leave the country, whether to save their lives or to find better opportunities for them and their families

Violence against women in Nicaragua has always existed. But, since the social outbreak of 2018 began, it has increased significantly and acquired the characteristics of a pandemic. As in the rest of the world, in Nicaragua exists a structured system of patriarchal domination that is rooted in the systematic practice of violence against women from birth and extends throughout their lives. These structures of domination have been strengthened by the influence of three factors: a) the sociopolitical crisis and particularly the repressive policy and police state that the government of Daniel Ortega and Rosario Murillo have imposed on Nicaraguan society and women; b) the pandemic caused by Covid-19 and the governmental health policy for its treatment; and c) the serious economic situation generated as a consequence of the first two.

This complex context covers at least the last four years and has given rise to a scenario characterized by insecurity, fear and violence against women. The expressions of this violence are multidimensional; that is, they are in all spheres of life and in a variety of ways, generating particular and complex reconfiguration dynamics that have critical effects on women in general and on specific groups.

The structures of violence against women in Nicaragua are systemic in nature; that is, they are rooted and are reproduced by society itself, with the aggravating factor that the state has become the main perpetrator of different forms of violence in recent years. In the social sphere, they are expressed as representations, beliefs, stereotypes, images and attitudes that reinforce the subordinate position of women in the structure of society. During the period under analysis, these belief systems have been strengthened especially since the Covid-19 pandemic, which forced the adoption of confinement measures, confining women inside their homes, overburdening them with the responsibility of care, substantially modifying their work practices and economic subsistence activities, in addition to exposing them to higher levels of violence. This complex context contributed to reinforce the traditional gender roles in which women appear as caretakers of the family, of its care and psycho-emotional support, particularly in situations of uncertainty, anguish and grief caused by the sociopolitical crisis and the pandemic.

These images and representations are also present in the spaces and organizations of the civic movement, as women are mainly responsible for the tasks of dissemination, logistical activities, activation of solidarity and accompaniment networks, defense of human rights, attention and accompaniment of victims, among others. They have also become the psycho-emotional support of their families and within their own spaces of participation, with the aggravating factor that they are also politically persecuted.

Several women groups experience the weight of these stereotypical images and the discrimination of the patriarchal system. Indigenous, Afro-descendants, feminists, exiled and LGBTIQ+ community women are at the intersection point where poverty, race, gender and heterosexuality cross as specifically targeted forms of domination.

The uncertainty, insecurity, fear and psycho-emotional burden of unprocessed grief that weight on women and turn them in the pillar of the family are forcing thousands to leave the country, whether to save their lives or to find better opportunities for them and their families. But these decisions are not easy, women face serious risks and more violence in their travel, as well as destination. At the center is a very strong feeling of ontological insecurity and scarcity. This feeling is more pronounced among young people, who do not find opportunities to develop their life projects in Nicaragua or abroad.

One of the actors in the potentiation of violence against women is the state, which has become a direct perpetrator by its refusal to enforce laws, the rollback that it has carried out in legal norms, the refusal to protect women's rights and rather, the application of policies that place them in an unprotected condition and of deliberate vulnerability. In fact, the policies are designed from a fundamentalist conception of power and of the role of women in society, which is promoted by Daniel Ortega and Rosario Murillo, and extends to all state institutions both in terms of their regulatory frameworks and action,

as in practice. Ortega is the ultimate representation of the perpetrator himself and of impunity, while the latter promotes a hate speech against women that justifies all forms of violence.

But the state is also a perpetrator because, particularly since 2018, it has executed a policy of repression against the entire Nicaraguan society and a substantive part is specifically directed towards women for the purpose of inflicting pain and punishing them. This is the substratum underlying the decision not to adopt any measures to prevent violence against women, and compel them to mediate with their aggressors, to deny them access to justice and to promote impunity. That purpose also underlies the persecution, repression and punishment of women who have dared to confront it in the streets during the protests.

The intertwining of machismo violence with political violence has configured an environment which is merciless with women, as can be seen in the different forms of institutional, direct, psychological, digital and symbolic violence. These complex overlaps have boosted femicides and frustrated femicides, sexual violence, physical aggressions, persecution, harassment, threats and numerous other expressions of violence. It is the frequency with which these acts of violence occur, but also of the viciousness with which they are committed and the systematicity or continuum, since they begin at birth, are expressed as sexual violence against girls and adolescents, and as physical and psychological violence against adult women as shown by the data and narratives. Political violence is also another expression of this intertwining as it has taken the form of a policy of repression specifically aimed at women who have dared to defy the regime.

This means that all these forms of violence are interrelated by their necrophiliac essence, but also because they share the purpose of breaking women's bodies in a continuum that seeks to subdue them, subordinate them, break their spirit and their resistance. Therefore, it is no coincidence that both direct violence exercised by men in general

and the political violence of the state are so merciless with women's bodies and use them as demonstration of exemplary punishment to terrorize society as a whole, especially women, and to sustain the structures of power and domination.

In this situation, women refuse to see themselves as victims. They spurn the reproduction in society of the idea of men as heroes and women as victims. They envisage and recognize themselves as protagonists and subjects of change. So, they have developed a variety of defense, protection and accompaniment strategies that demonstrate an enormous capacity for resilience and resistance since before 2018, but especially from that date until today. That capacity for resistance, of confronting power, is precisely what the government of Daniel Ortega and Rosario Murillo want to subordinate and eliminate.

As active subjects of change, women recognize their capacity for reinvention during the sociopolitical crisis and the pandemic. One of their greatest strengths is the existence of the movement and the support networks they have patiently and systematically built over time. These organizational spaces have been fundamental to accompany and support other women; but also, to carry out actions in defense of their rights, denunciation and the search for justice.

Today, Nicaraguan women, inside and outside the country, claim for themselves a space for participation, the recognition of their contributions. But, also, the right and the possibility of dreaming with a democratic society and a better future, with rights for women.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Amnistía Internacional. (2018). *Disparar a matar. Estrategias de represión de la protesta en Nicaragua*. Londres: Amnistía Internacional. Obtenido de <https://www.amnesty.org/es/documents/amr43/8470/2018/es/>
- Arciniegas, Y. (8 de Noviembre de 2021). Nicaragua: Daniel Ortega es reelegido con 75% de los votos tras unos comicios sin oposición. *France 24*.
- BBC. (31 de Diciembre de 2020). Huracanes Eta e Iota: la crisis humanitaria que dejaron en Centroamérica las tormentas (agravada por la pandemia). *BBC Mundo*.
- CEPAL. (6 de Mayo de 2022). CEPALSTAT. Obtenido de <https://statistics.cepal.org/portal/cepalstat/perfil-nacional.html?theme=1&country=nic&lang=es>
- CIDH. (2018). *Graves violaciones a los derechos humanos en el marco de las protestas sociales en Nicaragua*. Washington: CIDH.
- Confidencial. (6 de Mayo de 2022). OMS: en Nicaragua hubo al menos 12 095 muertes por covid 19 en dos años. *Confidencial*.
- Cuadra, E., & Jimenez, J. (2010). *El movimiento de mujeres y la lucha por sus derechos en Nicaragua*. Managua: CINCO.
- Divergentes. (25 de Noviembre de 2021). Violencia de Estado: 13 presas políticas bajo tortura. *Divergentes*.
- Envío. (Marzo de 1998). El caso Zoilamérica en la voz de los protagonistas. *Envío*, 192.
- FIDEG. (2020). *Informe de resultados de la encuesta de hogares para medir la pobreza en Nicaragua*. 2019. Managua: FIDEG.
- FUNIDES. (2016). *Causas y consecuencias económicas y sociales del embarazo adolescente en Nicaragua*. Managua: FUNIDES.

- Garrido, M. (2021). *Seguridad de mujeres periodistas en El Salvador, Honduras y Nicaragua*. 2021. Universidad para la Paz.
- GIEI Nicaragua. (2018). *Informe sobre los hechos de violencia ocurridos entre el 18 de abril y el 30 de mayo de 2018*. Managua: GIEI.
- INIDE. (2013). *Encuesta Nacional de Demografía y Salud 2011/12 Informe Preliminar*. Managua: INIDE.
- La Corriente. (2022). Observatorio de derechos humanos a personas LGBTQ+ en Nicaragua. Informe anual 2021. La Corriente.
- La Corriente. (2022). Observatorio de derechos humanos de personas LGBTQ+ en Nicaragua. Informe semestral Enero - Junio 2022. La Corriente.
- La Corriente. (s.f.). *AMNLAE: Mujeres en la revolución*. Obtenido de La corriente: <http://lacorrientenicaragua.org/amnlae-mujeres-en-la-revolucion/>
- La Lupa. (8 de Marzo de 2022). Ocho razones por las que el #8M no es un día de celebración en Nicaragua. *La Lupa*.
- La Prensa. (12 de Diciembre de 2019). Policía orteguista reprime y agrede a opositores, manifestantes y periodistas en Metrocentro. *La Prensa*.
- Mendoza, T. (9 de Marzo de 2014). Represión contra mujeres en su día. *La Prensa*.
- Molina, M. (2022). *Nicaragua: ¿una iglesia perseguida?*
- OACNUDH. (2018). *Violaciones de derechos humanos y abusos en el contexto de las protestas en Nicaragua. 18 abril - 18 agosto, 2018*. Ginebra: OACNUDH.
- Pérez, A. (5 de Octubre de 2020). Expulsión y desaparición de registros académicos, otra forma de represión. *La Prensa*. Obtenido de <https://www.laprensani.com/2020/10/05/nacionales/2728152-expulsion-y-desaparicion-de-registros-academicos-otra-forma-de-represion>
- Rivas, O. (19 de Abril de 2018). Crecen protestas en Nicaragua por reforma a la seguridad social. *Reuters*.
- Salazar, M. (13 de Abril de 2018). Jóvenes marcharon por Indio-Maíz a pesar de represión policial. *Confidencial*.
- Santamaria, G. (2005). *Alianza y autonomía: las estrategias políticas del movimiento de mujeres en Nicaragua*. México: Instituto Tecnológico Autónomo de México.



**BREAKING
THE BODY,
BREAKING
THE SOUL**

