Repossessing Democracy: Nicaraguan Women Migrants Constructing a Culture of Participation

BY

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THESIS
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## Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.</td>
<td>Background</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B.</td>
<td>New Realities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C.</td>
<td>Methods: The Center and the Network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D.</td>
<td>The History of the Network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E.</td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>GENDER, VIOLENCE AND MIGRATION IN THE NEOLIBERAL ERA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.</td>
<td>Converging Stories of Pervasive Violence and Migration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B.</td>
<td>State Restructuring, Participation and Struggle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C.</td>
<td>The Spaces and Scales of Gendered Experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D.</td>
<td>Interpersonal Violence: Structure and Agency at Different Scales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E.</td>
<td>Family and War as Institutions: Interpersonal Violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F.</td>
<td>Contradictions in the Everyday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G.</td>
<td>A Matter of Accumulation and Dispossession</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H.</td>
<td>Neoliberal Processes, Gender and the Reconfiguration of Labor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I.</td>
<td>Nicaragua’s Transnational Body Politic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J.</td>
<td>Identifying the Origins of Pain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K.</td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>THE CENTER: ARTICULATING PAIN AND UNEASE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.</td>
<td>Bridging: Coordinators, Meetings and a Movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B.</td>
<td>Formative Experiences of Feminism and Revolution: Lila’s History</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C.</td>
<td>Feminisms in Latin America</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D.</td>
<td>Scales of Transformation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E.</td>
<td>Pausing, Breathing, Rehearsing: The Gentle, Unhurried Space of a Neighborhood Meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F.</td>
<td>Learning to be Women Who Speak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G.</td>
<td>Mapping a Network, Planning its Moves: Leaders Coming Together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H.</td>
<td>Separating the Person and the Action: Conflict Resolution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I.</td>
<td>Prompting a Dialogue: Men and Women Discussing Family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J.</td>
<td>Finding a Voice: Elena’s Story</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K.</td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
IV   NICARAGUA: EXCLUSION IN STATE-MAKING........................................................................ 130
A. Governing, Authoritarianism and Gender in Everyday Life........................................... 133
B. Nicaragua Marginality and Future Imagining in the Post-Colonial Period ...................... 137
C. Somoza Dictatorship and the Consolidation of the Gendered, Authoritarian Household 141
D. Democratic Openings: Legacies of Transition............................................................... 145
E. Attempts to Forge Participatory Democracy................................................................... 147
F. State Gender Campaigns and their Discontents............................................................... 152
G. Gender Transformation in Everyday Life ...................................................................... 155
H. Transformation Through the Lens of the Women’s Movement ..................................... 157
I. Feminisms and Gender in Post-Revolution Government Policy and Civil Society .......... 160
J. New Responses: Labor Abroad....................................................................................... 168
K. Conclusion..................................................................................................................... 173

V. EMERGENT WAYS OF LEAVING VIOLENCE ................................................................ 175
A. Emigrations and Emergences......................................................................................... 177
B. Migration and the Global Economy............................................................................... 182
C. Converging Forms of Violence...................................................................................... 187
D. Negotiating Violence and Deciding to Migrate.............................................................. 190
E. Slantwise Behavior........................................................................................................ 196
F. War. Gender-Based Violence and Migration................................................................. 198
G. Emotional Labor in War................................................................................................ 200
H. Her Voice Still Echoes In My Head............................................................................... 202
I. We Began to Leave Bags Packed .................................................................................. 205
J. Isolation and Violence .................................................................................................... 207
K. Anita’s Story: The Violence of Family:........................................................................ 208
L. Abuse and Neglect and the Border: Common stories .................................................. 214
M. Conclusion: Mechanisms of Dispossession and Women’s Migration......................... 217

VI CONSTRUCTING EXCLUSION IN LAND OF PURA VIDA .............................................. 222
A. Exclusion in the Exceptional State.................................................................................. 226
B. Creating the Discourse of Exceptionalism..................................................................... 228
C. Borders: Defining National Space.................................................................................. 235
D. Restructuring, Unease and Migration.......................................................................... 240
E. Migrants, Exceptionalism and Stability....................................................................... 244
A. Erasure and Opportunity ................................................................. 422
B. Violence and Dispossession: ............................................................... 423
C. Grounded Experience and Organizing .................................................. 427
D. Hegemony and Dissent .................................................................. 430
XI CITED REFERENCES ........................................................................ 432
XII VITA .......................................................................................... 461
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BAMBI</td>
<td>Bank of Housing and Mortgage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DGME</td>
<td>Department of migration and foreigners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONAP</td>
<td>National Commission for Education Loans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IMAS</td>
<td>Institute of Mixed Social Aid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INA</td>
<td>National Training Institute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INAMU</td>
<td>National Women’s Institute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INVU</td>
<td>National Institute of Housing and Urban Planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEP</td>
<td>Ministry of Education</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SUMMARY

This dissertation is based on ethnographic research using participant observation, semi-structured interviews and informal survey methods. During fieldwork, I conducted 140 interviews with 65 members of the Network, and additional interview with 5 staff members of the Center, and 10 members of other organizations collaborating with the Network and the Center. Most interviews varied in length between one and three hours; I conducted 2 interviews with approximately three quarters of all Network participants. I also conducted participant observation of the Network and the Center meetings; participated with them in marches; assisted with outreach activities, such as community health fairs and immigration information fairs, as well as meetings with policy makers.

The research demonstrated that Nicaraguan women, both emigrants and family members work to raise awareness about the prevalence of violence in their daily lives. While policy is largely focused on protecting access to economic resources that migrants generate both abroad and in Nicaragua, relatively little attention has been placed on ensuring access to services that recognize, prevent and protect them from physical, emotional and institutional violence. The data collected firmly supports the argument that emigration and migrant marginality are directly tied to the lack of institutional mechanisms for resolving situations of violence, and economic marginality, which limit the options of victims to leave situations of violence.

The research also showed that Nicaraguan women draw on those organizing methods and strategies that feminist activists developed during Nicaragua’s revolutionary period. Migrant women now draw on cross-cultural feminist frameworks that question dominant understandings of democracy, participation and citizenship. The research shows that they focus on bringing about new ways of understanding these terms. Furthermore, they carry out this project in different spaces and at different scales: the home, the neighborhood, public service offices, public protests and policy-making meetings. Principally, the movement seeks to challenge to patriarchal and neoliberal social hierarchies.
1 INTRODUCTION

A. Background

My dissertation focuses on a transnational immigrant rights movement in Costa Rica and Nicaragua, exploring the organizing practices of the Network of Nicaraguan Women Migrants in Costa Rica, hereafter referred to as the Network. The Network provides a lens on the interconnections between gender, migration, violence and the rollback of social and democratic rights in Central America. While Costa Rica is one of the wealthiest countries in Latin America, Nicaragua is one of the poorest countries. Furthermore, Costa Rica is widely regarded as the most democratic country in Latin America, while Nicaragua is described as the most politically fragmented. Gendered violence, most prominently interpersonal abuse and socioeconomic exclusion, is a fact of life for most Nicaraguan women, and at the root of most Network women’s journeys. Nicaraguan women migrants supply a significant portion of the labor required for Costa Rica to participate in global markets, yet they remain a racialized other in Costa Rica, confronting both familiar and new forms of exclusion. Their experience indicates the ways that social hierarchies adopted through colonial and neo-colonial foreign intervention persist in dominant contemporary culture, structuring intra- and international political economy as much as everyday interactions. Network women’s experiences of migration demonstrate that the political economy dovetails with patriarchal logic. In this dissertation, I focus on the appearance, perpetuation and resurgence of violence at different scales. I also examine women’s visceral experience of these forms of violence at different times and in different places. Finally, I examine how it compounds throughout their lives. Women also interwove depictions of violent experiences with stories of the ways they had come to recognize their shared invisible experience and to organize around the issues of violence and erasure. Drawing on the memory of Nicaragua’s past revolution and its associated social movements, women linked their experiences
of gender-based violence to their political, economic, and cultural exclusion. It produces a cross-cultural, multi-scalar feminism. It demonstrated the ways that grounded experiences of persistent exclusion—in spite of inclusionary laws—comes to inform contemporary organizing logics.

The interaction between gendered violence and neoliberal restructuring augments marginality for Nicaraguan women who emigrate to Costa Rica and their response to this marginality by organizing with the Network. When I began my fieldwork, I went to work with organized Nicaraguan women who had migrated to take low paid positions in domestic work. I framed their migration within a neoliberal narrative. I presumed that migration was the way in which women from the poorest sectors of Nicaragua resolved the effects of privatization. I surmised that they sought domestic employment abroad and sent remittances home. These arrangements would reduce the costs of household reproduction in Costa Rica and provide families in Nicaragua with higher income from wages earned abroad. In turn, this reduced the pressure on government to bolster state services, freeing up capital locked in state enterprises and programs for the market (Feldman et al 2011). I anticipated that organized immigrant women, fed up with what some migrants had described as the disintegration of their families over the years they had spent abroad, had come to understand that successive governments benefitted from their marginality without so much as acknowledging their contributions. Furthermore, I observed from the outset that women were perceived to have abandoned their families in Nicaragua and to threaten Costa Rica with their presence. I anticipated that in the face of these perceptions, they would position themselves as a workforce deserving of rights and recognition in both countries. Scholarly work in both countries, in addition to popular efforts to contest rising xenophobia in Costa Rica, reinforced my confidence in this account. I assumed that the Network
would focus on economic changes in Nicaragua while valorizing the contributions that women make working jobs that Costa Ricans reject.

I realized through my fieldwork that although this narrative focused on the economic arrangements that explain Nicaraguan women’s migration resonated with an increasingly broader public, it hid key issues that women face in both countries. I spent twelve months with the Network of Nicaraguan Women Migrants in Costa Rica (the Network), the Network of Women Relatives of Migrants in Nicaragua (the Network in Nicaragua), and the Center for the Social Rights of Migrants (the Center). As women shared their life stories with me, I realized that emigration was one in a series of strategies that women utilized to escape violence, both domestic and structural and that their stories of emigration coincided chronologically with the political-economic shifts mentioned above. These women, responding to gendered, interpersonal violence exacerbated by social, political and economic marginality, had migrated to Costa Rica heeding its image as a land of democracy and opportunity. However, once abroad, women continued to experience abuse in the household. They found themselves relegated to jobs as nannies, housekeepers, and restaurant workers. They resided in precarious housing within peripheral neighborhoods and were unable to access social services. Their hope that the border would provide a barrier to interpersonal violence collapsed as they continued to experience abuse in their households and neighborhoods, while suffering from the additional burden of not-belonging. By studying women’s organizations, I explore how these women witnessed their own experiences with migration; how they came to join the Network as they navigated and confronted persistent forms of violence; and how, through the Network they found new ways to address the unfulfilled expectations that motivated them to migrate in the first place, as they developed the sense that they had a right to have rights.
Throughout my fieldwork I would sit in women’s homes as they told me stories of ongoing everyday forms of abuse they had suffered and that impelled them to organize. They also recounted the transformations they had been making in their everyday lives. Individually, many of these transformations appeared inconsequential, but taken together, pointed to the attempt to produce a transformation of the values, meanings, ways of being and ways of seeing that constituted dominant culture. For example, on my final Sunday in Costa Rica before returning to Chicago, I sat on Elena’s back porch for the last time with her neighbors and fellow Network members, Ileana and Fernanda. We relaxed in nylon string-iron rod framed rocking chairs, sipping coffee and laughing. We looked out on her back patio, where a few plants grew. Elena chuckled, “you know, I had a woornderful chayote vine that I planted when we first built this house.” Without hesitating she recalled “When my husband moved in with his mistress he asked me to give him the chayote” As she spoke, she waved her hand towards an unseen house to the north, a few blocks beyond her back patio. “Can you believe, the nerve!?” she exclaimed, becoming more animated. “I had cultivated that vine!” She paused for emphasis. “So,” she said, smiling coyly, “I ripped it out of the ground. I ripped it out of the ground and left it there to die, so neither of us would have it.” Once she let him return to live with her and he would often mention the vine. She avoided the question and eventually just told him she had let it wither. “When I finally succeeded in proving his abuse to the judge with the help of the Network and when they finally sentenced him with jail time,” she concluded, “I swore I would replant the garden here. [As a single mother] I haven’t had time. I’ve been working and organizing with the Network.” Had Elena told me this story when I first arrived to Costa Rica, it would not have

1 A soft squash, known in English as Mirleton. In the U.S. it is most seen in Mexican-American and Louisiana Creole and Cajun cuisine.
made a great impression on me. But after having sat in different women’s homes for hours on end, I recognized that the chayote symbolized the presumption that she would simply turn her work and care over to him, expecting nothing in return. An otherwise innocuous slight, in these circumstances the request for the chayote plant constituted one in a multiplicity of forms of abuse and exclusion the women described experiencing daily. It counted among the exact types of expectations and interactions that they aimed to transform.

On that last day in Costa Rica, I was also able to identify different ways that Elena’s transformation into an “organized woman” as she referred to herself, had changed her everyday life. At the beginning of my year of fieldwork, Elena and I would sit and talk for hours without interruption. But as she worked to become a leader in her community, women in the neighborhood began to seek her out for information and advice. Earlier that day while we waited for Ileana and Fernanda to arrive, a large group of women with children in tow came knocking on Elena’s front gate. “We are here for the meeting,” they called out. Elena and I looked at each other in confusion. Elena opened the gate and arranged seats on her front patio where she had housed a convenience store and arcade games until break-ins became frequent. As the year progressed, the leftover arcade games had disappeared one by one and a growing number of chairs for Network meetings appeared. Her patio became a convenient neighborhood meeting space as she became a leader. On that particular day, the women sat and Elena asked them, “which meeting?” The women asked after a new project offered by the Institute for Mixed Social Aid (IMAS), which they had heard about. Elena, still confused about why they thought there would be a meeting but familiar with the project, provided a brief description. She explained that IMAS would pay neighborhood women to conduct neighborhood clean-ups while training them in organic vegetable cultivation. With this training, they would be expected to convert many
untended areas bordering their neighborhood—a former squatter settlement—into cultivated plots. The produce would be slated to feed their families and sell locally. She finished by briefly reviewing the conditions for participation and provided the women with the date and time for the scheduled meeting with IMAS. They chatted a moment longer about other neighborhood issues and filed out.

Elena was the newest board member for the neighborhood Network committee and had recently been elected secretary when I arrived for my fieldwork. She had just begun to embrace her role as a leader. By the end of the year, it had become clear that women in the neighborhood were turning to her as a resource. She herself was focused on establishing an office for the Network in the neighborhood. “Ha!” I laughed and teased Elena once the women had left. “You’re a regular information center here now.” She nodded and smiled. “And I used to be the one who never spoke.” “Does this happen all week?” I asked. “Do women just stop by and ask you about things?” Her smile grew wider and she firmly replied “yes.”

As other women discussed their history of involvement in the Network they described changes they had made to open themselves more to their neighbors in their everyday lives. Most claimed they had lived insular lives, before. They had only concerned themselves with placating their husbands and raising their children. After “becoming organized with the Network” as they said, they began to associate well-being in the community with their own well-being. This change entailed changes in their thinking, in the ways of interacting with others, and in the ways they used the spaces of their homes and communities. Anita described dividing the space of a chalkboard hanging on her front door. On one half, she listed the flavors of ice cream she was selling. She dedicated the other half of the board to announcing upcoming Network and Center activities. Ileana described spending her days accompanying neighbors on the full-day trip to the
immigration office to ensure they filed their residency papers correctly. Ximena recalled how she had begun stopping by neighbors homes routinely to chat with them and ensure she was aware of their concerns. I heard similar stories of struggle, transformation and organizing from one woman after another. They told stories about mundane acts that to each of them symbolized a profound transformations. It is in this context, with this support, that Elena pulled the *chayote* vine out of the ground, symbolizing her journey to separate from her husband and “become an organized woman.”

Later that day as she concluded her story about the vine, Elena noted that the chayote no longer mattered because women in the neighborhood, trained through the IMAS program, would soon begin to plant *huertas* (small garden plots). Because of this “we’ll have products for ourselves. Hopefully, we’ll be able to generate income. And that will help enable us women to stand alone if we choose.” Moreover, she could laugh about the vine incident in Ileana and Fernanda’s presence. The three had formed a strong friendship once each of them had separated from her abusive relationship. Previously they had known of each other but had never spoken. In these different moments throughout the day, the changes Elena had made as an organized woman stood out. She had become aware of the resources available to her, conscious of her rights, connected with her community and comfortable building relationships with those around her. This dissertation draws on the stories of members of the Network and my participation in and observation of their organizing activities, to portray and analyze the forms of violence that push Nicaraguan women to emigrate to Costa Rica, organize in the face of perpetual exclusion abroad, and to engage in a movement whose transformative aims and strategies address their intersecting experiences of exclusion as poor women migrants and as a racialized informal labor class.
B. New Realities
During the seven years I spent living and working in Costa Rica, from 2000 to 2008, before undertaking graduate studies, I became involved with various organizations working in marginal rural and urban communities. These communities worked to discursively reposition themselves as vibrant neighborhoods, thick with organizations. I came upon the Network and the Center after one of these organizations closed its doors in the wake of the 2008 worldwide recession. Many funds for programs in arts and education had lost funding over the previous four years, as government cutbacks began to affect outreach programs such as adult education courses, specialized community clinics and communications. I returned to Costa Rica and Nicaragua in 2009 and again in 2012-2013, supported by a National Science Foundation Doctoral Dissertation Research Improvement Grant and three small grants from the University of Illinois at Chicago.

Costa Rica was visibly different as it neared the end of Laura Chinchilla’s presidency, the protégé and successor of “Nobel Laureate” and architect of the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) negotiations in Costa Rica, Oscar Arias. The ability to get by was no longer within reach. Costa Ricans and Nicaraguans alike were attempting to compensate for stagnant wages in the face of rising costs of living. Many friends had taken second jobs. Others had returned to school, seeing this as the only way to gain access to higher wages. But fares, hovering around 20 cents when I lived in Costa Rica before, had nearly tripled. Rent had increased as well. I paid the same price for a studio apartment as my friends and I had paid for a three bedroom apartment four years earlier. Cab rides, once considered a cheap and safe way to travel the city had quadrupled in price. Dissatisfaction with the government’s management of the economy was palpable.
Even more blatant was the turn towards a security state. The police force walked up and down most blocks, throughout the downtown area of the city, extending a few miles in either direction. Police surveillance towers dotted the downtown central boulevard. Police and students clashed on various occasions during protests. In the past, we had made police presence the regular subject of jokes. We would laugh at four policemen that we could see riding through the city together in a car, seemingly just to enjoy themselves and ogle women. Occasionally older friends would reminisce about confrontations with the police in the late 80s when students were constantly protesting. But throughout the first decade of the 2000s, I only interacted with police in precincts when they would respond aloofly my requests that they file a report whenever one of my students was mugged. It appeared that a decade of political campaigns promising to employ an iron fist to quell growing concerns over insecurity had justified the deployment of police to overtly surveil and control public activity.

Upon my return in 2012, there was also a greater sense of state concern with tracking migrants. The abrupt announcement of a regularization program took immigrant support groups by surprise. *Transitorio* (transitory) was the name given to a limited opportunity for some immigrants to regularize their status. It was open to immigrants whose residency had expired, who had arrived as minors and spent more than 10 years living in Costa Rica, who suffered from disabilities or were senior citizens, and those who had been working without documents for more than a year in the country.² From the date it was announced, it gave migrants three months to submit applications. It required, first, that migrants obtain special issue birth certificates and passports from the Nicaraguan consulate in San Jose, the initiative triggered a rush of

² The initiative, implemented in May 2012, was publically announced in July 2012. The original deadline for submitting application was set for November 2012 but then extended for certain categories of workers. It was mandated by General Law of Migration and Alien Affairs (No. 8,764), which went into effect in March 2010.
applications that effectively collapsed consular services, the Costa Rican police records-issuing office and finally, the ministry of immigration and foreign services. The initial rush on the consulate was so great that a line of people wrapped around the building. Nicaraguans slept on the street through the night for days on end to hold their place in line. Once the consulate switched to appointment-only services the long line of those with appointments still filled the street every morning, while the appointment phone lines essentially collapsed. The consulate became a spectacle of its own. Located along one of the principal thoroughfares, it drew the attention of bus riders and drivers as they sat in morning traffic along the clogged route. The origins of this spectacle were not obvious to most who passed, but they were interpreted as another sign of mismanagement.

Meanwhile, in Nicaragua emigration was a frequent topic of conversation, but was rarely mentioned in the media. Women would walk with me down the streets of their neighborhoods describing each household based on who had emigrated from it. Already in its second term, the Ortega administration (2007-present) never mentioned the phenomenon although First Lady Rosario Murillo delivered a weekly radio address to report on current events and government initiatives. There was clear unrest over other issues. Feminist groups clamored for the implementation of Law 779, enabling measures to prevent and address violence against women. Senior citizens clamored in the streets over changing pension requirements. Electricity bills pushed $100 per month for the poorest, urban sectors. People unplugged refrigerators at night, turned out lights and turned on fans only when at home to deal with the searing heat. They wondered out loud about a “true people’s government” ever returning to power. On my daily hour long ride between my home in Granada and Managua, the capital, I would observe the various posters of Daniel Ortega. He was pictured dressed in a white work shirt and slacks,
holding his fist in the air. Different words would be splashed in pink cursive across the poster: “the people-president” or “Christian, socialist and solidary.” Everywhere I went I spotted people walking around with t-shirts from annual the FSLN celebration of the anniversary of the triumph of the Revolution, which had been celebrated since 2007, the first year the FSLN returned to the presidency. Judging by this publicity, the revolutionary spirit was alive and well. But if judged by the number of jokes I heard about these t-shirts and posters, they only seemed symbolic of an embattled present.

C. Methods: The Center and the Network
My dissertation explores the work of the Network in Costa Rica. I conducted my research with women who were “organized with the Network.” I also briefly conducted research with women participating in the Network’s sister organizations in Nicaragua. Network women were Nicaraguan women migrants living in Costa Rica who had participated in the activities of the Center for the Social Rights of Migrants in Costa Rica, which I will refer to as the Center. However, participating in these activities was not sufficient to be a member of the Network. Rather, being part of the Network signaled that one demonstrated a commitment to organizing with women who participated in these activities outside of Center spaces. Organizing practices included on the one hand, participating in meetings, workshops and public events that furthered the Network’s goals, entrenched them in the public eye and consolidated their efforts into a movement. On the other hand, being organized signified that one engaged in the work of concertedly and collectively incorporating transformative practices learned in Center activities into one’s daily life. Thus, the organization of the Network was inextricably linked to the work of the Center. These connections aside, both Network members and Center workers share the goal of making Network women the facilitators of meetings and activities, rendering the Network and the Center distinct, but articulating organizations. The activities of Network women
in meetings and spaces facilitated by the Center is the subject of the third chapter of the dissertation. The context in which organizing emerged, will be described in chapters four, five, six and seven. The practices that constitute organizing are the subjects of chapters eight and nine.

Being organized with the Network principally entailed informal forms of association. Each community involved in the Network had a board that organized and promoted Network and Center activities in the community and also elected representatives for the board of the entire Network. In theory, women who belonged to the Network participated in monthly Network meetings being held in their respective neighborhoods and further semi-annual full membership meetings, under the guidance of Lila, program coordinator for the Network, and Leticia, the founder and director of the Center. However these meetings, convened by Center program coordinators, were taking place only occasionally throughout my fieldwork period due to changes in funding and fluctuating meeting locations. Beyond this, there was no formal acknowledgement of one’s participation in the Network. Instead, women in each community knew who else engaged in Network practices and who actively supported the Network’s transformational project. Network members routinely distinguished between those community members who simply showed up at workshops hosted by the Center within each neighborhood and those who responded to participation in the workshops by engaging in the work of community building and social transformation. Those who considered themselves and were considered to “be organized” felt that women who participated in Center activities without becoming organized were those who had not remedied situations of violence within the home, whether by leaving an abusive home or transforming their relationships with those in the home. In this sense, it was implied that women universally faced abuse unless they had become organized and remedying abuse signaled engagement in the Network.
I began my work at the Center by attending meetings that took place there. Lila, the vice president of the Network and the coordinator of community activities with the Center, progressively incorporated me into more activities. I joined Network women in meetings of three types. First, I attended planning meetings of the community boards and general Network membership. Generally, each group held a monthly meeting: one for the board of the entire Network at the Center, one for Grupo La Merced at the Center and one meeting each for San Felipe, Cartaguito, and San Jorge held at local Network members’ homes. The differences between these groups will be described in the following section. At each meeting, a senior member of the Network was present. She would be accompanied by Center staff and volunteers who advised community leaders regarding ways to resolve community issues. Here I observed how decisions were made about programming for each group including the types of workshops and support that each group asked the Center to coordinate, but also, the initiatives that Network women were themselves coordinating. These meetings also provided leadership training by imparting skills that members of the leadership committee summoned to organize within their communities. Finally, it was a space in which leaders could discuss issues or accomplishments they had observed or that other community members had reported during the preceding month.

The Center also held three programs in each community that involved members of the Network in addition to other community members: the “prevention of gender based violence” program, the “speaking amongst women” program and social and reproductive rights workshops for youth. Women often came to organize with the Network through their participation on these activities.

At Center meetings, I would observe the ways that staff prepared themselves to tailor their interventions to address issues pertinent to the communities they worked with. On various occasions, I was privy to discussions of funding and the preparation of reports for funding
agencies. In these meetings, I observed the ways that Center staff negotiated the challenges of maintaining initiatives they found important. Lila routinely epitomized the difficulty of funding, exclaiming: “we have to adjust whatever is *de moda* (in fashion). One year it was migrants, another year LGBT issues and still another HIV-AIDS!” Her intent was not to detract from the importance from any of these issues but instead, to point to the inherent problem of a yearly funding cycle in light of community issues that required more than a year of funding to resolve. She would also comment on the inadequacy of funding evaluations to address the issues they targeted. On one occasion, Lila and Leticia were budgeting funds for the support of women in acute situations of domestic violence to cover their transport to shelters, emergency medical support and legal support. They estimated ten women, then hemmed and hawed. Leticia dryly asked “and what if we don’t assist ten?” Lila answered, ironically “then we call up a man we know and get him to beat his wife!” It was not that Lila was making light of women’s plight, but instead, of the difficulty of maintaining funds. If ten women were not treated over the following year, they might be refused funding to cover ten women in subsequent years. At risk was the inability to attend women according to expected fluctuations in the number of cases. Instead, they attempted to quantify their work with women to fund key programs.

I also observed meetings where the Center brought in outside assistance to guide them in evaluating their programs and improving their work. Malena, a popular education program director in Nicaragua, annually attended the first meeting of the calendar year to assist staff in evaluating their programs against the backdrop of the socio-political and economic conditions and events in each country. For example, she opened one discussion by asking us to characterize how we saw emigration being addressed by the Nicaraguan government and how we related this to the work of the Center. In such meetings, staff and volunteers were encouraged to share their
projects, goals and critiques. Such exercises were intended to increase communication and articulation between programs.

The final component of my research was spending time with members of the Network outside of Network and Center activities. I would visit members of the Network in their homes or accompany them on errands. Sometimes we would sit for a semi-structured interview, sometimes we would converse informally. At other times, I would join them in their social time with other women from their neighborhoods, from the Network, or from other areas of their lives. Here I could observe their concerns outside of those discussed in Network activities. It gave me a window on their lives, their social time, their values and their forms of humor. I learned to see the city through their eyes: the places they felt comfortable socializing, where they purchased items for their homes, where they sought materials for side jobs and where they found food that reminded them of home. I also observed how many people they knew in the area. I also conducted research in Nicaragua, visiting groups who occasionally collaborated with the Network in Costa Rica. I conducted month-long homestays with women whose engagement with the Network, as family members of migrants intersected with their work with the Women’s Alliance of the Segovias, or the Alliance. Because of the distance between them, I chose an extended stay to gain a stronger understanding of life in rural areas, from which many women were emigrating.

The Center also coordinated the participation of the Network and other migrants from immigrant communities in meetings with policy makers, marches and other spaces where they felt it was important that immigrant voices be included and where they felt immigrants should receive the same training and participation as anyone else in the country. Likewise, I accompanied the Network in Nicaragua when they were invited by the domestic workers
association to participate in forums with policy makers. Finally, I participated in marches along with members of the Network in both countries.

During fieldwork, I conducted 140 interviews with 65 members of the Network, and additional interview with 5 staff members of the Center, and 10 members of other organizations collaborating with the Network and the Center. Most interviews varied in length between one and three hours. I conducted 2 interviews with approximately three quarters of all Network participants. I also conducted participant observation of the Network and the Center meetings; participated with them in marches, assisted with outreach activities such as community health fairs and immigration information fair and meetings with policy makers. I spent the first six months based out of Costa Rica, travelling to Nicaragua approximately every 2 months to visit members of the Network there. From March until August 2013, I made Nicaragua my principal base, though I spent time in Costa Rica, every two months.

D. The History of the Network

Through these interviews and interactions, I was able to piece together a history of how the Network itself had formed. The founding members of the Network referred to themselves collectively as Grupo La Merced (Mercy Group), having met each other in the Braulio Carillo Park located in front of the Iglesia de la Merced (Mercy Church) and just a few blocks west of the Central Park. Previously considered the park for drunks and avoided by most Costa Ricans (Sandoval 2002), it provided a comfortable place for Nicaraguans to meet on their days off after they began arriving to San Jose in large numbers in the 1990s. Buses from the southern neighborhoods of the city, where many immigrants reside, made their final stop nearby. The church began to offer Nicaraguan services such as the ‘campesino’ or ‘popular mass’, a musical performance of mass, taking cues from the liberation theology of Vatican II (see Lancaster 1988). Caritas, a catholic organization that provided training to immigrants and others, also
operated out of the church’s social ministry building, offering workshops and activities. A block east, a small commercial center filled with Nicaraguan vendors offered classic Nicaraguan snacks, such as cassava salad, pork with cheese, cacao and corn based drinks and coconut and milk fudge. Produce markets and discount stores came to surround the park, allowing migrants to socialize and shop nearby.

Members of Grupo La Merced, most of them domestic workers who had left family behind in Nicaragua and resided in the homes of employers in Costa Rica, began to notice each other sitting in the park alone on weekends. They began to socialize. On various occasions, members recounted their response when one of them became sick. While the rest of the group formed a circle around the woman to provide privacy, a trained nurse in the group administered a shot in her buttocks. The memory served as a symbol that they had become each other’s support system. They also recalled that on many occasions, someone would bring a radio. Whenever one of them celebrated a birthday, they would hold a party in the park, complete with a cake. The first time that Angela saw them, just after arriving to Costa Rica, she was walking by the park, feeling lonely. She saw a group of women dancing together and shrieking with laughter. She approached them, asking who they were. “Friends,” they replied, and welcomed her to join. This core group continued to maintain strong ties over the years that they had known each other.

The Network itself was born in the Center’s office. The Center had been opened by its current director, Leticia, as an effort to operate a branch of Nicaragua’s Polytechnic University, after she immigrated to Costa Rica from Nicaragua. Although this effort was ultimately hindered by problems between the two countries, the organization began to work towards providing programs for migrants. Funded by various entities, it has provided programs for the immigrant community since 2001. The original office, housed in a building just south of the city center, was
open on weekends for domestic workers to receive talks or plan activities. *Grupo La Merced* quickly adopted the space and it was here that the Network was born. Most weekends, Lila recalled, “we would sit and share our stories, sharing the anxiety of being abroad, the sense of isolation of working in homes and relieve ourselves of the persistent guilt of being away from our families.” The shared space also permitted relaxation. For example, Monica remembered that Lila would dance around in an apron as she cooked up the vegetables and other food contributions each woman had brought along. From the beginning, the Network emerged as a vehicle for recognizing, addressing and dealing with the challenges of life abroad.

During my fieldwork, due to rising city center rents, the Center’s office was temporarily re-located 30 minutes (by bus ride) east of the city. Because the women of *Grupo La Merced* lived alone, they were often removed from immediate spousal abuse, but found themselves excluded in other ways. They continued meeting to work together. For this reason on most Sundays, the women met in the park in late morning after completing household chores. They would run errands in the early afternoon. Members of *Grupo La Merced* were interested in learning about their rights as women workers and as women. On many weekends, they spent a few hours at meetings, in between, whether at the Center’s new offices or at related workshops hosted by other organizations. At the Center, meetings would give way to informal dance parties. They meetings often preceded their visit a dance hall located on the second floor of a building downtown, overlooking 4th avenue. There they would dance as a group through the early evening before returning home.

After the formation of the Network amongst the members of *Grupo la Merced*, Lila described to me at our first meeting, the Network expanded into various immigrant neighborhoods throughout San Jose, training women with experiences distinct from those of
domestic workers to be community leaders. In these particular neighborhoods, segregated from
others in San Jose by their high percentage of Nicaraguan residents, small houses were occupied
by a single family, typically consisting of parents and their children. Women, often staying and
working from home, balanced house and childcare with the need to obtain paid work. The
Network later expanded into an immigrant neighborhood in the semi-urban town of San Felipe in
the neighboring province of Alajuela. Finally, they had begun working organizing in a rural
town, San Jorge, a five-hours’-drive from the city straddling the border between Costa Rica and
Nicaragua. Network members told me that Lila, formerly the elected president of the Network,
was known for visiting all of the communities to speak with the women there, encouraging them
to become organized. Lila explained that these groups worked on empowerment, citizen
participation, gender-equality, and self-esteem, having distinct needs from Grupo La Merced:

In the neighborhoods, women felt they couldn’t participate, opine nor make decisions.
Their levels of formal education were particularly low. They created the goal of having
voice and vote; increasing participation, having a secure place in community groups and
taking ownership of their own migrant community network.

For women in the neighborhoods, reaching the Center’s office was costly and time-consuming.
To address this, meetings were held in their neighborhoods in the early afternoon, attentively
wedged between morning household cooking and cleaning, being home for children in the
afternoon, and dinner duties. They often attended meetings accompanied by children. Those who
held jobs outside of the home attended inconsistently, only joining when schedules permitted.
Neighborhood leaders’ homes became information centers. Neighbors would stop by and ask
about programs, about advice on the recent legal status regularization program and on meetings.

When the Network brushed up against the difficulty of having an impact in Nicaragua,
given the lack of policies driving state initiatives for Nicaraguan migrants, they looked to form a
group in Nicaragua. Impacting Nicaraguan politics was particularly difficult from abroad, not
only because of the persistent suspect perception of any attempt to influence the Nicaraguan scene from abroad, but also in the face of the overall invisibility and day-to-day lack of sympathy for migrants to Costa Rica. Moreover, Network leaders were aware of the sporadic articulation or coordination between Costa Rican and Nicaraguan heads of state and state officers. They garnered the support of another organization in Costa Rica to gather women in Nicaragua to form a Nicaraguan counterpart to the Network. The group in Nicaragua would form its own agenda, but also be involved in formulating policies. They focused on the ease of immigration transactions and raising consciousness among those who planned to migrate by disseminating information about the realities of migrating and of life abroad. In 2012, the board consisted of approximately 12 members, among them family members of migrants with minimal previous training. They met sporadically and did not produce ongoing programs. I spent various months working with the organization, but found that it operated in a way that was largely disconnected from the Network in Costa Rica, which had been the principal focus of my research. It did become clear that two members of this counterpart organization were part of another women’s association that had long been working around these issues. These women, Lola and Cecilia hailed from the Women’s Alliance of the Segovias (the Alliance), a group of rural women, agricultural producers, who have been organized for fourteen years, over the interconnected issues of women’s rights, agricultural production and [urban and international]

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3 Initially, the facilitators of the Network Nicaragua summoned a selection of women for their political and community presence or their professional capabilities; some had been community organizers since the time of the Revolution, others worked in politics; some were lawyers working in the ministry of the family, others professors who wrote about migration. Some were the children and relatives of members of the Network in Costa Rica. The Network in Nicaragua expanded membership more formally by forming coalitions with other organizations, garnering as many as 50 attendees in the past. But outside of meetings, there was no clear agenda. They seemed to see their main impact as assisting in connecting new emigrants to the Network in Costa Rica to ensure they received support as they became established in Costa Rica and engaging in some efforts to visibilize the struggles of those who remained. At the same time, I realized the absence of a transformative project amongst members of the Network in Nicaragua nor signs that one would consolidate. Furthermore, despite my inquiries and attention to it, I did not see the ways that their work clearly complemented and articulated with the Network (in Costa Rica), nor signs that such a project would consolidate. For this reason, the focus of the dissertation itself leans heavily towards the organizing practices of the Network in Costa Rica.
emigration. It was from my engagement with the communities where Lola and Cecilia lived and worked that I gained a more grounded view of the issues producing emigration. Ultimately, my engagement in Nicaragua provided a window on the difficulty of producing a transnational movement with limited resources on both ends and inconsistent agendas. Instead, it became clear, the Network had returned to focusing its efforts on life abroad.

E. Conclusion

Through my analysis of my interviews, field notes and materials, I realized the complexity of the Network’s project in Costa Rica and the depth with which it should be treated. Through the lens of the Network, this dissertation examines the politics of migration, violence, race and ethnicity, feminism in Costa Rica and Nicaragua. I understand them as struggles over the social construction of gender, race, space and scale in the neoliberal era. Network women’s experiences revealed how gender and racial hierarchies operate at different scales, producing violent practices in places ranging from the household to state institutions. Through the chapters, I will show how these experiences, each of which contributed to women’s suffering, nested together and compounded women’s exclusion. Women migrated to Costa Rica to escape violence and anticipated ready access to democratic rights. Instead, as I will show, they found they were not accepted in Costa Rica. The unexpected similarity in their everyday transborder experience galvanized them and undergirded the cross-cultural, corporeal feminism that emerged through their organizing activities.

Network women’s experiences reflected a nested dynamic among different forms of violence. For example, the violence they experienced in the home was mirrored in the violence they experienced in public spaces. In other words, the values underlying social relations at one scale were shared by social relations at another. Moreover, suffering caused by one form of
violence compounded the suffering caused by other forms of violence. Although women were loath to be characterized as victims and then pitied, their struggle to overcome any single obstacle they faced was inhibited by its interconnection with other obstacles. Women’s experience demonstrates the necessity of attention to scales of violence. The dissertation documents the way violence becomes embedded—and is manifested—at different scales.

The Network resisted and negotiated contexts of political, economic and social dispossession in Nicaragua and Costa Rica that resulted from society-wide processes as varied as revolution and neoliberal restructuring. Throughout my dissertation, I illuminate the social friction that accompanies these transformations through theoretical work, including that of Raymond Williams below, which expands on Antonio Gramsci’s analysis of hegemonic processes (1971). This literature demonstrates how state restructuring produces responses ranging from consent through appropriation and from resilience to contestation. Network women lived through the shifts among dictatorship, revolution and austerity in Nicaragua, as well as structural adjustment in Costa Rica. Whether acquiescing or resisting, they engaged in “everyday forms of state formation” (Joseph and Nugent 1994: 20). That is, by engaging in a range of struggle in places as varied as the household and the political sphere, they challenged the values underlying state structure. I argue that women’s organizing emerges as they navigate shifting and often conflicting spheres of meaning and practice (Williams 1977) that characterize each of these social, political and economic regimes.

Throughout the dissertation, I draw on cultural theorist Raymond Williams’ work (1977) to illuminate Network women’s struggles over common sense notions of gender that reflect patriarchal and neoliberal structures. Past ethnographers have used Williams’ concept of “structures of feeling” (1977) to show how institutions organize how people think about and
relate to each other in ways that reflect the social order. I build on his theories of social change to understand how Network women adopted alternative values and attempted to introduce them into widespread, common sense understandings of institutions at different scales. I use his theory to highlight the significance of the Network’s work to reveal how mundane acts reflect the way that power works through culture.

It is also clear that practices reflecting the social order differ according to the spaces in which they occur. To examine the relationship of space to practice, I draw on the work of geographer Doreen Massey (1994) who argues that space and scale are socially constructed. Furthermore, I draw on the work of anthropologists Lynn Stephen (2007) and Sharam Khosravi (2010) to understand how Network women experience changes in how they are treated, across spaces. Stephen and Khosravi argue that we should lend attention to the invisible borders that designate these spaces. Specifically, they argue that each space reflects a particular arrangement of gender, class, racial, ethnic and national hierarchy. When people cross between these spaces, their social position may change along with the way they are treated. They refer to this process as “transborder crossing.” Drawing on these analytical frameworks, I argue that Network women’s experiences speak to the persistence of social suffering across uneven transborder geography.

The invisibility of the violence Network women experience in both countries and in places ranging from the home to government offices demonstrates the multi-scalar dynamic of violence.

Woven through the dissertation are examples of the ways that structures of feeling normalize violent practices at different scales. Network women’s initiatives respond to this dynamic, enabling them to endure, recognize and denaturalize gender, class, national and racial hierarchies that characterized the social order. Anthropologists are interested in the way that people identify these ways of being. For example, in an article addressing Salvadoran women’s
response to everyday post-war violence, anthropologist Irina Silber (2004) contended that a focus on wartime violence in reconciliation efforts rendered domestic violence, among other forms, invisible. She demonstrates that invisibility impedes the “communicability of violence, pain and sorrow” (2004:564). She points out that through community efforts, women learned to diagnose the ambiguity of social suffering as symptoms of a social order that tolerated violence. In much the same way, through participation with the Center and the Network, women’s everyday experience became communicable encounters of violence. Each dissertation chapter in demonstrates the way violence across scales nests together, compounding simultaneously or sequentially throughout women’s lives. It also demonstrates the ways that women recognize and respond to violence at these scales. Moreover, I show the changes in the ways that they experience and react to this, over time, through their trajectories of migration and organizing.

I begin the dissertation by examining the literature and theory of political-economy, structure, state, culture and social change as it relates to gender, violence and migration. In the second chapter, I examine the space where women come to articulate their discord with dominant patriarchal culture. Based on the activities during Center meetings, the chapter introduces the work of the Network, arguing that women adopt feminist principles of equal participation through spaces in which values and tools for participation are transmitted. The third chapter explores the tension between dominant patriarchal culture and the revolutionary program of participatory democracy across government regimes. Nicaragua’s gendered culture of “mando”—patriarchal command” and the history of feminist initiatives, beginning in the revolutionary period, attempted to produce a culture of equitable interactions and participatory democracy. I argue that women’s immigration trajectories are a space where women begin to react to the discord they sense with a variety of forms of violence, that they are largely unable to articulate,
nor recognize as collective. Drawing on women’s life history narratives, the fourth chapter argues that immigration is one among a variety of ways that women attempt to individually negotiate gendered interpersonal and structural violence in their lives. I argue that in Costa Rica, a dominant “white myth” shapes the ability of women to participate as citizens. The fifth chapter examines the racial and spatial construction of belonging in Costa Rica and of Nicaraguans as undeserving others.” The racial and gendered myths of belonging and democratic practice in Costa Rica, produce subtle forms of exclusion. The sixth chapter shows how they contend with continual attempts to exclude them from social rights in Costa Rica. Their commentary reflects a growing sense of collective exclusion and non-conformity, as they describe the ways that public officials and employers imply that as Nicaraguans, they ask too much of Costa Ricans and Costa Rican state services, in turn, threatening to Costa Rican democracy. The seventh chapter returns to women’s narratives of organizing, moving beyond the stage of articulating collective unease to the concerted production of transformative meanings and practices introduced into everyday activities. Women demonstrate a particular concern with the spaces of interactions, demonstrating that the application of the idea of private and public is wielded to exert force on bodies. The chapter argues that women engage in transformative cognitive strategies by relating to family, community members and officials in ways that transmit the idea that they are equally-deserving participants in each of these spaces of interaction. The eight chapter engages with the idea of space but also, transformative agendas. In this chapter, I argue that Nicaraguan women introduce a cross-cultural feminism into public and policy-making spaces constructed around the implications of Costa Rica’s narrow definition of belonging and integration. The chapter explores the way that women engage in public and policy making spaces, showing themselves to be equally capable of representing themselves in the critical analysis of their conditions.
II GENDER, VIOLENCE AND MIGRATION IN THE NEOLIBERAL ERA

In this chapter, I introduce various bodies of theoretical and descriptive literature that inform my analysis of the ethnographic material. In particular, I elucidate the broader context of neoliberalism that engenders the context of violence that women experience. I begin by giving a broad overview of the social, political and economic pressures that pushed Network women to migrate, shaped their experience abroad and inspired them to organize. This overview provides the reader with sufficient understanding of Network women’s experience to understand the applicability of the following bodies of work I present. I begin by presenting the broadest analytical framework, drawing on Gramscian and Williamsian thought to show that people understand broad social, political and economic structures through common sense notions of their relationship to other people. Moreover, this theoretical work shows how those common sense notions are reflected in practices across scales. Next, I examine how these common sense notions inspire and naturalize violent practices. The effects include the view that social suffering is inevitable and that physical abuse is necessary. I also show that such views are also reflected in the practices that are utilized to signal control and domination during wartime.

After introducing these theoretical frameworks, I turn to the common sense notions that are disseminated in the interest of generating widespread consent towards the domestic processes of neoliberal restructuring and the international reconfiguration of economy and labor. In this way, I show how migration is shaped by and responds to these broader processes. I also point to the way that the neoliberal turn has instigated social movements. Finally, building on these theoretical frameworks and processes I briefly introduce the specific ways that gendered migration is linked to neoliberal restructuring in both Costa Rica and Nicaragua. I conclude the chapter by elucidating local responses to these changes. In this way, I provide the reader with the
background to understand how the mundane acts that Network women protest are reflections of a broader social order.

Anthropologists examine the re-arrangement of state assemblages in the neo-liberal era insofar as it produces changes in the relationship between states and citizens. This approach emphasizes state power and exploitation, and examines how agents of neoliberal governing promulgate change by carrying out processes of dispossession. The seminal concept of dispossession was originally described by Rosa Luxemburg (1913); it was newly coined by David Harvey, who described the neoliberal moment as a regime of accumulation characterized by dispossession or “accumulation by dispossession” (2005). Dispossession occurs when public goods are privatized and public services are dismantled. For example, when public schools are closed and education is privatized, it becomes less accessible to the poor at the same time that it becomes a potentially profitable commodity on the marketplace. These policies benefit the richest at the expense of the poorest. They are justified by arguing that when public goods like education are commodified they expand the marketplace, and that the marketplace—since it is theoretically accessible to everyone—is an inherently democratic place to circulate wealth.

Anthropologists are interested in how the neoliberal transformation promulgates a corresponding shift in ideas about personhood. The market ideology promoted by neoliberalism corresponds to an ideology that elevates individual choice and responsibility over social responsibility. For impoverished households, this creates a tension because its members find they find that the well-being that should be achieved through market participation is not accessible to them, but social welfare programs have been dismantled. Women caught in this bind tend to migrate so that they can better participate in the marketplace. Therefore the neoliberal shift is
implicated in the turn of the international labor economy towards feminine labor, reflecting a
gendered spatial fix.

When access to the broad benefits of society is linked to market access, we see a situation
where, in practice, citizenship rights are curtailed. Because women have higher rates of poverty
and because gender role expectations curtail their participation in the market, they have difficulty
accessing citizenship rights. Thus, these processes have entailed the active reconstruction of
citizenship, belonging, rights and state in ways that have largely excluded women. The resulting
overall contraction in access to rights, participation and well-being produces tension as actors
and agents from uneven positions of power contend with each other over the new logic of state
and citizenship obligations.

Juxtaposing these bodies of literature examining agency and exploitation, I argue that
Nicaraguan women’s experiences of exclusion are a product of the way that patriarchy and
authoritarianism pervade arrangements, ranging from the patterns of everyday social relations to
the political economy. In Nicaragua and Costa Rica the meaning of citizenship has shifted and
the extent of inclusivity has expanded and waned, yet Nicaraguan women’s positions in gender
and social hierarchies remain marginal throughout each. In turn, these positions are interpreted
through everyday understandings of Nicaraguan women’s rights in different spaces throughout
Costa Rica and Nicaragua. Specifically, they precipitated Network women’s exposure to
violence in various forms: the everyday violence of poverty, physical and emotional abuse from
partners and family members, wartime persecution, and finally, their lack of integration into
systems of citizenship where they inconsistently wielded rights. Women’s subordinate position
in national and international social orders produced and justified violence against them. Violence
is seen as a warranted manner of controlling them and is reinforced by a common perception that
women should submit to it. Given its ties to underlying values, these forms of violence can be
categorized as structural. However, there is great diversity in the way violence manifests. Such
difference results from the way that patriarchal values inform norms within different institutions
at different scales. Accordingly, we can differentiate among forms of violence by the scale to
which they respond. Though distinct, these forms are not detached. Rather, different scales of
violence nest together. It is clear from women’s stories that it is this nesting that makes otherwise
grim situations virtually insurmountable. In this chapter I pull back from discussing the Network
as a case study to examine the theoretical underpinnings of the broader themes of the
dissertation: state formation, neoliberal transition, migration, labor, gender and violence.

Ostensibly, the Network comprised an immigrant rights movement focused on building a
transnational policy framework that would guide government officials to create laws that
rectified women’s exception from social and reproductive rights. Namely, they portrayed their
work as seeking access to legal status, programs and services for themselves and their families in
either country. Network publications discursively positioned Nicaraguan migrant women as a
gendered labor force inserted into a global labor economy that benefitted from their transborder
marginality. They argued that they were deprived of citizenship rights in either space, although
their contributions of remittances and labor undergirded the Nicaraguan and Costa Rican
economies. In practice, the Network attributed Nicaraguan women’s exclusion from social,
 economic and political participation in either country to lived experiences of violence against
them. The distinction lay in their identification of violence as a significant mitigating factor that
pushed them into transnational production cycles and precluded their exercise of citizenship.
Through their work, the Network tacitly addressed violence and exclusion that was produced at
the nexus of migration, neoliberal restructuring and existing social hierarchies. They worked to
transform this broader social order by rectifying the gendered inequalities of everyday interaction. They argued that achieving the practice of equality in everyday intimate interactions would produce democratic practices at all scales. The Network’s emergence as a social movement illustrated how cross-cultural feminisms may develop out of struggle over the transborder production of marginality that characterized their lives. They also criticized and built on historic transformations in state structure that had failed to produce widespread equality because they ignored these intersections. They drew on a sense of themselves as marginal in an international order, considering the intersections of their identities that produced different forms and degrees of marginality.

A. Converging Stories of Pervasive Violence and Migration

Women’s life histories highlight the tolerance and normalcy of violence within Nicaraguan communities and directed at Nicaraguans in Costa Rica. I, as well as the women with whom I worked, examine the violence in everyday interpersonal interactions as a reflection of patriarchal capitalist relations intensified through centuries of authoritarian repression and decades of armed conflict. Women of the Network characterized women’s emigration from Nicaraguan to Costa Rica as motivated by violence. But this depiction of women’s emigration is not necessarily widely-shared. I do not take this as a sign that violence is not a widespread experience. On the contrary, women’s stories about their communities in Nicaragua and in Costa Rica attest to the widespread prevalence of violence in Nicaraguan women’s lives at home and abroad. Their stories also attest to its invisibility. To understand why such a prevalent issue remained invisible, I draw on anthropologist Nia Parsons’ assertion that “the ability to express pain requires language for talking about the pain, identification of the origins of the pain and the willingness and ability of individuals and institutions to hear that pain” (2013: 10). Network
women have learned to identify and attempt to overcome violence in the course of their organizing activities. This distinguishes them from many compatriots. In this sense, Network women’s identification of violence as their motivation to migrate and organize reflects their development of the ability to express their pain. Women reconstruct their pasts through the lens of their present activities and ways of seeing (Manz 2004; Moodie 2010; Lancaster 1992). For example, if Elena had been interviewed a few years earlier, she might have acknowledged that she was unhappy and occasionally experienced beatings, but probably would not have described herself as “living in violence.” By the time I met her, she had recalibrated her perspective on the events and their significance through her participation in Center activities. This discrepancy speaks to the way that Network transformed themselves from women negotiating violent relationships to women organized, attempting to identify and transform common values and practices that reproduced violence. Violence had become a central theme in their depictions of migration and in their past and present organizing efforts. As they came to see themselves as subjects of rights, through their work with the Center, Network women also came to recognize that the ways they had been raised and treated in Nicaragua and Costa Rica were in fact forms of violence exacted against them. Through this process, they assigned new meanings to past events.

Network women came to depict abuse in either country as normative. Most described their path to separate themselves from situations of violence as a solitary one. Violence influenced routine forms of interaction between members of households. In many cases, family members actively participated in perpetuating violence towards women. Others family members tacitly supported women’s abusers. Furthermore, outside of the family dynamics, interactions between soldiers and civilians in wartime were often fraught with violence. In these cases alone, entire families fled persecution by wartime combatant groups. Few described seeking recourse
from community members or public services for assistance. If they did, they felt belittled by public employees in the offices of government programs and services. They demonstrate that the issue did not garner significant state-support, with the exception of Nicaragua’s early-1980s FSLN government (Criquillon 1995; Kampwirth 1999). Altogether, women’s narratives of life prior to migration were marked by a series of personal decisions to escape violence.

The family violence must be contextualized within a broader picture of structural violence. Recently, the U.S. media highlighted what they label as “waves” of women and children from Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador, who risk the trek through Mexico, chancing to cross the southern U.S. border. Some journalists position this movement as part and parcel of the history of the United States government-sponsored “anti-subversive” warfare throughout the region (Jonas 2013; Martinez 2014). In the 1980s, the U.S. invested heavily in training and arming military forces in order to challenge the Nicaraguan revolutionary government and suppress revolutionary activity in El Salvador and Guatemala. In the latter two cases, youth and indigenous people became common targets for the armies and paramilitary forces. Many youths grew up witnessing violent deaths, daily. In the mid-1990s, following the signing of the Peace Accords, an uneasy transition ensued in which disarmament gave way to forms of violence that few understood how to navigate. Scholars often note that the end of war was mistaken for a time of peace. Wartime violence had been transparent in its use as an intimidation tactic (Green 2006). It gave way to pernicious forms of violence described as “crime waves” (Moodie 2010). The commonality of this experience is reflected in the frequency with which scholars, working in the region, highlight the ironies of the phrase “we’re worse off than

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4 Nor significant international support, for that matter as women often noted, demonstrated by the absence of funding for such efforts.
before [revolutionary wars]” (Lancaster 1992; Moodie 2010; Burrell 2009; Nygren 2003). It is an adage I frequently heard repeated from the mouths of Nicaraguans. Authorities throughout Central America discursively framed the violence as following a new logic. They characterized perpetrators as ambiguous in their intent, manifesting individual agency and lacking humanity (Moodie 2010; Foxen 2010). Instead, anthropologists suggest that the violence is not an anomaly. They suggest that it has been mislabeled and arises from inattention to the psychological aftermath of war. Most draw on the work of Jesuit priest and psychologist Ignacio Martin-Baro, who supported the revolutionary cause in Central America and who described the internalization of wartime social relations as a collective “militarization of the mind” (Martin Baro 1990:134). By this he meant that a military’s hierarchical social organization combined with the sense that stability be achieved through violence, pervaded individuals’ perception of their interaction with those around them. Anthropologists, in turn, show how this has become a dominant element of culture. In effect, military arrangements carry beyond wartime through the social body and therefore, shape social relations at all scales.

In this light, anthropologists have demonstrated that the conflicts in Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua left deep scars, whether in polarized relations between sides (Manz 2004; Nygren 2003; Lancaster 1992), in the minds of youth who grew up seeing violence as the only form of conflict resolution (Wolseth 2008; Foxen 2010; Quesada 1998; Zilberg 2011; Burrell 2010), in the distrust planted between neighbors (Moodie 2010; Lancaster 1992; Manz 2004; Quesada 1998), or in the economic devastation they left behind (Nygren 2003; Moodie 2010; Zilberg 2011). Meanwhile, the process of stabilization and a return to veneration of “traditional” patriarchal gender roles, as well as, an accompanying decline in public campaigns against interpersonal violence, augment the experience of violence. The act of mislabeling this
new violence as crime waves serves to deflect attention away from the absence of resources
dedicated to rebuilding amidst structural reconfiguration. It also justifies the transnational
investment in security measures, whether the funding of military equipment for civilian police
forces or restrictive immigration policies and infrastructure that position Central American
migrants as a threat (Zilberg 2011). Ultimately, they show that wartime values and practices are
incorporated into different institutions producing violence as it corresponds to different scales.

Contemporary U.S. scholarly and popular discussions of violence and migration in
Central America typically exclude Nicaragua. The rates of Nicaraguan emigration to the U.S.
have raised little concern, as it hovers around 7,000 emigrants annually. U.S. journalists argue
that this is indicative of the Revolution’s success (Nowrasteh 2014), of the country’s unique
community policing methods (Cruz 2014) and of U.S. status as a receiving country for asylum
seekers (Carlsen 2014). These journalists echo the prerogatives of a U.S. solidarity movement
that has long sought to change the image of Nicaragua in U.S. popular discourse. Meanwhile,
journalists and scholars in Costa Rica and Nicaragua acknowledge the high rate of emigration to
Costa Rica but relate it to Nicaragua’s high poverty and underemployment rates. My dissertation
speaks to the persistence of militarized relationships and authoritarian forms of interaction in the
post-war era. Though I would argue that the experience of violence in Nicaragua is qualitatively
different, it spurs equally high rates of emigration to Costa Rica reaches similar rates. In the
midst of a steep downward spiral of socio-economic conditions and social relations, Costa Rica
emerges as a site of possibility for Nicaraguans due to its supposed insulation from conflict and
chaos. Moreover, it demonstrates the invisibility of South-South migration and translocal
processes within Latin America. New civil rights, public activism, and immigration policy
frameworks of the U.S. obscures other forms of organizing.
B. State Restructuring, Participation and Struggle

I focused on Nicaraguan women’s encounters with institutionalized systems of belonging. These encounters may result from the way belonging is codified through laws and policies or manifested in social interactions based on widespread sentiment about Nicaraguan women. In particular, Nicaraguan women’s work leads them to recognize ways that gendered and racialized hierarchies are institutionalized through the nation-state. With some frequency, the state codifies common sentiment or disseminates ideas about these hierarchies, ultimately producing knowledge about different groups. Nicaraguan women’s experiences demonstrate how everyday gendered, nationalized and racialized exclusion was produced through renewed processes of consolidating the Nicaraguan and Costa Rican states. Women experienced these processes as tense situations in which shifts in the organization of the state brought change to everyday values and meanings. My research speaks to the negotiation of power by the Nicaraguan women’s movement as it variously consented to and contested institutionalized values and interests, insofar as they are marginalized and galvanized by them. To make this argument, I draw on the work of Antonio Gramsci and his theoretical descendants, describing hegemonic processes by relating the production of consent and contestation to state-making.

Scholarly examination of social movements in Latin America frequently draws on the Gramscian frameworks to characterize the contentious and uneven exercise of power from “above” and “below” as hegemonic process (Postero 2007; Paley 2001; Joseph and Nugent 1994; Alonso 1995). Gramsci described the state as a locus of power, insofar as systems of meanings and values are institutionalized through the creation of a governing body. He argued that the purpose of this body was to organize the productive activity of subordinate populations in line with the goals of the dominant classes (1971: 246-7; 266). In other words, the structural hierarchies had been codified through the consolidation of a state. In Gramsci’s formulation,
social change came about as a production of resistance consisted of counter-hegemonic activities. However, as cultural theorist Raymond Williams (1977) found, Gramsci’s theory that hegemony was produced through consent and coercion could explain dominant and resistant values, meanings and practices, but not how the ideas that informed dominant or resistant means and values came about. Moreover, Williams argued that the focus on dominant ideas, around which consent was organized and continually reproduced, ignored that there was struggle over these values, meanings and practices.

Williams theorized that dominant and resistant means and values were elements of culture. He sought to identify the cultural origins of social change based on this assertion. He defined culture as “the basic collective idea, and the institutions, manners, habits of thought, and intentions which proceed from this” (1968: 313-4). Williams saw culture as constantly changing as he asserted that it was never fully dominated by any single ideology. Instead, there were dominant elements of culture, which heavily influenced ideas about how society is organized. By imagining institutions and ways of being as subsumed under culture, he equated culture with power. Moreover, by asserting the presence of a multiplicity of cultural elements competing to dominate the collective idea, he treated culture as a site of struggle. Existing dominant elements might be challenged or tempered by other cultural elements within the collective idea.

As Williams examined these competing elements, he identified a greater degree of complexity than resistant or counterhegemonic culture. He differentiated their relationship to dominant culture in terms of the qualitative and temporal relationship of these values to dominant values. First, he juxtaposed the content of these elements of culture as oppositional or alternative. These elements were defined by the relationship of their values to dominant culture. On the one hand, he suggested that oppositional cultures would present distinct values, meanings
and practices. Alternative culture, on the other hand, would consist of values, meanings and practices that appeared different but did not fundamentally oppose dominant elements. He used the terms residual and emergent to refer to these elements’ temporal relationship to dominant elements. By residual, Williams referred to active elements of culture that reflected values, meanings and practices formed in the past (1977: 122). In turn, he used the term “emergent” to refer to those elements of culture that resulted when dominant interpretations proved insufficient in explaining lived experiences. While he felt that any number of elements might precipitate change, he did not assume that they would produce counterhegemonic practice.

Williams felt that the multiplicity of elements present undergirded struggles over dominant values, meanings and practices. Either residual or emergent features could be subsumed under dominant culture by diluting or depoliticizing their potentially oppositional features. Williams argued that dominant, residual and emergent cultures did not uniformly articulate but vacillated between accord and discord. He described how the competing dominant, residual and emergent elements within a particular sphere of influence produced a collective social experience of the surrounding world. As a result, everyday experience was unconsciously interpreted through expectations built on normative systems of morality and their contradictions. In turn, these pressures caused the social order to transform over time as novel and diverse “spheres of practice and meaning” consolidated (Williams 1977: 126).

Building on Williams’ assertions, the state can be seen as one among many structures where dominant elements are evident and institutionalized. For example, ideas about the purpose of the state influence the scope and types of government institutions. Such ideas also structure the organization of civil society, for example, inflecting a particular meaning on the concept of civic participation. They also structure the private sphere, for example, shaping gender roles in
the household. Existing or novel alternative or oppositional elements might change the practices of any of these institutions. They could also precipitate the dissolution of these institutions. To persist, dominant culture would absorb while depoliticizing such elements, rather than leave an alternative with potential to gain strength.

In this vein, William Roseberry argued the concept of hegemony was more useful to understanding “struggle than consent” (1996: 80). Each of these theorists argue that the negotiation of dominant culture is constant, rather than exceptional. More broadly, hegemony, power, domination and even resistance are incomplete, never-totalizing processes (Wolf 2001: 392). This allows for the possibility that contradictions between systems of values can produce resistance. Rarely is struggle motivated by an abstract notion of oppression. Instead, collective marginality from participation within the different institutions or structures that make up a state galvanizes a widespread sense of indignation. And it is through these institutions that contradictions become visible in the gap between received and lived experience. For example, patriarchy can be described as a system of values that accords decision-making to men in order to protect women. However, at times, this logic extends to the expectation that a man may beat his wife to correct errant behavior that endangers her. Social movements coalesce around these contradictions within institutions such as the household. The existence of such contradictions is a constant rather than an anomaly. For example, Eric Wolf points out that although states are organized and “equipped with economic resources [they remain] internally divided and subject to penetration by conflicting and usually contradictory forces [producing] ‘diversity and fluidity of form, function and malfunction’ (Bright and Harding 1984: 4; Gaily 187)” (Wolf 2001: 392-3). In this way, the Network’s private and public challenges to dominant culture comprise Joseph
and Nugent’s concept of “everyday forms of state formation: [the negotiations of] ideas disseminated by the state” (1994: 20).

C. The Spaces and Scales of Gendered Experience

Through these structures that make up a state, culture moves from the realm of the abstract to the material. The dominant social order and its attendant meanings, values and practices is expressed through different institutions in different ways. This is what Williams referred to as structures of feeling (1977), or the way that elements of culture are manifested and institutionalized. Among other institutions, we can examine how patriarchy becomes concrete relative to the structures of government and family. For example, the lack of women in legislative assemblies reflects not only structural impediments to elect them but also a commonsense notion that women are inferior leaders. The structure is also exemplified through the sense that men are heads of households; this is further reinforced by an absence of laws and policies enabling police forces to interfere in household disputes. A patriarchal logic is manifest in the ideas about gender roles relative to these different institutions. Moreover, the concept of structures of feeling can show how a logic may produce different actions relative to different institutions to exert dominance in a government institution, women may be refused service or entry while in the home they may be verbally or physically abused. Anthropologists have found the concept useful to frame ethnographic data and show how individual and group actions are conditioned and enabled (Roseberry 1989). They also use the concept to show that meaning and values are neither static nor totalizing but rather temper the interpretation of and reaction to social experiences as they progress (Moodie 2010). The concept of structures of feeling provides an analytical lens for eliciting the specific ways that different elements of culture are expressed in relation to different institutions.
The preceding examples of structures of feeling of household and government demonstrate the lens of structures of feeling can also be adapted for comparative analysis, showing how different structures of feeling reflect common elements of culture. More simply put, the same values and meanings are expressed at different scales. At each scale, they are reflected through different practices. If the gender hierarchy structures processes in spaces of the household, neighborhood, municipal and state, then patriarchy can be envisioned as multi-scalar. It operates through ideas about the legitimacy of different voices, structuring differential access to participation and decision-making within these different spaces. These hierarchies are codified in law. As Gramscian theory suggests, this dynamic is produced through consent as people learn and adhere to norms. Rephrased more simply, Gilbert Joseph and Daniel Nugent (1994) built on Williams’ work when they argued that the resulting dominant system of meanings and values is not simply imposed but is adopted and lived through commonsense behaviors. If masculine control is ideal, then fluctuations in gender relations may incite exhibitions of control within each of these spaces. In this respect, violence is produced in relation to the gendered control of space. As the examples of Nicaragua and Costa Rica will demonstrate, patriarchal hierarchies are codified through state laws and institutions.

Laws and institutions arrange a hierarchy of belonging among gendered, racial and ethnic subject-positions, constituted by and constitutive of local values and meanings. Geographer Doreen Massey (1994) suggests that the dual system of thinking about gender in Western society is co-produced with a dualistic form of understanding space, time and place. The perceived differences between spaces reflect hegemonic masculine ways of seeing. Boundaries are established, creating divisions that are seen as meaningful, such as public and private. In turn, identities are attached to each place, reflecting patriarchal values, such as the view that a woman
is good if she remains within the home or other private spaces (Massey 1994). Such attempts to “impose [and stabilize] the meaning to be attributed to a space” (1994:5) reinforce the hierarchy of social relations within and across spaces. In this manner, the gendering that operates through space makes local arrangements of space, politics and activities reflect dominant patriarchal culture. The control of spaces more generally is associated with the control of women in those spaces. For example, although woman’s place is attached to the home, men are considered to be the ultimate authority within it. Moreover, its construction as a private sphere assigns men the power to determine what goes on in the home and whose business it is to intervene. The struggle over gendered, racialized and nationalized values and meanings are intertwined with spatialized and scalar understandings of these arrangements. Thus, according to Massey, the struggle over space is likewise part of the hegemonic process and the division of space is “the site of social contest [and] battles over power” (1994:5). Insofar as gender inflects these processes, struggles over land and governing institutions involve demonstration over the control of women.

As I will show in the dissertation, authoritarian and patriarchal values are compounded through practices at each scale. Idealized masculinity idolizes men’s dominance within different spaces and, moreover, at different scales. Concomitantly, idealized Nicaraguan femininity entails women’s suffering. Depending on the particular space, this gender hierarchy is also inflected with racial, ethnic, national, regional and generational hierarchies. Nicaraguans characterize their culture as one of mando, reflecting a multi-scalar way of being. As I will demonstrate in Chapter 3, Nicaragua’s long history of patriarchy and authoritarianism in governance cultivated a value for the active assertion of dominance across scales. Moreover, dominance, broadly conceived, is asserted through the control over women. This is reflected in a gender duality of “ordering/suffering.” In some circumstances, these ideals may be expressed as a form of
paternalistic protectionism, a relationship where dominant males protect those below them in this hierarchy in accordance with the dictates of norms in those spaces. However, in other circumstances where dominance must be more forcefully exerted in order to wield power, benevolent expression is lost. Women’s stories speak to this as they depict suffering the simultaneous and sequential compounding effect of different scales of violence. Different scales of violence compound over time, increasing the longevity of the experience of violence. They may also overlap, increasing the intensity of the experience. They vary from private to public. But they are manifest differently, mediated through different institutions. Bringing this frame to bear on the discussion of structural violence, it is possible to delineate violence that shares structural origins, by scale. In contemporary anthropology, violence is defined as actions and arrangements that cause suffering. In this sense, commonsense notions of Nicaraguan gender duality normalize violence.

D. Interpersonal Violence: Structure and Agency at Different Scales

Network members’ accounts of the suffering that provoked their emigration conveyed multiple forms of exacting violence. These forms of violence were differentiated by scale yet the activities that perpetuated violence share a common logic: they were informed by dominant patriarchal values. However, these dominant values manifested distinctly according to the different structures organizing social, economic and political life. In other words, Network women’s stories demonstrate that different forms of violence can be associated with structures of feeling at different scales. Network women’s experiences demonstrate how everyday practices at different scales manifest the underlying dominant elements of culture or structure.

The concept of scales of violence builds on a body of anthropological scholarship focused on identifying the forms of exclusion that can be understood as forms of structural violence. Many anthropologists utilize the concept of “structural violence,” originally described
by Johan Galtung (1969) to distinguish the work of these “broad structural forces and political economic conditions” in producing marginality (Alcalde 2010; Farmer 2004; Scheper-Hughes 2004). Structural conditions increase the propensity of exposure to poverty, poor health (Farmer 2004; Scheper-Hughes 2004), environmental disaster (Klein 2014) and social marginality, warranting the label “structural violence.” To this extent, it shows how the “invisible social machinery of oppression…based on historical systems… promotes suffering among society’s marginalized groups—accordingly, violence exerted systematically—that is, indirectly” by everyone within the society, and not just as a result of individual agency (Alcalde 2010: 149). It provides a concrete and systematic manner of analyzing the denial of the right to well-being based on racism, sexism, nationalism, ethnocentrism and classism.

Generally, scholarship has limited the study of structural violence to encompass indirect forms of violence, as the term “invisible social machinery of oppression” implies. However, other scholars have worked to make a theoretical case for the inclusion of physical and interpersonal forms of violence within this framework. It can explain the ways that systems of power shape thought and action, more broadly. Andrew Gardner takes a distinct approach to framing interpersonal violence as structural violence by turning to theories of how power operates. He builds on the work of Farmer and Scheper-Hughes, “marrying” it with Eric Wolf’s concept of how structural power “orchestrates settings” in which interpersonal interactions take place (1999). In this way, he includes interpersonal violence and some manifestations of individual agency within the framework of structural violence (2010:7). Gardner draws on Wolf’s description of four “modalities” of how structural power is woven into social relations:

- the potency or capability inhered in an individual (Nietzschean); the ability, during interactions, of one ego to impose its will in social action upon an alter (Weberian);
- control over the contexts in which people exhibit their capabilities and interact with others…or organizational or tactical power; and finally, structural power-manifest in
relationships that not only operates within settings and domains but also organizes and orchestrates the settings, specifying the direction and distribution of energy flow. [Wolf 1999:5].

Wolf describes the relationship between agency and structure by explaining individual agency is inherent in the ways people interact. Nonetheless, he explains that this interaction shaped, or rather structured by notions of what should take place in a particular setting and how such arrangements should be enforced or encouraged. He demonstrates that there is an imbalance in the relationship between the two, arguing that structural power shapes the social field of action by “render[ing] some kinds of behavior possible, while making others less possible or impossible… the power to deploy and allocate social labor” (Wolfe 2001: 385).

Wolf positions culture as the site of meanings, values and practices that transmit ideas of what is possible. He likens the form of transmission to the use of a “code” of relations. This code is communicated through discourse and performance. In turn, it is incorporated into systems organizing thinking, making the world “understandable,” by providing criteria for interpretation, and “manageable,” by shaping behavior and reactions. Wolf equates culture with structure, in that power works through culture, shaping ideas and creating dispositions to act in particular manners. Drawing on this linkage, Gardner makes a “theoretical revision” to the conceptualization of structural violence challenging ways that the “progenitors” distinguish structural violence from “everyday interpersonal violence that purportedly inheres more to the agency of those who deliver that violence” (Gardner 2010: 7). In other words, interpreted through Wolf’s theory of power, interpersonal violence is as much structural as poverty.

5 These are not, however, “fixed templates” for how social life be lived but are variably deployed through communicative acts across social contexts- marked by scale (household vs. society), domain (politics, religion) and social characteristics of the parties addressed (nationality, gender, social origins) (Wolf 2001: 385).
E. Family and War as Institutions: Interpersonal Violence

Building on Wolf’s theory of power, I frame domestic-intrafamilial and wartime violence as reflecting a patriarchal code that shapes ways of relating between genders in the household and during political upheaval. Scholars generally relate physical violence to, but do not include it among examples of structural violence (Alcalde 2010; Gardner 2010). In the introduction to their seminal anthology on anthropological studies of violence, Nancy Sheper-Hughes and Philippe Bourgois suggest that we can consider different forms of violence to be located along a continuum (2004: 2). The continuum of violence ranges from intimate interpersonal violence to social suffering, or the violence of structural exclusion. Still, they distinguish interpersonal violence from structural violence, arguing that it differs from poverty and social marginality, by describing it as personal agency though informed by structures.

The explicit study of domestic violence and gender-based violence in anthropology is relatively recent, with the earliest publications in 1989 and 1990, respectively (Wies and Hildane 2008: 5). Indeed, Laura McClusky (2001) documents her extensive struggle to obtain funding for a dissertation project focused on domestic violence; repeated, reviewers rejected her proposals noting that the explicit focus on physical abuse in the home fell outside the realm of anthropological inquiry. Some scholars have located interpersonal gendered violence within the frame of structural violence by relating domestic violence to patriarchy. Wies and Hildane (2008) suggest the exclusion of interpersonal violence from structural violence is tied up with the division of activities carried out in the private domain from those in the public domain. Moreover, domestic abuse is labeled as an “individual pathology” (Merry 2006 in Wies et al 2008). In contrast to the wider view of domestic violence, anthropologists have shown that in diverse localized interpretations of patriarchal values, physical exertions of violence over women become acceptable, if expected form of controlling their behavior within the household.
(Lancaster 1992; McClusky 2001). In this vein, physical violence derives from gender-structuring of society and more accurately exemplified the practices tempered by a particular structure of feeling. In the current era, domestic violence is publically condemned and perceived to be declining. In reality, it suggests that the reconfiguration of household roles brought on by systemic change that limit the incursion into public arenas, such as the workplace, in which desired masculinity can be achieved and displayed.

Violence at this scale is produced, in part, by insecurity or fluctuations in gender relations within other spheres. For example, as formal employment for men declines while women’s economic opportunities expand, household gender relations are thrown into flux. These shifts in household roles, though produced by shifting political-economic arrangements, are experienced as marginally-permissible transgressions. They become more acute when women’s transgressive behaviors are thought to warrant physical punishment. To extend Gardner’s contention that physical violence reflects individual agency informed by commonsense notions of social hierarchies, it is productive in the sense that it serves to reinforce unequal household relations. Indeed, McClusky’s (2001) intimate portrayal of the production of domestic violence in Belize shows mothers may encourage their sons to beat their wives to produce a person who fulfills her gendered household role. Similarly, Lancaster (1992) notes that in Nicaragua young women are often subject to greater discipline, producing a sense of responsibility tied to the physical and social household reproduction, while the absence of punishment towards men impresses a desired absence of responsibility. Violence is exerted as a means of retaining control. Women, as much as men, wield it, reproducing a particular dynamic of gendered relations.

I argue that the same broader gendered social structures that have maintained authoritarian governments are also expressed in everyday forms of relating. The patriarch, as
authoritarian governing figure, is reflected in the authoritarian patriarchal configuration of the Nicaraguan household. According to this logic, domination is desirable. Patriarchal authoritarian logic manifests itself in individual acts exerting physical and emotional control over women’s bodies. Beyond the symbolism of wielding power through this gendered corporal control, it produces the logic of how society will be reproduced. From above, it informs the logic of how the country can participate in global markets, while from below, it informs notions of how the household can participate in the economy and be maintained.

While household violence is often conceived as individual agency, wartime violence is often attributed to the militarized mindset focused on eradicating an enemy. This in itself may be considered systematic as social relations become militarized. But bellicose interactions also demonstrate clear parallels to peacetime violence in their gendered dimensions. As is widely contended (Enloe 1999; Lutz 2009; Whisnant 1996), war and social violence reflect particular emphasis on the exertion of violence over women. Central American scholars draw on the work of Lisa Maalki (1996), who demonstrates the attempt to eradicate another way of being provokes acts of domination. The objective is not only to kill, but also to demonstrate domination through the desecration of the body (Malki 1996; Green 2009). As Maria Olujic (1998) explains “wartime transforms individual bodies into social bodies” and women’s bodies become targets of aggression, symbolizing social and political domination. They come to embody fear and suffering as they react to threats, endure rape and are killed. Moreover, anthropologists Anja Nygren (2003) and James Quesada (1998) document how the stress of Nicaragua’s civil war took its toll through nervios and chronic pain. The exertion of gendered sexual violence were not simply wartime atrocities but symbolic acts representing the domination of a nation (Enloe 1999; Enloe 2007). In this sense, women’s experience of war was notably gendered. Thus it is also
difficult to exclude the violence of war in discussions of ongoing forms of violence during so-called periods of peace. Responses to the tension surrounding the reproduction of dominant culture continues to reflect the militarization of social relations through control and physical harm done to women.

F. Contradictions in the Everyday
My research engages with the politics of belonging and participation that emerge relative to the structures of family, conflict, public services, participation and citizenship. Specifically, Network women engage with the ways that structures of feeling, relative to each, produce commonsense notions of who participates and how according to ascribed gender, class, nationality, race, space and education. I undertake to study how gendered participation of migrant women in different spaces in Nicaragua and Costa Rica is interpreted through different lenses. Women’s struggle to transform normative gendered notions of belonging and participation arose out of the articulation and identification of a collective unease with the exclusion they experienced at each scale. Their nonconformity with diverse experiences of violence had led them to migrate to Costa Rica, expecting access to its social and material wealth. Instead, their exclusion and unease persisted. This tension led them to relate to each other. In doing so, they interrupted the dynamic of erasure in which they had been complicit. Together, they articulated their collectively lived experiences. They recognized the contradiction between the demands made of and the disregard shown to Nicaraguan women across scales. As they shared their experience, they channeled their nonconformity into a feminist agenda. They resolved to make each other visible and therefore support each other through a myriad of strategies that would be implemented across scales. In this way, they forged a movement focused on producing an alternative culture of belonging and participation.
Their struggle emerges in a time of transition as Nicaragua has undergone significant fluctuation in the way of seeing women. In the final decade of the sharply authoritarian Somoza dynastic dictatorship (1935-1979), women constituted nearly 50% of the heads of household in the country (Metoyer 2000: 45; Ruchwarger 1989; Kampwirth 2000). They also comprised a high percentage of the urban workforce (Kampwirth 1999; Gonzalez 2014; Whisnant 1996), a phenomenon often attributed to high rates of male abandonment. Women themselves or the children of single mothers, filled the ranks of the revolutionary forces of the Sandinista National Liberation Front FSLN, before and after the final insurgency (1978-79) leading to the Revolution’s triumph in 1979 (Kampwirth 1999; Metoyer 2000; Collinson 1991). They aimed to produce a more equitable system. The FSLN was attempting to transform gender equality within the vision of widespread participatory decision-making. The Nicaraguan Revolution (1979-90), as the period of FSLN government is called, implemented highly successful initiatives to enable men’s and women’s participation: literacy and health campaigns, the construction and staffing of clinics and schools, land redistribution and agrarian reform. Though creating a revolutionary dominant culture, at least insofar as it was institutionalized, the effects of these campaigns were uneven throughout the country (Hale 1998; Gordon 1998; Lancaster 1992; Montoya 2012). The ensuing U.S. sponsored counter-revolution and economic embargo, however, left a high death toll, the economy in ruins and infrastructure destroyed. It also spurred a contraction in decision-making and the introduction of austerity measures, sidelining the gender or feminist agenda. The Revolution ultimately provided a “democratic opening” for ideas of radical gendered transformations to develop and proliferate. Yet in the subsequent years since the FSLN’s dismissal from government in 1990, governments have pushed conservative agendas. Officials and elites have advocated for “authoritarian” family relations and for a return to “traditional”
roles of women. Women’s narratives of navigating abuse are consistent in this aspect, signaling that the gender based violence was reciprocally reinforced through social interaction, policy and institutional absence. In this sense, Nicaraguans have lived this transition through the contradictory systems of organizing gender and citizenry.

Simultaneously, Costa Rica expanded its economy into the service and agro-export sectors, towards participation in the international market, requiring migrant labor to supplement its small workforce. Nicaraguan women see migration as an opportunity. Costa Rica is presented to them as a distinct alternative where they will have rights as women and earn wages to support their families, as workers. But they find themselves living in the midst of different localized hegemonic patriarchal codes. Common understandings of nationality, citizenship, belonging, history and geography of Costa Rica produce a dominant sense of Nicaraguans as invasive, expressed through ways they see and respond to Nicaraguan migrants. Scholarly and lay reproduction of a “white myth” shapes notion of belonging in Costa Rica. It portrays Costa Rica as exceptional in the Central American region for its perpetual preservation of a peaceful long-standing democracy, social welfare system and strong economy. Citizens are depicted as white, middle class, urban, educated and modern. Costa Rica’s social welfare system was largely dismantled, but the change has been largely obscured. Among other factors, immigration maintained stability in the country. Migrants’ low-wage labor reduces the costs of household and small business management, sustaining a similar quality of life despite rising costs. Still, migrants’ presence has accompanied a growing sense of loss of classlessness, prosperity and homogeneity. Officials deflect resentment over privatization by blaming migrants for the decline in available social welfare resources. This misrecognition sustains confidence in the resilient structure of the Costa Rican state and its persistent conflation with a social welfare model. In this
sense, the emergent sense of decline and disorder is directed towards the visible presence of Nicaraguan immigrants, propagating xenophobic reactions as well as the subtle deployment of exclusionary attitudes and practices towards them. They are inspired to organize by the discord they experience, between their expectations of Costa Rica, their sense that their marginality is not just and the reality of their experience.

Anthropologists studying social movements focus on the everyday experiences that provoke organizing and fueling concerted sustained, if shifting, efforts to effect change. At the same time, anthropologists Charles Hale and Lynn Stephens (2014) encourage ethnographers of social movements to place less emphasis on discussing the state’s organizing power in everyday experience, in lieu of emphasizing the everyday experiences of the groups it marginalizes and excludes. In this case, amidst Nicaragua and Costa Rica’s claims to exercise democracy despite the absence of practice, women continually experience structural violence across the border. It is in the midst of these processes and the practices they produce that everyday experiences of violence are recognized as collectively experienced points of tension. This tension is produced in relation to the exaltation of Nicaragua’s revolution, which ultimately failed to resolve the marginality women experience. It is produced in relation to Costa Rica’s hollow claims of exceptionalism. The tension galvanized women of the Network to address the violent everyday relational practices that expulse women, in turn, upholding a transnational political economic interdependence between Costa Rica and Nicaragua. It recognized that violence is not simply an individual agentive act but a practice reflecting dominant understandings of gender, relationships, belonging, transgression and participation.

This critique is still embodied, performed and expanded by the practices of community organizers who continue the Revolution’s work, constituting a residual culture. It is through this
lens that Network members teach each other to confront structural violence and its gendered underpinnings. But the transnational integration that accompanies domestic structural adjustment programs brings people into transnational realms. In Nicaragua, as other poor countries, it brings citizens in to transnational labor circuits. At its broadest, Network organizing activities address “democratic dispossess,” the erosion of access to rights and democratic participation. In its everyday forms, women come to value equality in interactions and develop practices that enact this new value. They embody and perform the desired transformation of social interactions, carrying out their work in spaces ranging from households to neighborhoods, offices of state institutions to public protests and even to government policy-making activities.

G. A Matter of Accumulation and Dispossession
The neoliberal turn has promulgated a broad range of theoretical work aiming to understand it as a social-political and economic philosophy that prompts a reorganization of state institutions. More concretely, it shapes the function of the state and in turn, the relationship between state institutions and the citizenry, regardless of legal status. Corresponding values, meanings and practices are disseminated through discourse, including the speeches of state officials and institutional shifts. These new values, meanings and practices shape relationships across scales, even the most intimate relationships, in different ways. Next, I turn to theoretical work that speaks to the specific shifts in the relationship between states and citizens given the transformation in the philosophy of governing that neo-liberal agents promulgate. I draw on this literature to argue neoliberal restructuring exacerbates existing intimate violence and poverty.

I argue that the articulation between neoliberal restructuring and gender-based violence dispossess women of rights. Ellen Moodie notes that “in a market democracy, inclusion is contingent on the demands of global capital. The economy calls for certain kinds of bodies at
certain times. It disposes of them at others” (2009: 172). In Nicaragua women’s bodies become disposable. They are relied on, but still maintained in a precarious existence abroad. Throughout these processes, they experienced moments of visibility and invisibility. More importantly, through their emigration, their experiences of violence were erased through explanations of their migration by actors as diverse as their aggressors, Nicaraguan and Costa Rican politicians, and even well-intentioned immigrant rights activists.

I relate this inconsistent depiction and recognition of the welfare and location of their bodies to the process of dispossession, described in Rosa Luxemburg’s seminal work (1913). Luxemburg built on the work of Karl Marx by positing that to persist, capitalism must continue to expand. Growth requires the continual input of previously untapped commodities through the dispossession or separation of social wealth or use value from uncommodified sources (Collins 2012; Harvey 2005). While Marx asserted a single instance of accumulation in his theory of primitive accumulation, Luxemburg (1913) theorized the continual creation of new regimes propagating accumulation through dispossession. She described colonialism and military conquest as forms of dispossession, among others. In the current era, scholars draw on Luxemburg’s framework to argue that wealth is drawn out for sale on the market through the dismantling of Keynesian socio-political arrangements, or the social-welfare state organizing logic. These arrangements previously garnered a social-safety net for the citizenry that guaranteed their enjoyment of a basic quality of life (Klein 2007). Current scholars draw on Rosa Luxemburg’s description of “dispossession” to describe how the rollback of public goods in the neoliberal era — labor laws, social services, protections, rights, and forms of participation — forces migrant women to commodify their social reproductive labor and allows private accumulation of public wealth (Collins 2012; Kasmir and Carbonella 2008; Harvey 2006). The
mechanisms of dispossession are highly contextual. The effects of practices derived from the precise regime of accumulation are mediated by the ideas, values, meanings and practices circulating within the local cultural context into which they are inserted. For example, neoliberal values and practices are variably exalted, augmented, diminished or contested in relation to a particular sociopolitical and economic system. This dissertation examines Nicaraguan women’s organizing in response to the mechanisms and effects of dispossession at play in Nicaragua and Costa Rica in the midst of a ‘neoliberal’ regime of accumulation.

The anthropological examination of global economic restructuring now encompasses over 40 years of scholarship on topics spanning the deterritorialization of capital and finance (Ferguson 2006; Ong 2006); the criminalization and concurrent contradictory reliance on international labor migration (Sassen-Koob 1981; Ong 2006; Khosravi 2010; Gardner 2010); changing forms of governance and the reconfiguration of perceptions of state obligations (Collins 2012); shifting forms and meanings of politics, citizenship, rights and engagement (Postero 2007; Paley 2001; Elyachar 2005); the shifting meanings of consumption (Doane, forthcoming; Gregory 2007); and finally, new forms of organizing responding to these shifts (Doane 2011; Murdock 2008; Edelman 2001; Postero 2007; Paley 2001). Scholars routinely debate the implications and modalities of these shifting arrangements. Such debates are certainly undergirded by the diverse contexts in which these changes take place. These shifts are related to the implementation of neoliberal policies, a concept used by scholars to describe and critique the dominant values, ideas, and practices of late capitalism. Thus, global economic restructuring is in effect a summation of the shifts that take place in this neoliberal era.

Anthropologists share a perception that the changing modes of capitalism are the driving force behind changing social and cultural arrangements. The ongoing debates related to global
economic restructuring focus on the changes it produces with respect to the “national state,”
defined as an assemblage of formalizing institutions. The assemblage is organized around ideas
about “law, economy, security, authority and membership” of how a group residing within a
specified territory will be governed (Sassen 2006; Doane 2011). Moreover, the deployment of
the discourse of nation, or an “imagined community” (Anderson 2006), provides the precedent to
establish a legitimate governing unit that will organize the distribution of wealth and the

Neoliberalism diverges from the previous mode of Keynesian policies instituted in the
wake of the Great Depression. The key objective of Keynesian fiscal and monetary policies was
to produce full employment and the creation of a social safety net (Harvey 2006: 17). The
“accumulation strategy” focused on the growth of national markets. The state was comprised of a
growing assemblage of national institutions that functioned to guarantee a basic quality of life for
its members, perpetuating its own growth. The institutionalization of social programs and
collective arrangements could further guard against the ravages of the market by creating a social
safety net guaranteeing basic welfare (Harvey 2005; Collins 2012; Silva 2009; Paley 2001). In
the neoliberal era these institutions are dismantled, shrunk, and taken over by non-governmental
organizations, or are reworked to serve global and corporate interests. Neoliberal technicians
abolish areas where wealth collects: in social securities, minimum wages pensions, and
state/socialized services. They argue Keynesian measures hinder the provision of services at
prices workers can afford and commensurate with their wages. State services could be run by
multinational more efficiently, at a profit (Klein 2007; Doane 2011). The state was the “new
frontier” (Klein 2007) or a new site of accumulation. Much like newly-conquered colonies the
dismantled state provided sources of “costless” wealth extraction (Collins 2012; Harvey 2005;
Klein 2007). The shift towards global markets also implies a shift decoupling the protectionist role of state institutions for the citizenry and its role in promulgating new accumulation mechanisms. In this sense, the national state is maintained as “the realm where formalization and institutionalization have all reached their highest level of development” (Sassen 2006:1). Ultimately, the implication of the neoliberal turn is that state assemblages are increasingly implicated in the “construction of new types of global scalings of dynamics and institutions” while continuing to “inhabit the realm of what is still largely national” (Sassen 2006: 1).

Neoliberalism forms the dominant system of values, beliefs and practices. The invigorated emphasis on individual freedom celebrates the ability of the individual to make choices as a consumer, moving away from collective arrangements and protections, which “disrupted” the natural equilibrium of the market (Klein 2007: 64). In this same vein, neoliberalism celebrates the market as a “harbinger of democracy.” Here democracy is operationally defined as the “freedom and individuality to promote the economic interests of large global corporations” (Doane 2011; Harvey 2005). Participation is enabled through market insertion where global entities concerned with enabling corporations determine rights. These arrangements are introduced through national participation in global trade agreements (CAFTA-DR, WTO)6 but also through national policies “shrinking” the state apparatus, though arguably not its reach, by concentrating power in the executive (Harvey 2005; Sassen 2006).

As a philosophy of governing, neoliberalism also requires the consent of those being governed. The implementation of neoliberal policies is a hegemonic process or a renewed phase of state formation (Joseph and Nugent 1994; Williams 1977). Neoliberalism redefines the

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6 The Central American Free Trade Agreements (and the Dominican Republic), signed in 2007 (regulate trade between the countries in ways that favor corporate, and often, U.S. based interest. It follows the philosophy of the World Trade Organization that prohibit nationalist protectionist measures (in some countries).
relationship between states and citizens, insofar as it eliminates the expectation developed under social welfare systems that states will be directly responsible for ensuring citizen well-being. Given the contentious nature of this change, elites deflect attention from the deteriorating social safety net by “urging citizens to take more individual responsibility for their own welfare” (Postero 2007:15). Though dominant, it is rarely experienced as totalizing. It is through these meanings and values that policies are formed and then implemented in local contexts (Inhorn and Wentzell 2011; Lagos 1993; Williams 1977). People do not simply accept state discourses, but struggle with elites over newly implemented policies in the era of the reduced state (Murdock 2008; Davis 1999; Joseph et al 1994).

Scholars Gonzalez de la Rocha, Pearlman, Safa, Jelin, Roberts and Ward argue there is a qualitative shift in the experience of poverty created by the pernicious eradication of a social safety net (2004). In everyday life, this shift is most often described in terms of declining household solvency. The household provides a particularly apt unit of analysis, because it is a site where people compile income and labor. The household is also the unit “targeted” by government programs: the social safety net buoys all members of the household. Previously, the social safety net permitted poor households and communities to insulate themselves and weather economic crisis. Together, these conditions and strategies provided a sense of security within the household that encouraged investment of surplus energy in the community and fostered community collaboration (Gonzalez de la Rocha 2001; Itzigsohn, 2006). But under neoliberalism the struggle to mitigate the effects of structural adjustment policies is greater. Households must increase expenditure to pay for privatized services, while adapting to a labor market in which employment opportunities for men decline in absolute numbers. Women encounter growing employment opportunities, however, they are increasingly informal, unskilled, unstable, and
poorly remunerated. In the face of growing insecurity, household costs monopolize income. Additionally, this shift entails “the intensification of domestic work as household budgets shrink” (Beneria 2003: 55; Collins 2012; Murdock 2008; Gonzalez 2006). Mexican anthropologist Mercedes Gonzalez de La Rocha describes the marginality of the Keynesian era to the “marginality of today” as a transition from “resources of poverty [to the] poverty of resources” (2001: 72). Accordingly, these scholars characterize the initial transition as one of increased economic adversity accompanied by growing social isolation.

Globally, across classes, women bridge the deficit in household income in addition to their caregiving roles (Gonzalez 2006; Mills 2003). The dismantling of state programs, services and labor protections accompanies the contraction of state enterprise and, therefore, employment most adversely affects households of the lower quintiles. To meet the costs of privatized programs and services, wealthier households may send more members into the workforce. Social reproductive labor of women in the home is often replaced by low-wage paid labor, to make women’s economic activity effective. The “flexibility” of households in the lower quintiles diminished in connection with the ubiquity of precarious employment, labor market restructuring and the weakening of laws guarding social rights. Increasingly, it is women who migrate alone, exchanging household unity for economic solvency. They emigrate in the hope that the relatively higher wages abroad will stretch to meet the cost of living at home (Keating, Rasmussen and Rishi 2010; Hartsock 2006). This is important in understanding and characterizing the demand in middle class homes and small businesses for low wage labor and its role in producing migration.

H. Neoliberal Processes, Gender and the Reconfiguration of Labor

Nation-states are implicated in global scaling in various ways, through global reconfiguration. Among them is the reliance of receiving and sending countries on a migrant
labor force to meet production goals or to provide remittances. In particular, the patriarchal values undergirding the logic of global economic restructuring (Beneria 2003) have produced a corresponding shift in the gendered dynamics of immigrant labor. As low-wage labor is feminized, women have emerged as the primary immigrant labor force. In fact, this is one of the principal arenas of tension in the wake of restructuring. As the effects of neoliberal policies affect household dynamics and intimate relationships, the difficulty of maintaining a household forces some of its members abroad. But, as a process of consent, the tension is not complete. Migration often becomes a part of gendered local and translocal cultural logic. It is reflected in the desire for immigrant’s efficient or particularly caring labor in a home (Hoschild 2004) and the widespread notion that emigrant mothers “abandon” their households or the desirability of male emigrants as spouses, marked as worldly and hardworking providers (Pribilsky 2007). In the following section, I turn to the literature theorizing the turn in international labor economy to understand the transitions in the Nicaraguan and Costa Rican economies and its effects on intimate relations.

When they decide to emigrate, Nicaraguan imagine Costa Rica as a site of possibility. The commonality of emigration to Costa Rica and the spread of a discourse that it offers access to work and rights, emerged in the midst of Costa Rica’s expansion of its export sector and labor shortage (Cortes Ramos presentation 10/8/12). Most Network members’ response to violence through emigration took place in the midst of this shift. It reflects global trends in the reconfiguration of the gendered division of labor. Moreover, though women’s impetus to migrate is social, it is tied up with their economic marginality. Some migrated rapidly and directly, seeking to escape the violence of Nicaragua’s civil war in the 1980s. Many lost access to
Some women sought employment within Nicaragua upon separating from abusive spouses, facing the challenge of providing for themselves and children alone. When this became impossible, they emigrated abroad. Others, removing themselves from violent homes, traveled directly to Costa Rica. Once abroad they too sought employment. Ultimately, they participate in the shifting economic scene and, through their presence, reproduce this same discourse of possibility.

It is through material dispossession, such as the dismantling social welfare programs, restrictive labor laws, shrinking social rights under increasingly conservative governments, and the retraction of democratic participation that women are unable to meet their social reproductive needs. They move to Costa Rica envisioning greater access to social rights but also to the economic means to support their families. Yet, they are also subject to non-material forms of dispossession, which are manifest in state appropriation of the economic and material success of practices such as migration. State representatives celebrate government investment in communities that are in reality upheld by remittances. In turn, in the midst of these empty discourses the conditions that produce and are produced by women’s departure persist unresolved (Collins 2012; Doane 2012; Elyachar 2005).

When women migrate abroad to work, it is advantageous for both receiving and sending countries. Receiving countries gain from the productivity of migrant workers without investing in the reproduction of labor (Feldman et al 2011; Mills 2003). Further, they benefit from legally, socially and economically marginal labor (Sassen-Koob 1981; Gomberg-Munoz 2010; DeGenova 2005). Mass emigration reduces the pressure on sending states to provide services and employment, while balancing debts through remittances (Guevara 2010; Mills 2003).

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7 See Anja Nygren’s 2003 article for documentation of similar experiences in south-eastern Nicaragua.
Sociologists argue that the export of women laborers becomes the strategy for growth in some countries converting them into “labor export platforms” (Guevara 2010: 22; Lundquist and Massey 2005; Chang 2000; Chin 1997). In this vein, migration from Nicaragua to Costa Rica is equated with a safety valve (Cortes 2006). Labor migration allows both sending and receiving states to retreat from providing services. Instead, economically marginal groups bear the costs of household and labor reproduction (Mills 2003). Meanwhile, the ongoing lack of services continually renews the need for wages from abroad and therefore renews migrant workforces (Mills 1999). The new international division of labor allows value to be continually accumulated from the “comparative advantage of women’s disadvantages” (in Nash 1989: 235). In a sense, the economic, political and social stability of both sending and receiving countries becomes dependent on each other, forging a transnational interdependence. Viewed from this perspective, each country is as much implicated in massive migration and, further, in the denial of “citizenship” for migrants or the creation of spaces of exception to state membership-- as women neither receive the benefits nor participate in either.

Starting in the late 1970’s, scholars began to notice that women had become the archetypal worker in the new international division of labor (Nash and Fernandez-Kelly 1983). Scholars apply this frame to understand the burgeoning migration of women from the periphery who sell their reproductive labor on the market, most prominently as domestic employees, nurses, caregivers and factory workers. Women workers had become desirable in the global market because their labor could be easily devalued. They were recruited from rural areas where, in theory, they had been subject to patriarchal family authority, and this, combined with lack of exposure to unions, would make them less militant than male unionized labor. Moreover, skills associated with women’s reproductive labor were recast as innate and unskilled, making women
desirable precisely because their skills were devalued (Babb 1986; Fernandez-Kelly 1983). Assembly-line managers continue to assert a preference for women workers for their “natural” dexterity, hand-eye co-ordination, and docility (Beneria 2003). In the realm of domestic labor, employers seek women from the global South who are said to retain a natural disposition to mothering (Hoschild 2004; De los Reyes 2001; Salzinger 1997; Ong 1988; Ehrenreich 2004). Globally, women’s earnings are deemed supplementary to men’s wages within a nuclear household, which justifies lower wages for women. However, many women are responsible for household subsistence (Guevara 2010; Beneria 2003; Gamburd 2000). The incorporation of women into employment in the global market profoundly affected the social and geographic conceptualization of households of the global South.

A wealth of scholarship also deals with women’s responses to these shifts. One body of literatures explores how women’s own motivations and realities to migrate, play on these discourses. They point to new ways that women express agency in accessing markets, wealth, social mobility and geographic mobility (Freeman 2000, Salzinger 1997; Constable 2006; Parreñas 2003). Increasingly, women who participate in mass-migrations perceive that states benefit from their labor abroad, while women’s families absorb the costs. Activists describe these arrangements in the language of “structural violence” (Gardner 2010), results of political-economic arrangements. Migrants and members of sending households, particularly women, claim they are being denied basic rights associated with citizenship, such as work, social services and “the chance to keep their household together” (Fernandez Poncela 1996: 55). They reject the implicit demand that sending communities subsidize economic growth (Constable 2004; Mills 2003). In response, migrant women activists demand policies resolve structural inequities improving access to rights, resources, and forms of participation. Some assert that as citizens
who contribute to their home communities and country, they should receive benefits from the sending state. Other have argued that by contributing their labor to receiving states, women have earned the entitlements of citizens (Kofman 2010; Ong 2006; Dagnino 2003; Mills 2003). Women equate their struggle for well-being and dignity in the neoliberal period with struggle over the changing meaning of citizenship and the changing relationships between state and citizens (Bosniak 2006).

Contemporary immigrant movements face similar challenges. In the U.S., immigrants are considered to be unworthy of citizen-rights in the host nation-state. This has galvanized immigrant rights activism that spans a broad spectrum of responses. Advocates of the Dream Act, which would provide a path to citizenship for college students and soldiers, were divided in their positions. For example, some regarded this as the most politically expedient legislation, while others felt they were the most deserving. Meanwhile, immigrant worker groups have sought broader reform to a “broken” immigration system that tacitly conflates immigrants with illicit labor and embraces the intersecting subject positions (Pallares 2012; Coll 2011; Motta et al 2011; Gomberg-Muñoz and Nussbaum-Barberena 2011). Scholars widely recognize this notion functions to maintain low-wage labor that is vulnerable to deportation and unable to access rights (Stephen 2007; DeGenova 2005; Zolniski 2006; Stasilius and Bakkan 2009; Kearney 1991; Sassen-Koob 1981). These and other social movements around the world dynamically position themselves to address the neoliberal realities of migration and the dispossession of their democratic rights.

Significantly, these relationships have principally described migration between countries of the so-called “global South” towards the “global North” or South-North migration. Another body of scholarship described these arrangements in rural-urban domestic migration, itself
ongoing for centuries (Mills 2005; Fernandez Kelly 1981). There has been significantly less acknowledgement of the burgeoning migration of women between countries of the global South or “South-South” migration. In part, this movement has been constant and has gone unnoticed. Furthermore, some analytical frameworks assume that there the absence of cultural difference between migrants and receiving countries. However, a turn to critical geography provides the theory of uneven development. This posits that the poverty of some areas is connected to the wealth of others (Smith 1984). This inequality may grow as the result of lending institutions designation of some countries for programs of “economic growth” and others for “stabilization,” such as is the case in Costa Rica and Nicaragua respectively. Furthermore, countries of the global North have often upheld punishing political regimes that stymie attempts to evenly distribute wealth and economic productivity. More recently, scholars within Latin America are proposing research on these relationships between countries such as Argentina and Bolivia, Columbia and Venezuela, Mexico and Guatemala, Nicaragua and Costa Rica, and finally, Brazil and Bolivia (Hujo 2012).

Moreover, the lack of recognition of these patterns in global scholarship and policy-making drives a lack of local acknowledgement. In Costa Rica and Nicaragua, the perpetuation of this relationship has benefitted from its invisibility in terms of internal economic, social and political stability. The calculated invisibility, in turn, makes the focus on individual responsibility inevitable. The absence of a labor force large enough to fulfill labor demands in Costa Rica relies on informal networks of recruitment, rather than labor programs (Cortes Ramos 10/7/12). In fact, a recent regularization process was limited to a few of the numerous labor sectors employing Nicaraguans. In its initial iteration, it included agriculture and domestic work while ignoring construction, tourism, cleaning services, restaurant work, and security guard
services, among the most commonly recognized. In Nicaragua, the executive branch prohibits public discussion of emigration, though it is commonly recognized. It is acknowledged in applications for bus passes, loans and census data. The absence of official recognition perpetuates the perception of emigration as an individual or household responsibility. This maintains the perception of an artificial divide between public and private spheres of incidence.

I. Nicaragua’s Transnational Body Politic

The growing transnational interdependence between Nicaragua and Costa Rica is easily framed within the broader trends of global restructuring as a movement responding to uneven development. However, the exact motivations, experiences and responses surrounding migration in the neoliberal era vary among individuals and countries. In the case of Nicaragua, plenty of activities reflect these trends, such as the divestment from Nicaragua’s industries and the dismantling of its state programs. But they take place in specific social arrangements, or hierarchies, which are not simply a backdrop for the economic activities and arrangements of neoliberal restructuring, but active social scenes that temper migrants’ experiences. They produce suffering and as such, constitute another scale of violence. In the case of Nicaragua, I argue that austerity measures, attendant to a neoliberal agenda, serve to augment women’s historic marginality and social suffering, encouraging their migration. In this sense, the interaction of the local with the global demonstrates how different scales of violence nest together. This articulation exacerbates women’s discontent with a social milieu in which violence exacted on their bodies is expected and invisible. It then offers a channel for their emergent inconformity with this gendered exclusion through the hope of finding work abroad. Economic stabilization and violence converge on Nicaraguan women’s bodies in a transnational regime of accumulation by dispossession whereby the wealth of their social reproductive labor is
redirected towards the transnational business of remittances in Nicaragua, undergirding economic expansion in Costa Rica and masking structural adjustment in both. Thus, as Naomi Klein describes, in relation to “shock treatments” meted out on Southern Cone countries, the mutually reinforcing interplay of neoliberal reforms and gender-based violence “converged on the body politic of the region” (Klein 2007: 87).

Amid neoliberal reconfigurations of the state, gender-based violence ultimately constitutes a means of separating women from the use-value of their social reproductive labor. Network women’s life histories reflect their negotiation of different scales of violence. Most began describing a solitary search for well-being that pre-dated the Revolution, responding to violence exacted by mothers, siblings, spouses and caretakers. Some narrate their life histories by threading together a chronologically-ordered description of the households and communities they departed as they left abusive situations. Others narrate a fulfilling rural life disrupted by warfare. All relate poverty and marginality. With minimal exceptions, women occupied informal sectors as domestic workers, market vendors, farmers and cooks. A few completed high school and with additional technical training, became nurses and school teachers. The absence of value for women’s educational achievement, their unstable household situations, the need to provide income for their households, early marriage and an overall lack of resources kept them from seeking to complete primary or secondary education. In the case of Nicaragua, violence as a response to a “flux” in gendered economic relations is further tempered by the civil war during which neoliberal restructuring began.

Few noted a change over the course of the Revolution, though their emigration notably coincided with the Revolution’s end during the 1990s. In the Revolution’s aftermath, social interactions took on the polarized and militarized character of a civil-war-torn society amidst
political transition, military demobilization and the implementation of austerity measures.
Leaving violence requires women to support children, younger siblings and elderly parents alone, mitigating significant impediments to accessing basic needs such as affordable housing, education and healthcare. Women were exposed to the dispossession of social rights as they confronted the dismantling of institutional support, declining wages for feminized labor, minimal legal knowledge and ruptured social networks, each of which might have enabled them to remove themselves from situations of violence, locally. Moreover, in this setting, separation alone did not offer women any particular protection from ongoing or future violence.

Network women’s attempts to negotiate this violence brought them to sell their labor on the market of social reproductive labor. In this manner, their narratives departed from those of women migrant workers around the world. Many found themselves at a loss for strategies to escape violence at home and attempted migrating to Costa Rica as a last resort. Many anticipated that the international border would serve as a barrier to influence by the social networks that had repeatedly pulled them back into violence. They also anticipated that the higher wages would allow them to generate the means to support themselves and children, where they had been unable to in Nicaragua. There, they lacked spousal and other familial economic support, state programs and services, and a secure environment. They envisioned Costa Rica as an alternative site of possibility in a number of manners: a place where women and children would have rights; a place where spouses and family would be unable to pursue them; a place where work opportunities would be abundant and well-remunerated; and more simply, another place to go. Instead, gendered interpersonal violence often kept them from working once abroad. They found they had entered another nation-state’s regime of belonging. There they experienced distinct, though equally marginalizing forms of violence. They also endured the countless ways Costa
Ricans reinforced their exclusion, perceiving them as a gendered, racialized and invasive underclass. Ensconced in the tussle that characterizes daily life abroad, in a country whose “myth” of nationhood purports the widespread enjoyment of universal rights and equality, their collective struggle over the everyday “right to have rights” (Dagnino 2009) emerged. Across borders, these different forms of producing women’s marginality complements global economic restructuring. Given this exclusion, the clear message is that the global economy is built on women’s exclusion from equality. This is not to imply that they passively accepted these arrangements. Women’s stories indicated that they constantly negotiated the structural marginality they encountered. In this sense, as the Network’s project developed, it brought to light a wide range of marginalizing practices reflecting dominant values that remain invisible when they adhere to normative values.

J. Identifying the Origins of Pain
In the Nicaraguan and Costa Rican contexts, violence and migration hid in plain sight. They appeared throughout popular culture. In 2007, the nephew of the Nicaraguan Revolution’s prized musicians coined a tune “rivers of people, crossing rivers.” The corresponding music video depicted families sitting in humble homes holding pictures of those who have departed. The song referred to the crossing of the San Juan River, running along most of the breadth of the isthmus, just a few kilometers north of the Nicaraguan/Costa Rican border. He wrote another for a battered woman and her aggressor. A Costa Rican band\(^8\) wrote a ballad depicting the romance of a star-crossed couple, in love from opposite sides of the San Juan River, despite their countries’ quarrels. Although widely acknowledged, the issues remained tacitly invisible without being remedied. In Nicaragua, officials rarely spoke of emigration to Costa Rica, while exploring

\(^8\)
ways to curtail the excesses of those migrants who had ventured to the global North. Legislation aiming to protect women from violence was opposed by women and men in Nicaragua’s National Assembly and received minimal public support. Meanwhile, Costa Rican legislation focused on controlling women’s labor without recognizing the exclusion they faced. Why was the obvious so difficult to address? Pain is not easily recognized nor expressed. Anthropologists who study violence find that this difficulty is explained by examining the role culture plays in precluding the visibility of the pain. Detecting the pain of migration and violence is made more difficult by insistence on prioritizing those holding citizenship and acting on it by engaging in recognized forms of loyalty to their country. When we describe the world around us, we deal in codes, systems of seeing and understanding that render some bodies visible and others invisible, some interactions noteworthy and others insignificant (Moodie 2010; Wolf 1999; Lancaster 1992). In the neoliberal era, both Nicaraguan and Costa Rican governments have dealt in specific codes that render Nicaraguan women migrants and their experiences invisible.

Nicaragua was portrayed as Christian, socialist and solidary. Successive Nicaraguan governments’ public silence surrounding emigration denoted a concerted code (Wolf 2001; Moodie 2010) categorizing both violence and emigration as issues that should be addressed at the scale of the household. As I accompanied women through Nicaraguan neighborhoods, they pointed at almost every house we passed to point out who had left. Yet immigration was no secret. Nicaragua’s code divided the perception of family members and migrants between the dualisms of loyalty and abandonment as well as presence and absence. It dealt in absolutes. Thus, in spite of migrants’ regular phone calls, visits and remittances, they were perceived to have abandoned family. Migrants’ were successful for their flexibility to work while separated from family. Yet this flexibility was born of necessity. It was a product of the insecurity women
experience when they lacked a clear path towards the resolution of their economic and social vulnerability. So a prevalent issue was rendered effectively invisible.

Costa Rica dealt in codes of democracy and universalism. Costa Rican officials were propense to blame migrants for the decline of security and public institutions (Sandoval Garcia 2007). When they did so, they drew on the code as they questioned whether migrants threatened Costa Rica’s democracy. Costa Rica’s exceptionalist code divided perceptions of its inhabitants between dualisms. They might have been labeled disruptive or passive, democratic or autocratic, and foreign or belonging. A code in which all Costa Rican interactions were deemed democratic relegated discussions of xenophobia to a depoliticized cultural realm. The dichotomy of foreign and belonging enable those who did not appear to “fit” to be treated as undeserving without further evaluation. Although there was increasing respect for migrant workers’ contributions, there was also a steady ambivalence toward their participation and incorporation. Women confronted the widespread understanding that Costa Rica was “developed” and had working mechanisms in place to deal with violence. The consequence, Nicaraguans women encountered, was that only minimal international support was available to continue pursuing justice. Furthermore, Center program leader Johana noted that the mechanisms were “like a defunct machine: having the gears in place but ultimately taking up space without doing anything.”

Network women’s stories of violence and migration diverged from the typical narratives of structural marginality that characterize the gendered global labor scholarship. Their stories did not immediately conjure images of the “ravages” of the market. Instead they depicted their decision to migrate as a self-sufficient reaction to violence. Nor did this particular reaction itself grow from the adoption of a neoliberal sensibility that women should take care of themselves. Instead, the designation of interpersonal violence as private, a feature of the patriarchal
organization of the social order, gave women the sense that their well-being was their own concern. Anthropologist Cristina Alcalde (2010) asserts that interpersonal violence has psychological repercussions. It produces a sense of isolation, causing women to retreat into the home. This move entails the loss of social networks and social solidarity. These conditions were complicit in women’s search for self-sufficiency through the sale of social reproductive labor.

Additionally, during Nicaragua’s long war and its aftermath, everyday confrontations with episodes of violence produced ways of seeing, shaping actions and reactions. Widespread socio-political violence and militarized social order came to inform the way people saw the world and related to each other (Martin-Baro 1990). Specifically, it entrenched authoritarian practice in everyday social relations. In addition, similarly widespread psychological violence produced widespread distrust (Manz 2004). Network women’s stories illustrated how Nicaraguans’ ways of being reflected the hierarchical, commanding and violent forms of interaction and conflict resolution of its historic socio-political landscape. The normativity of violence and the hegemony of gender inequality rendered women’s search to leave violence transgressive, and isolated them in their attempts to remedy authoritarian patriarchal practice.

Throughout Nicaragua’s history its political leaders have effectively coopted movements demanding recognition of the right to have rights. In particular, they have enforced a strictly patriarchal order in which men control everyday life. Given this history, interpersonal violence per se is not uniquely neoliberal. Nonetheless, the declining availability of work for men, for example, has provoked a shift among household roles and caused discord related to gendered understandings of work and family. In areas where ‘ideal’ masculinity is tied to power and providing, the shift toward men’s inability to obtain employment can produce exertions of power in other areas. This routinely provoked instances of abuse. Women recounted that their spouses
collected and confiscated their wages, made disparaging remarks about appearance and competence, attempted to control women’s mobility and physically abused women ranging from pinching to beating and burning women.

It is clear, however, that their migration was not divorced from neoliberal restructuring. The economic changes and changes in social relations certainly affected women’s lives. The interplay between gender-based violence and neoliberal restructuring produces the insecure conditions that foster accumulation by dispossession. Women’s struggle towards economic independence, the absence of jobs, social safety net and the unyielding exclusion of women clearly drew on the interplay between economic and social orders, marked by the inability to build a house, pay for rent, feed children or provide adequate care for them. Women turned to spaces, cities and sites abroad, where opportunities had appeared to be abundant (Klein 2007; Gonzalez de la Rocha 2001; Itzigsohn 2006; Wilson 1999; Fernandez-Poncela 1996).

The erasure of women’s experiences of exclusion at home and abroad acted to detach them from any social wealth they had cultivated at home or might produce abroad. Insofar as the migrant workforce relieved the pressure on Nicaragua for public investment and bolstered Costa Rica’s economic growth, women’s migration demonstrated that “the market thrives on…insecurity” (Moodie 2010:48). In this case, the insecurity was the result of the devaluation of women’s labor and the way it rendered them marginal across scales. In this way, their experiences of migration are illustrative of what Eric Wolf describes as the ways that “capitalist formations peel the individual out of encompassing prescriptive bodies and install people as separate actors, free to exchange, truck or barter in the market as well as in other provinces of life” (Wolf 2001; 396). Stabilization in Nicaraguan and growth in Costa Rica were predicated on situations that forced women to migrate and yet, disregarded their labor. In Nicaragua, families
came to expect that remittances, rather than government investment, would enable access to education, healthcare and dignity. In Costa Rica, the production of consent towards the dismantling of public services was achieved by placing blame for the decline on Central American and most frequently, Nicaraguan migrants. Women became scapegoats for decline although their labor was indispensable, leaving them to survive on wages exchanged for labor.

By extension, as neoliberalism produced new mobility, it also reconfigured politics and participation. Research on organizing activities in Latin America over the last few decades has pointed to democratic openings and closures as mediating circumstances in the everyday experiences of those organizing. While the democratic openings are often carried out in a state-wide program, the closings are often experienced collectively by a delimited group. Insofar as the Revolution purported to transform Nicaraguan society, it was experienced as an opening, although ongoing sexist, ethnocentric, racist and regionally biased practices excluded some groups. Likewise, in a sense, the possibility and reality of emigration to Costa Rica purported to provide status, rights and access not previously experienced by Nicaraguan women. But in the practice of nationally-delimited universalism, women experienced this as a process of closure, and ultimately, the tension of being denied what they understood they could claim.

In response, the women of the Network engaged in collective efforts to construct new feminist codes normalizing gendered equality. They believed they would usher in democratic forms of relating by concertedly and collectively working to transform ways that women interacted in spaces from the home outward. The work of the Network reflected their growing cognizance of their marginality across scales, a product of social hierarchies that produced the violence they experience. Moreover, they engaged in a local, feminist politics, insofar as they addressed the gendered dimensions of their exclusion as much as their racialized and
nationalized exclusion. Massey points out that feminisms are tied to local politics, and that “the term local is used in derogatory reference to feminist struggles and to feminist concerns in intellectual work” (1994:10). They are dismissed as unreflective of broader struggles. Instead, as Massey’s work suggests, this perception is socially constructed and only serves to obscure the direct relationship between local and broader struggles.

The Network’s local feminism built from their realization that they were embedded in a transnational system of relations and that citizens in both states derived benefits from their marginality. They showed that violence, in different forms and across scales, had physical, emotional and economic repercussions, reinforcing women’s sense of unworthiness and reproduced their reticence to demand rights. Migrant women remained a low-wage labor force, upholding the economies of Costa Rican and Nicaraguan states without reaping any substantial benefit. They maintained that they aspired to provoke changes that would remedy inequities, which emerged as they experienced violence across scales and different national regimes of belonging. Collective localized experiences were at the center of their movement and were implicated in their ability to point to the operations of a transnational system of inequality. Given their attention to these experiences of gendered violence, this dissertation focuses on the social construction of gendered belonging and the way the corresponding notions are deployed at different scales. The hegemonic process can be mapped onto social interactions, where embodied enactments of dominant ideologies clash with the purposeful embodiment and performance of alternative proposals for the arrangement of the social order.

K. Conclusion
Throughout my dissertation, I show hegemony in its transformative phases and the friction of transformation. I do this by pointing to dominant and residual cultural elements as
they manifest through different structures in each country and wove in and out of women’s trajectory of pre-emergence and emergence. Notably, although Williams was writing about transformation, he was not writing about organizing and concerted shifts in culture. As immigrants and family members of migrants, Network women focus principally on their perception that gender-based violence was implicated in the high rates of emigration—51% of whom are women-- from Nicaragua to Costa Rica since 1995 (Cortes Ramos 2006). Furthermore, they argued that women were marginalized by violence abroad despite the expectation that Costa Rica offers a space of “rights” for women and children. Medical anthropologist Charles Briggs (2004) uses the term “erasure” to indicate a process through which people’s lives, deaths and experiences are deemed insignificant or unworthy of concern. He shows that in fact the marginality of one group is, in fact, the part of the same structure, which marginalizes the other. Yet the process of erasure naturalizes the marginality and exclusion of one as much as the modernity and citizenship of the other. Insofar as Network women’s efforts focused on transforming everyday interactions that reproduced a translocal social order that normalized violence against women, they interfered in this process of erasure. They addressed their ascribed subordinate position across space and scale, public and private, informal and institutional sites. Through their focus on transforming dominant meanings, values and practices, they challenged arrangements that rendered them simultaneously central to the new transnational interdependent political economy and its most marginal and invisible participants.
III THE CENTER: ARTICULATING PAIN AND UNEASE

A. Bridging: Coordinators, Meetings and a Movement

The Center provides a lens on ways that past revolutionary organizing logic, deployed in the neoliberal present, produce feminisms that demonstrate a neoliberal resilience but also a transformative potential. Through their participation in the Center’s programs, Nicaraguan women come to distinguish the different scales of violence they confront at home and in life abroad. It is the space in which they instigated organizing around their grievances and formed the Network, whose collective practices respond to the tensions they confront in life abroad. The fraught relationship between NGOs and collective action is ubiquitous in the social movement literature. In particular, anthropologists document the ways that NGOs limit the ways dissent is expressed, maintaining a status quo. Center coordinators carefully tread through the civil society domain in which this takes place. In some ways, in their efforts to encourage Nicaraguan women’s participation by raising their self-confidence, Center coordinators celebrated women’s capacity to endure hardship. Celebrations of survival readily elide the structures that produce violence of different scales. However, I argue that this celebration is tempered by the efforts towards reconsidering sexism, starting with the examination of the construction of gender. I argue that program coordinators at the Center, all of whom were involved in Nicaragua’s revolutionary state, consciously and unconsciously deployed revolutionary organizing logic amid neoliberal pressures. They produced an organization espousing residual values and meanings of feminist initiatives during the Nicaraguan Revolution. Their values also reflected the influence of regional feminist thought. Drawing on these influences, Center coordinators worked to gradually...

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9 Anthropologists began to grapple with the task of delineating an anthropological understanding of civil society in the midst of a wealth of publications attempting to establish an anthropological approach to social movements. These debates were motivated in part by democratic transitions from military governments in South America, peace negotiations from civil wars in Central America and the transition from socialism in former Soviet Republics. This debate also emerged in the midst of a shift from class-based movements to ostensibly identity politics (Doane 2001).
fortify Network members’ efforts towards recognizing and contesting naturalized social hierarchies. Aiming to produce a transformative movement, Center efforts ultimately supported the production of an emergent migrant feminism that navigated a border area between resistance and resilience.

The histories of the Network and the Center were entangled and difficult to distinguish. The Center emerged at a moment of confluence: Nicaraguan migrant women were beginning to find each other. Most women who joined its activities had recognized the discord between their expectations of migration and the reality of their persistent marginality. Yet alone, their lack of knowledge, resources, confidence, friendships and a sense of their rights precluded a collective response. Leticia, having been active in the Revolution and part of a professional class, was opening a community center. Nicaraguan women, who would eventually form the Network, began meeting at the Center on their days off. It provided a safe space to relax and socialize. There they shared their mixed feelings about life abroad, as well as their life histories. Significantly, it was in these spaces that women who had felt invisible in life at home and abroad, became visible to each other. They recognized they had been stripped of their humanity through the different forms of violence they had experienced. Through these discussions they became visible to each other. They resurrected their sense of humanity and began to recognize that their exclusion was collectively experienced. They shared their inconformity regarding the poor treatment they experienced abroad. At the same time, those migrants who had previously participated in the organizing work of the Revolution became leaders in the group. They began coordinating with Leticia to utilize the space for workshops and support-building activities. Having recognized their shared grievances, the women formed the Network. Those who had more training began guiding immigrants. Network members, in turn, continued to introduce
migrant women they encountered in their workplaces, neighborhoods and other shared social spaces, to Center activities. The activities continually provided an arena where Nicaraguan women could recognize that the unease they experienced was collective and resulted from broader structural arrangements. In this sense, they bring a residual logic of transformation. It was this continual process of input and renewal by its members that sustained its capacity to support organizing despite its engagement with mainstream funding, participation in political incorporation projects and some ways the program is structured, which reflect the professionalizing tendencies of NGOs.

For many women, what they labeled as their transformative moment occurred during meetings hosted by the Center. Sometimes it was their own revelation, the moment in which they felt they could let go of a violent past by speaking out loud about it. Others recalled a particular conversation during a meeting when they found they were able to put together the information and discussions they had observed. The meetings provide an important space to transmit ideas and a bridge between the sometimes vague articulation of the idea of what it means to be part of the Network and its translation into a concrete way of being. The work of the Center, as a site of articulation of shared unease and inconformity, aligned its work with the process Raymond Williams described as “pre-emergence.” It is significant that Williams was not referring to organizing but rather the process through which culture gradually changes. In his description, circulating narratives of inconformity give way to increasingly common collective ways of being that entail new meanings, values and practices (1977). The stories Network women told me about their introduction to and trajectory with the Center pointed to it as a site where women found ways to articulate their previously unrecognized tensions with their gendered, racialized
and national marginality. They recognized the experiences as shared and the tension as collective. They began to see how the violence exacted on them was considered normal.

None the less, the process was uneven. The Network had spent over ten years building and rebuilding its network and practices, objectives and goals. It had endured waning membership and, for many women, relaxed standards of what it meant to be involved. Women described how their value for carving out time for meetings regularly fluctuated. Sometimes Network time competed with the necessity of supporting family. Some women lost interest. Others described lapsing into the idea that these were just frivolous activities, given that women’s social interactions were often labeled as vagancia (laziness), chisme (gossip), and ways of being metiches (meddling). Few members recognized the full interconnectedness of violence, migration, labor, services and policy. At the same time, the Network’s success can be measured by women’s ownership of their project, as I will argue in later chapters. For example, Network women were actively involved in securing their permanent place in spaces for intervention in policy making. They were also beginning to consolidate and more actively define a guiding principal for new ways of seeing and interacting by establishing a set of practices that comprise “being organized” and build towards gendered and other equalities throughout the “private and the public.” Yet, I saw this process was also partial and limited. The friction of transformation is evident as competing residual, oppositional and dominant values contradict and complement each other as women consciously and unconsciously employ and contest them throughout Center activities. The way in which this process unfolded corresponded to the pressures, limitations and possibilities that these converging cultural forms produced. As it progressed, program leaders and Network members navigated these pressures with a mix of confrontation, acquiescence and amelioration.
B. Formative Experiences of Feminism and Revolution: Lila’s History

Lila, a leader of the Network and a program coordinator with the Center, was among those whose introduction to feminist ideas and community organizing practices began with the Revolution. The triumph of Nicaragua’s revolution in 1979 encouraged the exchange of ideas about the roots of marginality through the lens of class (Gordon 1998). This brief opening also permitted alternative ideas to proliferate motivated by ethnic, racial and gender marginality. Among the Revolution’s shortcomings was its treatment of these movements as secondary or non-essential (de Monthis 1996; Gordon 1998; Hale 1998; Montoya 2013). The shortcomings aside, the Revolution directly and indirectly produced community leaders able to promote participatory citizenship projects, form organizations, reproduce popular education initiatives, conduct critical, place-based social analysis and develop parallel feminist initiatives. During the Revolution, many Nicaraguan women were involved in community organizing initiatives. Most were employed by the revolutionary state. They were trained in popular education, whose objective is to elicit the concerns and grievances from people and facilitate their participation in making critiques of the conditions that allow them to understand the revolutionary project and the crucial role of community participation. Lila’s initiative to make organizing a life-long activity was spurred by her disillusionment with the transformative potential of the Revolution. Indeed, after the Revolution’s triumph, support for the insurrection did not necessarily translate into an ability to launch social critique, nor participate in the process of making decisions during what is referred to as “the Revolution” or the period when the FSLN was reorganizing the state.

The Nicaraguan Revolution entailed an effort at transforming national culture towards cultivating equity in everyday interactions. Literacy campaigns, health brigades and more

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10 De Monthis writes, most notably, that it is estimated that only 14.6% of women actually took part in the revolutions’ mass organizations, in contrast to the popular notion that women’s involvement was (widespread) (1996: 94).
importantly, training in popular education were implemented throughout the country following the Revolution’s triumph. These activities worked towards providing the marginalized with a praxis to help them identify the obstacles they confronted and providing them with a language to voice their concerns. In turn, each of these programs represented efforts to provide the marginalized with the skills to have a voice in deciding over the course of the Revolution, granting weight to voices from below. In policy and partially in practice, their efforts were reinforced from above through a decision making structure that aimed to ensure these voices would be weighed by the revolutions’ vanguard. Revolutionary leaders’ vision of a participatory democracy that responded to all voices was incorporated into the institutions of citizenship and governing, in other words, into the governing structures. The value for transformation and widespread participation informed the practices of different institutions. The extent to which this practice was implemented fell short, particularly in recognizing that beyond class the intersecting hierarchies of race and gender marginalized different groups in Nicaragua. Furthermore, the revolutions’ project to foment widespread participation was curtailed by the need to fight the counterrevolution. However, overall, the dominant culture supported transformative efforts.

Lila’s experience in the Revolution illuminates the key concerns and solutions that informed the way the Center was run and its activities organized. This shared background of its founders and coordinators played a key role in the development of programs capable of producing transformation. Lila began organizing with the Revolution in high school and participated in the Sandinista Youth¹¹ in the first years following the triumph. She joined literacy campaigns and later trained as a popular educator. She worked organizing community initiatives in different towns focused on women’s issues. Lila found that many of the same hierarchies were

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¹¹ An official/mass organization of the Revolution.
being reproduced in these spaces that were intended to produce an egalitarian, direct participatory democracy. This was evident to her even in the community committees that were formed to provide a forum for voicing the most localized issues. Although women were equally active, she noted that “the machismo remained. The men were in charge. A woman could tell them what she wanted but they didn’t take it into account.” Women’s voices were excluded from spaces ranging from community to mass organizations. On top of this, she began to see that “opportunists” with higher social standing who joined “in the midst of the noise of the triumph,” held sway in decision-making.”12 When she spoke up, she was sanctioned. She “became disenchanted.”

She sought new avenues to be involved, beginning with taking up university studies. She encountered a gendered double-standard in relation to her preparation. While “latecomers and men” received scholarships to study so they could help with the revolutionary project, her pursuit of a college degree was labeled “an act against the Revolution.” She was told her country needed her to engage in combat and community work, preparing others to engage in the new society. During our conversations, Lila related that she internalized the idea that getting a college degree “was like laughing about the death of the heroes, walking through the blood of the martyrs. That the Revolution needed me [more].” Upon reflection, within a short time, she felt this was her loss:

the living heroes, the men, got prepared. But they didn’t want us women to do that. They spoke of equality, [between] women and men. But we didn’t have a voice and a vote in decisions. Why not? [For example,] I’d given birth to my third child and 25 days later they drafted me. They weren’t concerned about me or my child. If I didn’t go to work. I would lose my job. Where were my rights? Where were my children’s rights? So, please. Long live the Revolution.

12 She refers to these as the “July 19ths” referring to those who joined once the Revolution had triumphed, on July 19th, 1979.
Lila’s voice had grown flat with ire as she concluded. Her ability to identify the contradictions left her at odds with the project. Her response was to become rebellious. She continued openly questioning how decisions were made. Finally, she disengaged from party work when they called her a counterrevolutionary. She described the contradiction of being called a traitor when she felt that she was working towards the Revolution’s expressed goals as painful. Lila left the Revolution’s formal channels for organizing projects that operated parallel, yet independent of the institutionalized revolutionary project. Her response indicated that she could not imagine a transformation occurring in everyday relations without transformation of decision-making forums.

Lila resolved this challenge by turning towards developing her skills as a community organizer. She studied popular theater for five years and began to apply it. Forming a “cultural promoters association” with her peers, Lila began to work with communities in addressing local issues related to health, gender, environmental issues and abuse. They trained youth in carrying out health brigades and taught them about first aid, preventative medicine, waste management, health, vaccines and shots. She felt they were successful in “getting the message to people, distant communities who never would have received it” and establishing durable projects in which people would continue to invest time and energy. She felt this was the result of their distinct work dynamic prioritizing local experiences. Eventually, she says, “the [Sandinista] party arrived and wanting to take credit and run it.” Though allowing them to join activities, Lila’s group ensured that the communities retain control over the priorities and dynamics of the brigades and promoter trainings. Though adhering to what she saw as revolutionary principles, Lila and her colleagues were called hysterical by the party.
Lila’s experience during the Revolution undergirded her feminist perspective that promoting a localized actors’ ability to critique and analyze their conditions encouraged durable beneficial change. She brought this experience to bear on her work with the Network. She was among the interstitial actors who articulated between marginal groups, activist entities and government institutions, permitting democratic ideals to be disseminated. For the remainder of this chapter, I will discuss, in greater depth, the approach and practice of introducing the women organizing with the Network to feminist ideas and practices, through meeting spaces provided by the Center. I bridge this discussion by providing a brief overview of the changing scene of Latin American feminisms.

C. Feminisms in Latin America

Research taking place within Latin America has pointed out the importance in recognizing cleavages and divergences among Latin American feminisms. Costa Rican sociologist Monserrat Sagot identifies common elements in Latin American feminisms, which purport to produce “a vehicle for broadening democracy” given that feminisms commonly advocate for “a broad notion of social justice to enable the construction of a society that contains the necessary conditions for all its members to develop and exercise their capacities, express their experiences, and participate in determining their living conditions” (2010: 223, emphasis mine). Moreover, she argues, the feminist lens frames violence as a violation of these terms of social justice, whether the psychological impact of intra-familial physical violence or the police forces’ mantra of non-interference in private/home matters (Sagot 2010). Recognizing these common threads, philosopher Francesca Gargallo argues for critical reflection regarding the tendency to speak about feminisms through one voice. Her work, a result of a collaboration with Guatemalan-Maya sociologist Gladys Tzul, documented indigenous feminisms throughout Latin
America. Many of these feminisms (Gargallo 2012) recognized that indirect representation was often an impediment to meeting the conditions for all members of society to participate. Professional representatives, such as politicians or NGO personnel, fail to recognize and legitimate subaltern forms of engagement and priorities. Anthropologists Rosaida Hernandez Castillo (2007) and Maylei Blackwell (2007), writing about the struggles of Maya women in Chiapas, problematize another consequence of indirect representation: that representatives of broader movements bringing together intersecting agendas, prioritize the most broadly shared concerns. Other feminisms may diverge based on differences in priorities and forms of participation spurred by class, ethnic, religious, geographic and national differences. This reflects Doreen Massey’s assertion that the difference in the social construction of space and belonging to that space (1994) produces context-specific forms of resistance. Women in Chiapas view alternative forms of engagement, such as indigenous *usos y costumbres*\(^{13}\) or feminist values, as too radical or antithetical to policy-making and government structures and spaces of discussion (see also Collier 1994; Postero 2007). Scholarship documents the widespread recognition of diverse priorities across and within marginal communities, informing the development of localized feminisms.

An overlapping body of work has critiqued adherence to universal models of political engagement, starting from the ways that priorities are elicited. Any of these representatives who do not “walk in [the] shoes” of marginal women or who utilize top-down styles to elicit group priorities, overlook day to day impediments to participation. Anthropologists George Collier and Elizabeth Quaratiello problematized the transmission of skills and information to marginal communities (1998). They demonstrated that often members of Zapatista communities, chosen to

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\(^{13}\) Forms of decision-making that integrate local indigenous customs in determining who participates as well as local values and worldview.
become the formal representatives of the community, were taught to view issues confronting the community through a mainstream lens. This lens was preferred over a locally rooted lens that criticized the meanings and values with regard to the way that they shaped how issues were approached in educational and political institutions, such as advisory boards on indigenous affairs formed by university or public officials.

In response to the neoliberal schemas, purported, but failing, to produce democratic participation, multiple and overlapping feminist visions for producing the equal exercise of citizenship have emerged. Anthropologists describe various trends pertaining to the neoliberal era that have proved insufficient to achieve these ends, including the professionalization of NGO staff and their claims to represent the interests of marginal women (Murdock 2008); democratization (Paley 2001); enfranchisement and legal citizenships extended to marginal groups (Postero 2007); and finally multiculturalism in policy-making (Collier and Quaratiello 1998; Warren and Jackson 1998; Alvarez 1990). Scholars have described these as top-down shifts, consisting of women being taught to exercise a particular form of citizenship participation rooted in hegemonic ways of seeing through official formal channels (Collier et al 1998; Paley 2001; Murdock 2008; Postero 2007). In other words, male social movement leaders, feminist professionals, academics and politicians claiming ties of identity are generally unable to produce changes most important to marginal women (Hernandez Castillo 2008; Speed and Stephens 2008; Blackwell 2007). In this process, feminist interests may be sidelined during negotiations or deemed too radical for the established parameters of formal political settings.

Nevertheless, feminisms emerging from Latin America build on this “democratic opening” by recognizing that practices rooted in neoliberalism have permitted the persistence of exclusion in representation. In response, they push for unmediated self-representation and direct
participation in spaces of discussion structured by intersecting experiences of marginality. Many of these views were spurred by the exclusion of the concerns of women, indigenous, Afro-descendent and other diverse experiences during mass uprisings. This exclusion instigated processes of pre-emergence. The Revolution ultimately provided a “democratic opening” for ideas of radical gendered transformations to develop and proliferate (Montenegro in Criquillon 1995). This critique is still embodied, performed and expanded by the practices of community organizers who continue the Revolution’s work. Those at the helm of the Network in Costa Rica work with its members, through this lens, to teach each other to confront structural violence and its gendered underpinnings.

Central to ideas of feminist practice is the value for paradigms that develop out of women’s past experiences. At a practical level, Center meetings transmitted a skill set that women could draw on to elicit and transmit these experiences and enter into productive discussions and initiatives, such as transmitting new ideas to their communities or participating in policy-making initiatives. Some of these skills included familiarity with alternative frameworks and ways of seeing. Others skills included public speaking, conflict resolution and interviewing techniques. They introduced feminist practices through the frameworks of popular education and “pedagogy of the oppressed,” (Freire: 1970) which significantly influenced the revolutionary initiatives promoting, teaching and structuring participation in the effort to build a new society. The selection of paradigms for eliciting popular perspective were rooted in the desire for “base” participation. Center leaders modified forms of practice, building on the

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14 Beatriz Manz (2004: 200-204) also describes ways that Maya activists who became refugees in Mexico, forming the organization Mama Maquin, received classes from dedicated non-Maya solidarity workers. The skills they developed created a notable difference in their ability to organize and lobby for themselves, in comparison with equally dedicated Maya activists who had not received these workshops.
feminist critique of these spaces and their subjection to the judgment of a revolutionary vanguard that became increasingly conservative.

I utilize this chapter to illustrate a different type of exchange. The Center and the Network’s focused on transformations made from the home outward in order to build women’s ability to advocate for themselves in all arenas. In this way, they aimed to forge democratic participation through everyday feminist practice. They focused on addressing how women saw themselves in these spaces, but also, how they were perceived. They envisioned a mutually reinforcing transformation took place in spaces ranging from the home to political spaces. Likewise, they felt that the laws and policies resulting from a feminist vision of democratic participation should not only move gender relations forward in the home, but also reflect the grassroots initiatives aiming to equalize gender relations within homes and communities.

D. Scales of Transformation

Anthropologists focused on the study of social movements have cast a careful eye on their own categories of analysis, particularly amidst “democratic openings” throughout Latin America. In particular, they have noted that the work of championing popular causes, often entails the interaction of multiple sectors of society. Moreover, they point to subtle differences between movements that reinforce or transform dominant culture. Anthropologists Jonathan Hearn and Marc Edelman have pointed out that in themselves, the terms “social movements” and “civil society” are “imprecise, contested terms” that are vaguely defined in relation to state, middle classes and popular classes (Edelman 2005: 29).

The period characterized as one of “democratization” in Central America in the 1990s (Edelman 2005) has witnessed the proliferation of NGOs and the revival of the term “civil society,” by actors with a “leftward” political agenda (Hearn 2001). As Hearn and Edelman note,
in the moment of revival, the definition delineated civil society as the “associational realm between household and the state” (Edelman 2005: 30; Hearn 2001). These actors defined civil society as a domain “that attempts to defend autonomous collective institutions from the encroachments of both the market and the state” (Edelman 2005: 30-1). The NGO was promoted as a vehicle to deliver the corresponding message and tools. However, this view of civil society ran counter to that of Antonio Gramsci who distinguished the space of the state from the shared space, including the market and the institutions of the professional classes. Gramsci defined civil society as the site where the organizing logic of state institutions could be made “culturally pervasive” (Hearn 2001:343). Hearn contends that scholars, activists and state actors used the term civil society in such diverse ways that they rendered the concept itself of little analytical value. However, he emphasizes that the discussion over the term has been useful in the analysis of power. This larger debate implies that in identifying this realm labeled civil society, scholars have tacitly pointed to a “network of intermediate social pathways through which power is distributed” (2001: 347). The NGO, in contrast to civil society, is a readily observable object of study. In the 1990s, anthropologists who observed these sites in Latin America began to trouble the idea that an NGO could itself construct, much less be conflated with transformative agendas and practices.

Through this discussion, Hearn highlights the need for greater concern with the potential of middle segments of society to generate political changes or maintain status quo through their allegiance. He then situates NGOs among the segments occupying the middle ground between the state, which he viewed as the institutionalized manifestation of dominant values, the

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15 The “political-economic” agenda often influences more specific definitions: for conservatives or economic liberals, markets and corporations are included. As Edelman points out, ironically rooted in a position taken by Hegel and Marx. Those who exclude the market from the realm of civil society, draw on Gramscian notions (2005: 30).
communities NGOs purport to serve and the usually “highly diffuse power of popular sentiment” (Hearn 2001: 346). The middle segments inhabit the realm where dominant values are reproduced, resisted, negotiated and contested. The implication for the study of social movements is the need for attention to the necessary interstitial relationship between middle and marginal sectors in the processes of disseminating democratic ideals and protesting social exclusion. Hearn writes that whereas “those at the margins are rarely an organized threat to those at the center…strategically situated [interstitial] actors…and institutions with the resources, connections and advantages of middle-class experience [wield a particular] structural positioning at critical junctures” (2001: 347-8). The conclusion that the politics of culture takes place in this middle realm lends significance to the need for attention to scale and particularly, the ability of social movements to mobilize social sectors that would otherwise be absent from the realm of civil society. In other words, crossing scales is key to the insertion of those on the margins into social movements.

Insofar as the Center can be considered an NGO, it was situated with this realm of contradictory relationships. It occupied the ambiguous position of taking part in a network of national and international non-governmental organizations, few of which engender even an alternative agenda. Moreover, the organization navigated transnational tensions of organizing. The Center was a site of tension, as Nicaraguan women’s revolutionary feminist practices and commitments traveled with them across borders. This transfer implied movement across structures of belonging, political economic regimes, and historical contexts. The Center relocated this practice beyond the space where most Nicaraguan women hold legal and cultural citizenship.

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16 Hearn points out, revolutionary leaders were often highly educated (2001). Among them: (Oft-speculated professor) Subcommander Marcos of the Zapatistas, the medical doctor Ernest “Che” Guevara, the lawyer Fidel Castro in the Cuban Revolution, Philosophy professor Angela Davis in the U.S. Black Power movement in the U.S. and public faces of the Nicaraguan Revolution.
It attempted to assert values and practices deriving from the revolutionary political-economic regime to the neoliberal regime of Costa Rica. Staff worked to insert women who had lived on the margins into a key realm of dominant culture. Moreover, it attempted to provide them with the perspectives and tools to transgress scales by inserting them into spaces synonymous with the realm of civil society. Finally, it moved beyond historical contexts and international consensus. This move has contradictory effects on these same meanings and practices. In some ways, it amplified the potential for alternative or oppositional practices, given that Nicaraguan women could reflect on their experiences abroad through their experiences with different political regimes.

It is also clear that without the network of oppositional organizations which abounded during the Revolution, an organization’s potential for broad transformative work is limited. The Center faced the additional tension of utilizing a feminist organizing logic based on revolutionary principles in a setting in which neoliberalism is hegemonic in the organization of the state. Specifically, the Center takes on the trappings of an NGO, often a site where internationally funded programs, run by paid professionals removed from the communities they serve and organize, transmit the neoliberal values of self-sufficiency, participation through market insertion, and technocratic governance. Those who facilitated the Center’s programs self-consciously navigate this complex terrain. From their own encounters with organizations providing services for migrants, government forums and institutional spaces, they were well aware of the role that citizens, and more importantly, migrants were supposed to play in this new era. I argue that they drew on deep backgrounds in revolutionary transformative practice to engage in the politics of civil society.
Perhaps more noteworthy than the management of the organizations themselves are the particular ways that NGOs operationalize the common goal of increasing participation. Anthropologists argue that the proliferating NGOs\textsuperscript{17} of the 1990s became vehicles for organizing the population around practices of citizenship and participation that complemented the organization of the state in the neoliberal era (Mudock 2008; Postero 2007). Moreover, scholars noted that the conversion of “leftist activists” into “professional NGO workers” (Doane 2001: 364) and grassroots organizations\textsuperscript{18} into NGOs (Uzwiak 2013) provided a contemporary venue for the state to insert itself into local communities. The NGO was often depicted as having a permanent, often hierarchical structure, paid personnel, permanent funding and agendas that transcended particular communities and issues (Murdock 2008). It was equated with, or symbolic of, the institutionalization and professionalization of social movements. By linking empowerment to activities such as voting, self-provisioning and market insertion, NGOs often redirected emphasis away from the state as the object of transformation and, in turn, depoliticized governing activities (Paley 201; Murdock 2008; Postero 2007). Thus, NGOs’ legitimacy rested on a careful balance of being acknowledged by the state but viewed as a neutral actor and watchdog of the state. Legitimacy also drew on leftist depictions of a civil society disassociated from the state by celebrating NGO participation in what they declared to be a robust and autonomous civil society. It provides a counterpoint to anthropologists’ doubt as NGOs proliferated throughout the 1990s that “real change could emanate from these newly professionalized contexts” (Murdock 2014).

\textsuperscript{17} Tellingly, the “NGO sector” is often conflated with civil society (Doane 2001). In part, this is due to the almost omniscient presence of NGOs in any form of collective action or transformative effort, the ubiquitous presence of NGO personnel in these discussions and activities, as hosts, funders, project coordinators and experts. But it is also the result of the attempt by anthropologists to understand the implications of these NGOs.

\textsuperscript{18} grass-roots organization- implied as “ground-up”; organized around a specific problem, with temporal funding and staffed by those immersed in the problem/situation.
The Center was a non-governmental organization operating to provide Nicaraguan immigrants with the tools to interact with state officials and challenge state formations. The Center is distinct from many NGOs in its history, make-up and operations. These aspects each grew out of the popular and feminist projects and outgrowths of the Nicaraguan Revolution. It effected a self-conscious project by inserting organizing tools and consciousness imparted by revolutionary popular education projects. These were used to leverage marginal immigrant women’s inclusion in a social-intellectual landscape predicated not only on legal citizenship, but also, the trappings of middle class status: education, professionalism and modern self-presentation. Lila and Leticia, who coordinated work with the Network, were vocal critics of NGOs, funding agencies, and development workers. Yet they also recognized that as an NGO, they could serve as a vehicle within such an assemblage to provide social and cultural capital for Nicaraguan migrants to engage into the politics of gender and belonging.

As described in the preface, the Center’s project had been to develop women organized with the Network into “interstitial” actors through popular education. The relationship between Center coordinators and community members initially appeared consistent with the articulation between interstitial actors and marginal groups in the neoliberal period. Yet Center coordinators consciously and unconsciously resisted the common formulations of this relationship in which professionalized staff transmitted knowledge to communities who receive the knowledge. Instead, they made concerted efforts to provide those skills that women organized with the Network had requested. Women, in turn, aimed to strengthen their sense of belonging and worthiness towards their goal to increase their participation in their communities. Further, those programs that incorporated entire immigrant communities focused on challenging patriarchal and capitalist norms. Few who collaborated with the Center held the normative credentials of the
technocrats, experts and managers that dominated normative discourses and vision of civil society. Instead, coordinators and participants’ skills reflected alternative, if oppositional forms of participation, knowledge production and critique produced during the revolutionary period.

Leticia and Lila were the most involved in implementing programs. In a sense, they split the interstitial space. Lila, whom I described earlier, was among the founding members of the Network; she numbered among those women who formed Grupo La Merced. She was formerly employed as a domestic worker. Later, she began a small catering business out of her home and during this time was elected president of the Network because of her honed organizing abilities. After some time, she was employed as coordinator of Network programming in conjunction with the Center. She was compensated for running projects in communities whenever a grant for a project was available. Network women characterized her principle work as “walking the streets” of immigrant communities: collecting grievances, carrying out training and supporting women in forming community groups. She also encouraged women to communicate their material and pedagogical needs and desires. She would relay this information to Leticia and other Center staff. In turn, Leticia also migrated from Nicaraguan. She was a former revolutionary leader from an intellectual family and became a psychology professor at the National University in Costa Rica. She was well-versed in popular education techniques and, moreover, translating popular education into the methodology and language of international funding and policy-making. She bridged communication gaps between the Center, NGOs and government programs to provide funding and support for such project. She also found ways to insert trained members of the Network into government and activist working groups as representative of the migrant community. She routinely encouraged others to propose programming, in an effort to
decentralize decision-making. She was not paid as director of the Center but was supported economically by her academic position.

Lila and Leticia were supported in their collaboration with the Network by various largely permanent collaborators, most of whom were volunteers. Monica another Nicaraguan migrant and former nurse, led immigrant support initiatives such as counseling immigrants about their rights as workers and as immigrants, connecting them with lawyers and other services whenever needed. Amanda, a volunteer who had grown up in Costa Rica and had spent ten years in Spain as a domestic worker, assisted Monica in coordinating outreach services. These included running a consultation booth at community events in immigrant neighborhoods. Sofia, herself a migrant and former domestic worker, received a small salary as the accountant for the organization. Volunteer psychologists Guadalupe, Julio and Salvador ran weekend workshops with immigrant men and women, respectively, to discuss issues of violence. Giselle, a Swedish volunteer and retired school teacher who had spent the previous seven years in Columbia, Nicaragua and Costa Rica ran skill-building workshops requested by Network women. Alejandro, a recent college graduate from Sweden and a volunteer, supported Giselle and Lila by running activities for children when they ran workshops. During my time there, I attended all possible Network and Center activities among them meetings, workshops, fairs and other events. I was typically charged with taking notes and providing summaries of each Network or Center activity. I also began working with staff to write grants to fund initiatives such as creating a shelter for victims of domestic violence or to provide Nicaraguan folkloric dance and music programs for migrant youth.

Scholarship and activism addressing the “NGOization of civil society” has been concerned with the way that NGOs have become a vehicle for de-politicizing the grievances of
marginal people, disciplining them towards a neoliberal subjectivity through technologies of the self. Their sentiment of exclusion is directed towards ways they can participate in the ways mandated by the state. These forms, in turn, maintain the status quo. The outcomes are measured in the numbers of women registered to vote, completing schoolwork, engaged in literacy courses, or garnering employment. Funding is often contingent on these achievements. Organization programming is redirected towards these goals. Such organizations espouse the ideals of self-reliance rather than building collective and critical conscience. For example, in her ethnography, *When Women Have Wings*, Donna Murdock portrays poor Columbian women’s reactions to their changing forms of interaction with an NGO targeting women from impoverished neighborhoods. Originally, sensing that NGO programs supported their local priorities and assisted them in community building, they felt that a new relationship had emerged in which programming could be characterized as “*eskuliando* (being schooled)” (2008: 203). In other words, NGO staff directed women in how to improve their lives based on knowledge produced outside of the communities.

Scholarship demonstrates that like-minded community organizations find unique ways to work within this particular structure by demonstrating knowledge can be produced locally and utilized to inform programs and transformative initiatives (Paley 2001). In these spaces, women build new ways of seeing their relationships to each other, family, community and society. They also build a “toolkit” to do so. This demonstrated that while prominent and likely predominant, the NGO assemblage is not absolute. Conscious of many of the pitfalls of most organizations, if not the NGO itself, Center personnel attempted to implement a different style and struggled to maintain independence from funders. The Center sought community-driven programming. Lila recounted how the Center created activities in immigrant communities to pinpoint the issues they
faced. Each community was invited to propose the types of programs they felt would be beneficial. Conversations with Network women reinforced the way Lila would describe the projects in the different communities. Network women would describe to me the precise applicability of programs that the Center had implemented in their communities. For example, Cartaguito chose public speaking, conflict resolution, and the integration of men and youth into separate but linked networks. Alternatively, San Felipe women were prominently focused on forming a baking cooperative. They then chose conflict resolution in the wake of the cooperative’s dissolution and public speaking in the interest of promoting initiatives in the community. Finally, the San Felipe women chose not to involve youth and men in organizing towards preventing gender-based violence activities. Occasionally, when I visited, they would ask me to relay messages to Center coordinators about new types of programs that interested them. The Center eschewed the idea that formal education and training be the basis for participation. The Center provided a space to analyze and determine the elements that would be needed to transform themselves, relationships and group “articulation” from antagonism to collaboration.

Center workers and volunteers would then be charged with seeking or maintaining funding to support these activities. As mentioned in the preface, whenever Lila commented about the funding of “fashionable issues” such as HIV prevention, her ambivalence was hardly attributable to a lack of concern with these issues. Instead, it critiqued the inattention of funding initiatives to the pressing issues facing many of Costa Rica and Nicaragua’s unacknowledged and most vulnerable communities. The Center staff integrated these programs into their larger agenda. They used the situated knowledge of program coordinators who shared similar
backgrounds to community members, such as Lila and Monica, to resolve any disconnect between the initiatives and the principal concerns of Network participants.

As a space intended to promote growth and healing, the meeting set-up was the subject of significant contemplation. Lila would call meetings for skills training or to plan programming. For Grupo La Merced, these meetings took place at the Center’s office. For women in Cartaguito, San Felipe and San Jorge, they would take place at the home of an affiliate or at the local school. If a meeting brought leaders from around the country together, they would meet at the Center’s office. The Center would coordinate the meeting, cover their travel costs and provide meals. In all cases, Center coordinators facilitated meetings by providing newsprint sheets, markers and other materials for reflection and planning activities. If the focus was planning, they would encourage Network women to run the meeting. If the purpose was learning, Center program coordinators or invited guests would facilitate the activity. Often, Alejandro would accompany to take care of women’s children so they would not worry about them nor be interrupted during the meetings. It was common to hear children’s shrieking, laughter and the occasional burst of tears in the background. Finding a space to meet was difficult; husbands and any adult men could not be present, with the occasional exception of one of the Center’s male psychologists. Generally, program leaders preferred to sit indoors. They worried that holding meetings on patios close to the street would keep women from speaking openly about critical issues as they were cognizant that they might be overheard. Still, because women’s homes rarely had windows many preferred the porch where they could enjoy the daylight and the occasional breeze. Finally, the creation of the space recognizes that maintaining the cohesion of a group requires more than just a verbal “contract” or showing up at activities, but learning new ways to relate to each other and build a shared movement.
E. Pausing, Breathing, Rehearsing: The Gentle, Unhurried Space of a Neighborhood Meeting

Network women often expressed that Nicaraguan society instilled in women the idea that they should prioritize others’ needs and that their own position in family life is a private matter. In meeting spaces, they treated the violence and silencing they experienced as significant community concerns and wounds to be healed. Women provided support but also received support in these spaces. Guadalupe, one of two psychologists who volunteer with the Center, would begin meetings by pronouncing that as “women, we always put ourselves last, but this space is for us.” In meetings, women were the priority. They emphasized that in meetings, the processes of sharing, learning, well-being and relationship-building were the foundational pillars of the space.

Each meeting began with an exercise to set aside any preoccupations and redirect women’s focus towards themselves and each other. One day, after an earthquake had firmly shaken San Jose, the self-care exercise was modified to address women’s added anxiety. The tremor had jogged their memories of the 1972 Managua quake that killed six thousand people, injured more and left hundreds of thousands without homes. Helping to focus their thoughts on the meeting activities, Giselle brought out wire head massagers and wooden back massagers. We sat on a mix of wooden chairs from the kitchen and the vinyl-cord rocking chairs that were perpetually stored on the porch, pillows covering areas where the cord had stretched. Then everyone would pair up. Each woman would take a turns letting her hair down, closing her eyes, and allowing her partner to care for her. More than 20 minutes seemed to pass for the activity. Then the meeting moved on to discussions of conflict resolution, community initiatives and public speaking.
At another meeting, held at the Center office, Lila took the group out into the backyard to begin with a dance activity. She played a lively *merengue*\(^\text{19}\) while she encouraged us to join a dance circle as she led the movements. This alleviated the anxiety of dancing in front of others. She led the group through movements to loosen the arms, the shoulders and the chest, while repeatedly exclaiming “get those gorillas off your backs!” Then she switched to a more active merengue and moved everyone out of the circle to dance on their own for a song, urging them to lose themselves in the music, to forget everything else for a moment. At the end of the song, she brought us back together. By the time we were done, the group was relaxed and laughing, shrieking occasionally and acting noticeably more comfortable with each other. We ended by re-forming a circle and massaging the shoulders of each of our neighbors, first to our left, then to our right. She pronounced, “everyone has left the problems at home and are now able to focus on themselves and the group.” The sun shone brightly on us and Lila emphasized that she had wanted to make sure everyone “got outside, got out of the house” for part of the meeting, bucking women’s tendencies towards self-negation and living life in the home. In this way she actively encouraged them to engage in physical and spatial transgressions of the norm.

Self-care was paramount throughout the Network activities. It was synonymous with Lila’s notorious wisdom and advocacy as well as her attention to a woman’s tendency to forget herself. It pointed to ways that the Network women expanded upon ideas about basic needs and rights. Their definition went beyond exchanging massages and holding moments of silence as the forms self-care exercises took in meetings. The idea of self-care underlay Network women’s efforts to ensure their right to well-being. They discussed the need for spaces to share leisure time among friends, whether they lived in a marginal neighborhood, had left children behind in

\(^{19}\) A fast, 2/4 beat.
Nicaragua, or lacked free time. “Don’t forget about it,” Lila habitually chided. Even the most hurried office meetings commenced with a moment for self-care. When the Network formed, Lila tells me, everyone felt guilty for having left family behind. They were so focused on saving and sending money to their families back home, many denied themselves any form of comfort. This was compounded by family members’ complaints that they failed to send enough. Some women she said, would prostitute themselves just to earn more money to send home in order to meet expectations and obligations. They began to get together to release that sense of guilt. Self-care developed into a concerted practice, fitting into their view of relaxation not only as a basic need but also as a necessary step in transforming their position in the complex web of relationships immigrant women are immersed in. This became a site where they articulated a collective sense of exclusion.

Self-care, like many of the Network’s activities, is often associated with a neoliberal ideology that the individual be responsible for carving out time and space to mind their own well-being (Uzwiak 2013). Meanwhile black feminist scholars equate it with a radical act of “political warfare” (Lorde 1988). The difference, in part, hinges on the perspective. For those who adopt it as a lifestyle philosophy, it is indeed neoliberal. It relates to the notion that individuals are responsible for their own well-being. Self-care is a reminder for those working, and who are therefore deserving, to make time for themselves. But for feminists of color, self-care is about recognizing their dehumanization across time and contexts. They acknowledge that the underlying structures of society dictate that they are unworthy of care and must work harder. They demonstrate that they internalize society’s broader view of them. Reminding themselves to engage in self-care is an act of decolonizing the mind and body. They perceive self-care to be an act of loving themselves, something the colonized society denies they should do. It entails
insisting others love them, while they are depreciated in colonial ways of seeing. On the same token, the act of caring for oneself is radical in that it is about resisting racial and gender hierarchy during even the most personal acts. Self-care is therefore one among many ways feminists of color dismantle the ways of thinking that uphold social hierarchies that have persisted since the colonial era. Ultimately, this debate points to the need to assess how the term self-care is actually being used to determine the implications of using it.

As with other Network activities, women ensured that they took time for self-care as a method of reminding themselves that concern for women’s well-being and comfort should be incorporated into ways of seeing them. In this sense, their actions and intentions couched self-care, and care in general, as a fundamental right that should be ensured by all. Ileana, an emerging leader in the Network, commonly used the example of enjoying a *gustito*, or a treat, as a right. She noted that spouses engaged in economic violence when they withheld resources or money to purchase items such as basic food, shelter or clothing. She argued that it was also abusive to deny a woman the money to buy a rice-pudding from a passing street vendor, should she get a craving. By taking time to practice acts of care in meetings, women became conscious of its centrality to their project of transforming their everyday relationships. More than just an ice-breaker, self-care was part of the learning process, emphasizing that women should expect and be offered care, rest, and well-being. Self-care became radical acts in a context that positioned Nicaraguan women as subservient to the rest of society. They counteracted the view of the bodies of women of color as sites of endless extraction. Through such practices, Network women came to recognize their own humanity in a society that renders it invisible. Their focus on the “self” was not the ultimate goal but rather the origin of transforming values and practices related to women’s bodies across scales.
F. Learning to be Women Who Speak

In almost every meeting Giselle, a former high school teacher from Sweden, led some skill-building exercise. Giselle had been employed as a volunteer coordinator for college graduates from Sweden. She had spent the previous ten years in Latin America, first as a Witness for Peace in Columbia and the last three years in Costa Rica. During this time, she had worked with the boards of the Network in each community to reinforce their organizing and leadership capacity through skills such as public speaking, conflict resolution and cooperative management.

Groups focused on public speaking at every meeting. She would begin by having Network women report on their homework from the previous meeting. At the first meeting I attended, this consisted of observing and critiquing someone else speaking in public. Mili had observed agents at the ministry of immigration and the foreign affairs. She reported that the agent spoke in a manner that made people nervous by shouting and interrupting anyone who asked him a question. Fernanda had observed her church pastor and reported that he had spoken slowly and politely. Next, Giselle projected an instructional video on public speaking and finished off a series they had viewed in other meetings. This video offered tips on polishing a speech. After showing it twice, she asked after the main points the video had made. The women spoke together: “One. Speak enthusiastically.” Fernanda raised her hand and proceeded to speak: “Two. Keep a positive mentality.” Luisa volunteered the third: “have confidence in yourself; program your subconscious to think: I can.” Elena provided the fourth: “think of your voice as a tool. Practice out loud.” Giselle provided additional tips: to use notecards as aids, to write a maximum of three words as prompts on each and finally, to remember to look up while speaking. She assigned each of us a three minute topic, handing out notecards and markers. After composing a small speech on a topic of her choice, each took a turn delivering her speech to the
group. Many seemed nervous. After each presentation we provided *retroalimentación* (feedback). For example, one woman was praised for laughing, using humor and making gestures. Another was complimented for developing her subject well but was critiqued for looking down at her cards frequently. The exercise concluded with Giselle’s request that they continue observing the techniques public speakers use and to practice speaking up in their communities.

In another instance, Giselle challenged women to speak on a topic they knew little about. She had pre-selected a topic they would likely need to address outside of meetings: explaining the different ways that migrants could qualify for the ongoing regularization opportunity. She handed out background information including different flyers from the ministry of immigration and foreign affairs. “Speak,” she suggested, “as if you were informing your neighbors about how to apply. Remember,” she added “no more than three words on each notecard. Look up at the audience. Modulate your voice.” Once again, she handed out notecards and markers and allotted twenty minutes to prepare. As always, each woman spoke and received *retroalimentación*. Sarita, for example, spoke quietly, pausing to glance at her notes. She explained what to do if an ID card expired. The others commended her for providing a complete summary of the requirements but suggested that she speak with more confidence. They praised her for freeing herself from the notecards. Next, Elena stood up and explained the most confusing category, “adult youth.” The women could only praise her. She had made a confusing topic comprehensible, she made eye contact with everyone and nodded regularly at each of us, checking for comprehension. She varied her tone while speaking firmly, calmly and confidently.

In comparison with self-care, the purpose of public speaking was straightforward. It provided women with skills to relate their experience and knowledge to community members...
and officials alike. For most, having completed little to no formal education, this was the first
time they were learning these skills. It taught them to prepare an argument, present it cogently
and express it effectively. Moreover, the women were learning that their everyday experience
was more than sufficient to engage in public speaking and participation. Public speaking would
afford them the tools to ensure their voices could be heard in any space. In this way, they
addressed the norms of participation and expression.

G. Mapping a Network, Planning its Moves: Leaders Coming Together

In the space of Center workshops, women came to question naturalized ways of thinking
about gender and space that have marginalized them. They lent attention to the scale of the home
and community, particularly, the relationships that develop between them. An important part of
each meeting focused on reinforcing the cohesion of the Network by reviewing women’s shared
objectives and learning new ways to collaborate. In one meeting, they linked the issues of
violence prevention and network building. Lila led the activity. She began by asking a familiar
question. “What is the cycle of violence? How do relationships tend to evolve?” by way of
transforming the ways that women assessed each other’s actions within their communities. They
learned to recognize, rather than judge the signs of violence. She prompted, saying “starting with
noviazgo (dating) on to marriages and as the relationship continues” she paused and looked
around. Elena took the cue and spoke: “You confront limitations, your self-esteem is low and
your home life is filled with golpes y gritos (blows and shouting).” Amelia continued: “You
begin to restrict yourself, you do what they tell you para estar bien (to just make things alright).
You become an object, a piece of property, an employee, or a slave.” And Sarita finished: “Your
cell phone becomes a remote control. And he’ll tell you ‘there’s no reason you should be going
to those meetings.’” Lila added on to the discussion, mentioning that it is not just spouses that
made things difficult for them but sometimes mothers as well. “Sometimes even your mother
will say to you: ‘there’s no reason you should be outside of the house; he’s going to leave you’; she may be 65, 85, but that’s not the issue.” These sayings showed, they indicated, that women and men, young and old, participated in the reproduction of gender inequality and violence. Lila used this to segue into the next activity: “Together, we create the view that violence as natural. So we must begin to think about community responses to violence.”

They realized that they had come to see woman’s place as being in the home, but also regarded it as a male controlled space. They had adhered to the expectation that women would maintain the privacy of their home and respect the privacy of others’ homes, that they would labor within the home for the benefit of the family and that they would prioritize others within the home over themselves. They were taught to be wary of interacting with others outside of the home lest they air household matters in public spaces or neglect their duties. Through Center meetings, they had realized that these expectations had produced acrimonious relationships within the home and outside the home. Building on these reflections, women began to address household and public relationships in new ways, towards building a participatory social culture. They discussed what it meant to have a loving relationship and the meanings and practices of well-being and care. They engaged in discussions of participation and learned the tools of communication, conflict resolution and cooperativism. Finally, they addressed the gendered and racialized hierarchies that structured their family and community lives, noting the interconnectedness between exclusionary behaviors in private and public spaces.

Lila divided us into two groups and instructed us to formulate a community plan of action that could respond to different forms of household violence. We were asked how to assist others upon learning they experienced abuse, whether neighbors, workmates, or children in the neighborhood. This exercise was clearly intended to refresh their recollection of an earlier
workshop they had completed. When each group gave their answers, they were encouraged to elaborate on how the women could draw on the resources of the Network and its coordinated forms of response. In other words, they were asked how they could put the idea of acting as a network into practice in order to strengthen the response.

One group’s chosen spokesperson read their statement:

We don’t need to judge the situation. We have to understand that there are situations, for example, economic conditions that obligé them to remain in these relationships. Some have been in these relationships for decades. They never learned to work. If we can begin to see ourselves as humans that can speak to each other, we can reduce conflict in the communities. We should recognize that we face verbal and psychological aggression; we face institutional and occupational violence. These are socialized activities and also a violation of our human rights and rights as women. In response, we would counsel the woman, saying: ‘don’t allow it.’ We would accompany her visiting the authorities. We would find her a place to stay in our homes. For the child, we would alert family members, speak with them carefully, considerately. Ensure the child was removed from the home. Accompany in all reporting. Help her seek treatment for the child.

Each group presented their response, in turn. When they finished, Lila highlighted the critical nature of formulating responses, by recounting a story of what she considered a failed response.

“Compañeras,”20 she began,

last week, one of our own returned to an abusive home. We had helped her take the most basic steps. She denounced the actions, and left her home. We found her shelter with social services, for three months. We found her housing at a fire station for the next three months. We found her housing at a church for another three months. Back to social services for three months. But, unable to stand on her own feet, she returned to the abusive home. We need to think about how we can work as a network, coordinating our actions, so that we are all supporting her and each other to ensure she has all the tools to continue on her own. Shoudering the work of support alone will result in the same. Together we help her find her permanent housing, work, classes and other ways to support herself and her children, but also, to have the time to work these issues out.

20 Compañeros is a term frequently used for “mates” whether work, class, friends, or otherwise. It is particularly common in Nicaragua where it was part of the key terminology of the Revolution. In that time, it also became a term to refer to a partner in a romantic relationships of any type.
Members of the group nodded and added “working with each other” to their list. The final section emphasized that building new ways of seeing violence and formulating responses could benefit all. We closed with reflections on what we had learned and how we could apply it. What the responses demonstrated, however, was women’s appreciation of the space as a time to build towards their goals as a community.

Elena’s response voiced women’s regard for these activities as more than rudimentary skills sessions or social meetings. Elena looked around and pronounced in a voice filled with emotion: “we can see how our arms are lengthening.” She referred to her view of Network meetings as a space to strengthen the ties between the women and their capacity to grow. It represented a response at the scale of community life, which many women noted was typically fractured. They learned to counteract their tendency to “eat each other” by strengthening their ties to each other. Elena’s use of the body as a metaphor for the gendered social life in the community signaled her sense that they had intervened in the body politic. Women recognized that common sense notions of proper behavior, such as keeping to their homes and demonstrating sole allegiance to their spouses, had been a means of controlling them. Her comment signaled women’s emergent value for their connectedness to each other and the ability of Center programs to provide a space for this to occur.

H. Separating the Person and the Action: Conflict Resolution

Maintaining sustained, coordinated activities also required that women find ways to resolve conflicts that emerged between them. In San Felipe, I observed as Giselle guided women through the practice of conflict resolution. Throughout its short history, the cooperative was wracked with poor communication and internal strife. Rather than help build community collaboration, it initially seemed to provide new grounds for conflict. Certain that this was an
issue of learning to relate to each other differently, cooperative members had requested lessons in conflict resolution.

That day, Giselle focused on the internal thought processes that should precede any attempt to communicate over a point of tension. She provided the women with a series of questions they might ask themselves before addressing any particular type of behavior they found errant. Marker in hand, Giselle stood in front of the newsprint. She facilitated a review of the three basic principles of conflict resolution. She utilized a simple example to ground the discussion, selecting a time for the group to meet. If one individual expresses a desire to hold the meeting at a time that is inconvenient for others, rather than express anger, they should ask after the interest the individual was expressing. Women might have had children coming home from school at different times, appointments in the center of town or might have taken a church volunteering shift. Rather than assuming someone’s absence at a meeting stemmed from their lack of respect for the group, they reminded themselves that their first reaction should be to ask after the circumstances of their absence. At the same time, they reflected that they should be aware their own actions could be misconstrued. They resolved to communicate, as much as possible, naming habits they could form that would support this goal. For example, they agreed that anyone who anticipated missing a meeting would call the others. They were taught to see the issue, not as stemming from the person herself, but from the situation and the conflicting interests the situation produced. They closed the activity by role-playing a series of situations they had faced in the past such as missing the coordinating meeting, one woman’s repeated tardiness and the challenge of aligning their vending practices. By establishing a set of shared expectations and consequences for any violation of those terms, the women could avoid many conflicts in addition to having a way of resolving them.
Skills, such as conflict resolution, were perceived to assist in providing greater depth to the sense of community. The cooperative had broken down further, not only because of the difficulty of organizing, but also the difficulty of sustaining supportive relationships between each other. In turn, the longevity of the cooperative itself was seen as tied to women’s ability to maintain locally-generated and women-controlled sources of income to grant women economic autonomy from spouses and family. By assuming the simultaneous legitimacy of competing claims the form of conflict resolution recognized women’s competing commitments, given that cooperative participation contended for women’s time: of obligations to children, other jobs, church and community and family. In this way, the discussion brought to light women’s shared structural position and pointed out that few had a choice in attending to these other priorities first. Learning to think about the origins of conflicts would also lead women to ask after the signs of violence or even prompt them to think about ways they were collectively responding to the boundaries set by patriarchal expectations and conflicting over points where they intersected. Here they recognized that the social fabric of community, even when repaired, was not always harmonious. In this way, they acknowledged the complexities of social life and built their capacity to overcome other pressures and divisive situations at the scale of community.

I. **Prompting a Dialogue: Men and Women Discussing Family**

The Center recognized that the changes women make would be ineffective if implemented in a vacuum and also created parallel groups and spaces to initiate dialogue about change amongst women, men and youth in immigrant neighborhoods. The spaces, not only moved conversations forward by providing new perspectives, but also presented the concerns of women, men and youth as collective rather than individual. They initiated difficult conversations in safe spaces, encouraging community members to continue the conversations within their
households. Meetings also served as opportunities to evaluate the communities’ needs in terms of gender-work. On a hot and sticky morning in San Jorge the Center convened organized youth, men, and women, from San Felipe and San Jorge, who participated in the Center’s gender-based violence prevention initiative. It was the first time in the two years since the Center implemented the program that these particular groups had come together. Leticia characterized the spirit of the day’s work by pronouncing us all to be one united family, invested in creating a better future for adults and children. She framed the day’s agenda as an opportunity to evaluate the extent to which the project had advanced and to determine how to move forward. In the tradition of popular education, the activity began with an icebreaker exercise and continued by eliciting each attendee’s personal experience to provoke a conversation about gender roles. The approximately 60 participants presented themselves, sharing their names, neighborhoods and their history with the Center. The Center’s psychology team, Guadalupe and Julio, presented the day’s program.

The first activity facilitated dialogue among members of different families about changing family dynamics. Moreover, it brought men into the conversation about Nicaraguans’ unease with predominant gender relations. Many expressed their reticence to abandon old ways, but acknowledged that they were hurtful and recognized the need to adopt new forms of interacting. Together, men and women addressed the tension of family and community dissolution. Each group was assigned an animal. Before initiating dialogues within the small groups, they were encouraged to introduce themselves to others as an animal family. The introductions produced screaming laughter, creating a more relaxed atmosphere in which men and women could converse. Then, on a page of newsprint, each animal family was encouraged to write notes from their discussion of the questions: How do we see violence in our families? What does it mean to be violent? How is violence experienced? What is the consequence of living in a
place where there is violence? What is the consequence of living in a place where trust is absent?
Guadalupe instructed: “The value in this is to learn and unlearn, to build trust and be honest.”
For the next half-hour, the room was abuzz with noise. Then each animal family presented their reflections to the larger group. Men, women and youth took turns presenting. Demonstrative of how much ground the program has already covered, each group reflected on a different kind of violence that could be found in the home.

Some told stories of suffering abuse at the hands of parents and partners in Nicaragua, of migrating in search of a change. They recounted abuse at the hands of employers, state workers and the “very same Nicaraguan compañeros (peers).” They recounted ongoing violence in the home abroad. One woman, Santa, stated:

People who work for the state, they carry out psychological violence, yelling and humiliating us for not having documents. Migrants don’t challenge anyone out of fear. We leave it to community leaders to get them out of such situations. We need to learn to speak but also to learn from this necessity of being tolerant, not disrespectful nor discriminatory. We are all humans and equal, no matter what.

They regarded household interaction as a microcosm of unequal relations throughout their lives.

Participants discuss a parallel tendency to build authority through physical and emotional abuse.

By demanding rather than conversing with each other, they fueled an environment of suspicion in the family and discouraged communication. Many groups felt that punitive child-rearing practices set a precedent for fractious household and community relations. They pointed to how violence was reproduced between all members including spouses, parents and children and in-laws.

Agosto expressed this relationship most succinctly:

Reflecting on intrafamilial violence. We Nicaraguans have always been rough with children. We think that punishment is grabbing them hard and giving it to them, not just prohibiting television. This is passed down to us from our great grandparents. They used to lock me up and they wouldn’t give me anything to eat. My father made me a
responsible man, a worker, but it’s traumatized me for life. We take these forms of addressing disagreement into our marriages. We have learned not to listen to each other. Not just partners, but neighbors also. Everything becomes violence.

Agosto problematized punitive childrearing given its repercussions in family and community life. He also highlighted the dilemma of detangling the association between obedience and responsibility. Josue, a youth, felt that children did not receive support from parents in developing alternatives to the violent forms of interaction that surrounded them in their neighborhoods. Rather than someone demanding their obedience, he asserted that “youth need someone around who will converse, communicate and share without yelling or abusing them.”

Women and men delved further into the challenge of creating supportive relationships; they recognized that they had learned forms of interaction that did not acknowledge others’ right to well-being. Juana was the first to bring up the issue, summarizing quickly that violence resulted when living in poverty was compounded by mistrust, miscomprehension and miscommunication between family members. She shared a personal reflection about the ability to weather adversity together:

I lack a good partnership. We think differently and have poor communication. Since we don’t come to an understanding, we are unable to address the issue in question, nor work together to find concrete solutions that would improve our family’s quality of life.

Juana concluded by relating household patterns to community patterns, “[they] spill out into our communities; we all share the sense that we can’t walk around freely because there is a lot of insecurity in the streets.” Through the activity, they showed that there were critical connections between their ways of relating in and across spaces, producing acrimonious relations in the home and the community. It was this recognition that led them to see violence in both as a collective concern. Various groups highlighted a collective need to “be well” and build trust between different sexes and generations as a key element of resolving a variety of problems, whether
economic or emotional. They suggested that corrective practices include being “tolerant, respectful, communicative, honest, collaborative, responsible [and communicative].”

While problematizing violence in immigrant communities, they did not “culturize” it, or naturalize this form of community relations. Instead, they related violence to ways of behaving embedded in daily interactions that reflect patriarchal and militarized norms of interaction. In particular, they spoke of normalizing violence that reflects “a pattern of masculinity that includes assertion of power over feminized others by violence means” (Bayard De Volo and Hall, 2015: 869). Here again, members articulated their shared discord with divisive behaviors. Moreover, they addressed each other’s roles in reproducing the behaviors. In this manner, they actively participated in a pre-emergent phase as they articulated their collective unease with violence and identified how it is reproduced.

Their commentary reflected the connection between everyday interactions and the concern with asserting domination in Nicaraguan social arenas. Throughout its post-colonial political history, the conquest of resources was equated with women’s sexual conquest and, moreover, a display of domination of one individual over racialized men and women. This complex relationship is illustrated in historian Jeffrey Gould’s work, showing how “elite males operated in a discursive universe where sexual conquest symbolized class power” (Gould 1990: 231). David Whisnant builds on Gould’s work, arguing for the “remarkably durable capacity of [...] gender paradigms to focus and organize social and political power in Nicaragua.” He argues that “the conquest of women, then, is a feat performed for [an] audience...to prove one’s masculinity...In such a system, women are not primary or final objects of desire” (2001: 400-1). Instead, women are “intermediaries... [within] an ongoing exchange system between men”
Gould, Lancaster and Whisnant demonstrate that machismo is a system in which power operates through racial, class, ethnic and gender hierarchies.

Moreover, the communication continued by outlining steps to recognize and realize the origins of antagonistic activities within impoverished communities. Participants framed their commentary about adopting ideal forms of interaction with discussions of transformative courses. Various participants identified the need to engage in intermediate steps, what they called “self-reflective processes” to evaluate each person’s behaviors and experiences. They noted that in their normative interactions, “whether dealing with a partner or neighbor, we get so caught up in showing we are the stronger one.” The comment recognized the individual’s previous fail to recognize his or her own complicity in generating violence towards others. To improve would require “reflecting on errors we have made.” One participant, Marielos, reported that she had been reluctant to change. Building trust and respect, her assertion tacitly implied and required the discomforting acknowledgement that both men and women were complicit in reproducing gender inequality. Through the Network she had come to “celebrate becoming another person, thinking of it as moving forward, [while] dreaming of being better.” As she and her partner worked to change together, they found they were also improving relationships with neighbors and family members. Resolving violence required more than just “adopting the language of equality” but also disrupting the comfort and security of routine. Various groups asserted that “joining the Center family” provided the tools and knowledge to “learn to live differently.”

Having identified the need to engage in self-reflection, the second and final activity addressed the link between sex and gender providing participants with material to embark on future self-reflective activities and conversations about changing their relational practices along the lines of gender. They spoke to the ideas tied to gender roles that generate abusive
interactions. By denaturalizing these roles and resulting behaviors they engaged in the groundwork for creating new gendered ideals. The group was divided among women and men and a male youth group. Each was asked to describe the “qualities” exclusive to the opposite sex. Each group appeared simultaneously reflective and apprehensive about the opportunity to express ideas without repercussion.

Leticia used the associations with each sex to guide the group towards an understanding of these associations and their eventual adoption, as learned rather than inherent. The women’s list describing men produced a wide range of qualities, some of which would make a man desirable and most of which would not. Among others they described men as machistas, womanizers, controlling, insensitive, aggressive, respectful, impassive, detailed, responsible, serious, humble, workers, partiers, strong, stingy and violent. The youth’s list largely demonstrated respect for women, particularly their mothers. Among the qualities listed were “caring, valiant, hard-working, intelligent, manipulative, sentimental, jealous.” The men’s responses read: “Women are intelligent, home-makers, loving, manipulators, fragile, untrusting, impolite, understanding, and responsible with children, good with money, jealous.” After the lists were presented, Leticia challenged participants to detangle biological features from those attached to learned gender roles. She began by asking them to differentiate between those features humans are born with and those they learn. The group pointed to their reproductive functions. Then, she challenged them to explain why we perceive the other types of differences to be natural. In this manner, she provided a basic idea that most differences reflect gender roles, which are socially constructed.

With this established, she moved to challenge the meaning and value of each of these ways of acting. She selected the assertion that women are fragile to elicit conversation. She
asked which behaviors warranted this label and why this was seen as a negative quality. Some suggested that the associations resulted from the perception that men and women’s labor is different, using field labor and household labor as examples. Leticia pushed them to think through this further, asking after the relation of fragility to these jobs. One participant suggested “fragility is understood as less physical force.” Another stated that it was understood as showing emotions, crying more easily. Leticia pushed them to think about this further. Upon examining the meaning of fragility and the way these characteristics were portrayed in negative light, many became contemplative.

Freddy, a thirteen-year old youth from San Jorge, provided a testimony expressing that neither the absence of physical force nor the act of crying were signs of fragility. He told a story of watching his mother care and provide for him and his four brothers alone. Then he used his story to explain his perception that women were stronger. Women participants found his words validating, sitting rapt throughout his presentation.

Women are stronger. A woman asks herself, ‘why am I crying? This will pass.’ She keeps moving. My mother faced adversity, but today she is a woman who cultivates crops and maintains her household without help… Women [work without being told]: running the house..., raising children, [protecting the] money.

He developed his own logic around the assertion that women were equal, relating it to the situations he saw around him. And he outlined the value of activities that often remained unrecognized, pointing out that these activities constitute work. He also challenged the values associated with those roles by highlighting the inconsistent logic that labeled men as strong and granted them authority, stating:

When a man cries, he goes to the cantina. He fights and comes home with empty pockets. Men don’t think of anyone else. They think that looking at pictures of naked women or exerting power over women makes them men. Men say ‘I have authority, because I work and make money.’
For the women present, this was a significant development in their work with youth. Freddy’s assertion provided an alternative understanding of fragility. He also demonstrated an inclination to reflect and begin letting go of the privileges of being male, chipping away at the association of power with hegemonic masculinity. In effect, he was fully engaging with the gender project proposed by the Center and the Network. Though various participants made comments, Freddy moved the discussion forward significantly towards challenging norms.

Leticia then moved the conversation into its final stage by showing how gender roles and the characteristics associated with them were part of a system. Continuing with the theme of perception of strength and provisioning, she pointed out that these gender roles were “constructed by society and learned through family and school.” She showed that it is apparent in both men’s and women’s expectations. “We both reinforce it. If men don’t bring money home, women criticize them.” She then continued by arguing that physical differences between the sexes, such as size, do not determine the role. “We can all provide. Depending on papers, education, money and care networks for children.” In this manner, she pushed participants to discuss how these ideas about gender and the values associated with them are produced. Leticia concluded by pointing out how deeply entrenched these ideas were. She noted that men feel threatened and turn to violence “when women begin to assert an egalitarian relationship.” She concluded that an egalitarian household would not simply switch the power dynamic but should produce a respectful relationship between couples that brought happiness to both. In this way, the workshop gave participants criteria to consider towards rebuilding relationships in the home.

Much of the Center’s work with women had focused on providing them with the skills and confidence to communicate through a feminist vision of gender equality. This workshop forced men and women to collectively initiate dialogue about the broader project across the lines
of gender and generation. Furthermore, they heard new perspectives by inserting participants to enter in dialogue across households. They were led to recognize the well-worn grooves of communication between spouses, parents and children, where minor changes might be taken as signs of progress. The pressure to enact different, if transgressive practices before a broader public forced them to express more guarded sentiments, fears and misunderstandings regarding the Center’s project, whose stated aim was to transform. It also provided concrete ways of reflecting on their experiences. It guided them to explore how their values and practices had been constructed, their role in teaching and reproducing inequality and their capacity for transformation.

The workshop closed by inviting men and women to reflect on the perspectives participants had gained and the areas that remained unclear. We sang a revolutionary song declaring how Nicaraguans’ love for their country deepened now that it was free. It was an apt metaphor for participants’ desire to be accepted as they adopted new manners of interacting. The space of the meeting was constructed as tolerant towards transgression as men and women expressed fear, prejudice, limitations and regret among other sentiments. In this way, it worked towards producing cohesive communities who value the acts of knowing and collaborating with each other. The workshop advanced the project of having all community members see themselves as subjects in the process of transformation. They could envision themselves as learning and producing knowledge. They would not just be stuck in their roles as their communities changed around them. The workshop aimed to produce members who value collective action as an indicator of community well-being. The belief that each person’s welfare was tied to each other’s produced a way of seeing that countered dominant individualizing
discourses structuring expectations between state and citizen, as well as patriarchal gender discourses.

J. Finding a Voice: Elena’s Story
I close this chapter by returning to my conversations with Elena, to illustrate how women’s participation in the Network unfolded as they found their ways of seeing changing as they participated in Center-sponsored the Network meetings. Elena’s background, briefly illustrated in the preface, pointed to spousal and institutional violence in Nicaragua and Costa Rica. Additionally, in conversations throughout the year, she wove discussion of her changing sentiments about her relationships to her children, her ex-husband and her community into her discussion of becoming an “organized woman” through Network activities. Elena’s separation from her husband signaled a break with her past, but not with all the patterns of isolation and abuse she had learned to live with. Her transformation, as her involvement with the Network progressed, was notable not only to herself but to others. Her story provides a compelling example of what is possible, illustrating the transformative work of the Network.

In our first encounter Elena enacted the quintessential task of Network leaders, building new relationships and expanding what she referred to as the “reach of its network.” I walked into my first meeting; she hurried over, greeted me and ensured I felt welcomed without knowing anyone, showing that the Network was an inclusive space. For immigrants unaccustomed to a welcoming invitation, similar small gestures build the framework for a new sociality. No one but Lila had expected me at that meeting. Elena acted of her own volition to extend the support she herself drew from the Network. This action was one among many examples of how she was beginning to embody her leadership role to see those around her in a new light, to act in the spaces she occupied as someone who belonged and as a valued participant. In turn, she treated
those around her with the same consideration. But as she told me during our first interview, she had not always experienced meetings in the same manner.

Elena was drawn to Network meetings as she dealt with her spouse’s ongoing abuse once they had separated. He continued to make threats against her. He arrived one day to show her a newspaper article about a man who had poisoned his two children and himself after separating from his wife. He told Elena he would do the same. His threats had the intended effect:

I felt so much fear, I experienced the aggression so deeply. I couldn’t speak. When I told people, I just choked up crying. It hurt me so much that he’d behaved like this. You can’t imagine how much I loved him, a horrible, ugly man. For me, there was no one else.”

She highlighted discord in two ways, first, between his physical appearance and her desire to remain with him. She also highlighted her ongoing desire to be with him in spite of the abuse. In this sense, she pointed out her deep-seated attachment to him.

Aware her neighbors were participating in Network meetings, Elena began to seek out those spaces, recognizing that she needed to detach herself from the relationship and regain her value for life. She said “I was so desperate; I wanted to find some reason to hold on, something to latch onto, so I went along to the meetings. [I absorbed] everything they told me when we would play games. I began to let go of my stress and I began to see things differently.” The meetings and activities allowed her to step back from her situation and identify the abuse in the company of others who had experienced violence. Attending the meetings also put her in touch with those who could identify and provide the resources she needed. Leticia, for example, recognized she could benefit from counseling and arranged for her to attend group therapy with a psychologist. Elena felt that these forms of support allowed her “to move ahead, to continue advancing. Until I had developed!” For Elena, her ability to manage the painful memories of
abuse and repurpose the emotional towards assisting others signaled her progress. It was in the same space of the meetings that she sensed the change:

I didn’t speak [in the first meetings]…when they recounted the ‘cycle of violence’ I clutched up into a ball to keep from crying, feeling as if it were aimed directly at me. When Guadalupe spoke about cases that they’d seen, some people that laughed. I thought, ‘I hope they never have to live through that.’ I didn’t have it in me to speak. But a short while back, they had us speak about something in our real lives. I told the whole group my entire trajectory. Afterward, I couldn’t stop crying. I cried and cried… I felt like I was falling apart. Leticia told me, ‘at last, you’ve let it out, let it go. From here forward, you can move beyond this.’ In that moment I felt that I had liberated myself. Before it was as if I were drowning. Now I can speak with tranquility and I can tell other women not to allow it.

Elena’s ability to channel her energy was bolstered by joining the Network board, made up of representatives from each organized community. Through her participation, Elena refined her own voice and rhythm as a public speaker, adopting the tricks and toolkits provided in the workshops. She commented to me that she was speaking up more and realizing her own strength. She and the Center’s program coordinators began to note how she was harnessing her capabilities as a leader. She made her burgeoning ability undeniably apparent when she spontaneously spoke up at the previously described meeting of men and women from organized migrant communities discussing gender-based violence prevention. Having been vocal throughout the meeting, she developed a coherent response to the assertion by some men present that what the Center and feminism proposed more generally, was for women to mandar al hombre (order men around). Awkwardly at first, searching for words, starting and stopping, finding a ways to bridge her thoughts and examples to her point, gaining confidence, she gave the following speech:

I want to share my views about the impact that on life in the home. Our vision, as organized women, is to empower ourselves. We want to participate, share decision-making... [Our idea is] not to be humiliated nor dominated... We don’t seek to [substitute for] the father as household authority or as authority in society. [But it’s also] not just about saying ‘yes, my love.’ As we raise women up, [we can] eradicate violence from the
neighborhoods. The violence passing from father to mother, from mother to children, when they yell. As parents and leaders we are trying to instill [certain] values in our children…Not to be aggressive…We [will show them how] by guiding them towards what should be done. We’ll all grow together. But we need to change the idea that the man has the last word; to value women’s leadership in the home. This is the project we are working on: a negotiating society.

Elena’s spontaneous response marked her incorporation of the Network’s values into her way of seeing. Not only had she acted as a voice for women participating in the Network, but also she had captured the vision of a new form of relating, starting within the household. Most importantly, she had described a key component of this transformation: capturing the idea that men, women and youth participate in the reproduction of unequal relationships that can be observed within and beyond the home.

The moment had not been lost on anyone present at the meeting. Visiting her a few days later, she was animated. After the meeting, she told me “Leticia had pulled me over after I spoke and praised me, she said that I clearly grasped the message of the Center.” Leticia had invited her to join a new group of promoters-in-training that would be formed in 2013. She was flattered and overwhelmed. “Me?” she recounted exclaiming. “Am I ready?!” Lila had responded by counseling her, “well, now you’ve completely integrated yourself into the Network, into the work of building the network. So what matters is, are you willing to go to all the workshops? Are you willing to study?” “It’s true,” Elena summarized to me, “I’ve been participating more and more, over the past four years.”

Elena’s growing participation in Center and Network activities allowed her to distance herself from her relationship and to perceive the detrimental effects of subservient or overly-dependent relationships with spouses. Her changing view of relationships, in general, was reflected in her comments about Anita, a fellow promoter. She felt that Anita was embarrassed to admit that she suffered in her marriage, instead describing her husband as “marvelous.” To
Elena, Anita had mentioned that he exerted physical, emotional and economic violence on her. For example, he provided food and money “when he felt like it” though injury and illness prevented her from working. Elena asserted that Anita had alternatives: her adult children would welcome her in their homes. If financially dependent, Elena could understand how she would stay around for the benefit of her children. In her own case, Elena could not have envisioned how she would have provided for her children if she had separated. She used to see herself as old, undocumented and unemployable. But she felt that Anita could more easily “get this [man] off her back.” At the same time, from her personal experience, she was aware of how cycles of violence worked. She knew from experience that one was easily pulled back in. Her story demonstrated different ways the Center attempted to keep community women at the helm of the project. As they gained a sense of the systemic nature of violence, they connected themselves and their communities to greater resources.

Elena’s story pointed more specifically to the ways ideas about gendered roles pervaded relationships. For example, many women took pride in their record of enduring suffering. Anita once asked me proudly, if her story wasn’t the “hardest” I had heard. Through her work with the Network, Elena felt she had come to appreciate new perspective on gender and relationships. At the same time, many tied their well-being to their husband’s presence, epitomized in Elena’s comment that she used to feel she would “die without her husband.” Once organized she started to draw her pride from becoming a “survivor” of violence, of becoming someone who had learned to value the calm of a life without violence. She empathized with women’s fear of being alone and encountering loneliness. Separated but supported by the Network, she noted that she felt more relaxed. Loneliness still came and went she noted “but her sense of calm” prevailed.
Separation also permitted her to continue on her new path and supported her emotional well-being.

Center and Network activities had afforded her a new perspective on relationships in the home and led her to share familiarity, trust, and affection with those around her. She commented that the absence of her husband was filled by her new relationships with her three sons. She reflected that women often struggle to balance attention they direct at husbands. She mused:

I’ve found that if your husband is around, you concentrate mainly on him. You still hear your children. But when he’s there, it’s ‘you arrived. Here’s your food. Here is your clean clothing.’ Your children’s needs come second. You say to them ‘oh I’ll [help you] later.’

Her husband’s departure provided the opportunity to discover the difference that emerged from concentrating equally on her sons. “[Now] we talk and share ideas. They’re [more] attached to me.” One particular story reflected her changing relationship with them, as well as her changing view of gender roles. Recently her adolescent son, Cristian, came home. She sensed something was wrong. She pried; he tried to deflect. But eventually he told her. She emphasized: “he even cried with me.” She contrasted this openness with the repression of the “lost” adolescent men in the neighborhood. She felt that those who engage in violent and criminal activity repress their sentiments. She felt the change in the relationship with her own children came at a crucial time, as they entered their teenage years, when she could introduce new ways of being in relationships.

Elena’s reaction did not demonstrate any interest in attempting to build a distinct type of relationship with a new partner. She recognized that sexist and violent behavior was not inherent to men as she showed through her description of her relationship to her sons. Still, she seemed resigned to the idea that men in her generation would not be worth the trouble and pain.

Beyond her changing view of the home, she was beginning to view everyday negotiations of gender roles as political, as Leticia and Lila bridged her introduction into new sites of
learning. An invitation to become the Network’s representative to Resist!, a Central American feminist organization, provided a site where she could appreciate the importance of women’s participation at all levels. She described Resist! as a network of institutions defending women’s rights, from Mexico down to Panama. She explained “they are interested in politics, not politics with a big P, but in the exercise of democracy, of women’s unfurling unwrapping, of democratic practice.” This space encouraged her to inform herself about what was going on around her, inspired by the depth of knowledge of those she began to interact with in Resist!. In order to be undeterred by the knowledge activists around her already hold, she said, “I just keep learning.”

Elena’s comments pointed to her changing views of herself, her community and the work of organizing, through her trajectory with the Network and the Center. She related her changing views to the way she participated and perceived her participation in the spaces and types of interaction that they offer. Moreover, she was excited by the prospect that she felt capable of change. She enjoyed feeling part of a community. She found her new commitments exciting and important. Elena’s story offers a window into the ways in which women saw their lives changing through their involvement with the Network. Her story illustrates the role of the Center as a site of emergence: where women found the words, ideas and opportunity to share experiences, articulate its collectivity and be introduced to alternative and residual feminist logic.

Elena’s story also points to the way that the Network’s efforts could easily be categorized as neoliberal tooling of resilience. Philosopher Robin James (2013) describes resilience as a “structure of individual subjectivity”: development of the ability to meet any challenge rather than prevent them from happening. She describes a fetishism with resilience, one’s strength is denoted by overcoming obstacles. She is concerned that where women argue for their resilience, they are in the act of creating surplus value for themselves by “overcom[ing] their [gender]
damage in socially profitable ways” (2013). Network women interpreted their work as gaining status by overcoming violence devaluing their former self that had not overcome violence. At times, they protected themselves from violence without effectively transforming the broader system, instead using their own labor. Yet, by raising the consciousness of the women experiencing violence as women and migrants, Center staff aimed to transform the gendered and racialized social order by addressing the ways it manifested at different scales towards creating effective gender equality. The intent, therefore, is rooted in a transformative vision, building consciousness from below. They aimed for the spread of the Network’s vision of equality, but lacked the time and resources to do so.

Center personnel opened the discussion of violence beyond the types of violence that occurred in the household. While they did not directly address the underlying structures of society, they did examine the ways that patriarchy and racism were evident in responses to Nicaraguan women at different scales: within the home, the community, state services, state programs and the justice system among others. They recognized that these were not individual fallacies but patterned exclusion. For example, transforming relationships in the home was about building a new gendered household culture that prevented against the development of ways of seeing, characterized by gender inequality. Moreover, their idea was that by raising children in new ways across homes would also create an immediate community and public sphere in which gender equality was the norm. Lila invited motivated members of the Network to join her in attending the meetings of groups that explicitly discussed these global patterns and underlying structures. Making these connections would provide women and youth with a broader base of support for their work towards transforming gendered hierarchies throughout Costa Rica and Nicaragua. In this manner, she acted to facilitate transformation. The Center demonstrated the
emergence of a migrant feminist consciousness and the attempts of “middle” members who used their position as leverage to get women “in the door” and into transformative discussions.

K. Conclusion
At the end of my first visit to a Network meeting, I was immediately struck by Elena’s reflection that “our arms are lengthening.” I had immediately grasped that the day’s skill-building exercises were intended to allow them to disrupt normative gendered relationships and activities within and across their communities. In creating plans of action for coordinated collective response to episodes of domestic violence, they were rehearsing the steps so that when a neighbor was in trouble, they could smoothly help her transition to a home life she described as “free of violence.” Women’s experiences indicated the exclusion they experienced was not rooted in a single household, but in the arrangement of state infrastructure to which their needs and privations were invisible. Yet their experiences of exclusion across the border also indicated that state institutions responded to even-more deeply rooted structures outlining belonging along the lines of gender, class and race. When border-crossing did not resolve but instead augmented exclusion, they turned to everyday sites where hierarchy was reproduced, but also, the institutional arrangements in both states that denied [poor people] “recognition as bearers of social rights” (Dagnino 2003: 5).

However, I argue that the aim of the Center’s leaders, namely Lila and Leticia, was to *concientizar* (raise the consciousness) of women to transform relations across scales in a way that not only prevented practices exerting gendered superiority but also creating an effective gender equality. This in itself was a challenge. They faced a second challenge: to create a critical mass of people engaged in this task. A third task was that they were implementing revolutionary praxis in a largely static culture, a neoliberal setting undergoing the increasing elitism of
democracy. The intent, therefore, was rooted in a transformative vision, building consciousness from below. They aimed for the spread of the Network’s vision of equality, but lacked the time and resources to do so.

The Center became a site where the hegemonic can be viewed in its transformative processes. I argue that it followed the trend of the NGOs dominating civil society. Yet it engaged in the politics of this scale by introducing alternatives to dominant patriarchal and neoliberal values. What emerged at this site of confluence was an emergent migrant feminism that was increasingly cognizant of common sense notions of gender disseminated in the home and at other scales of society that reproduce gender inequality. Center collaborators focused on moving the conversation about belonging forward towards producing a participatory citizenship. In this process, women resurrected or formed a sense of their humanity. They also recognized that Nicaraguan men also face exclusions and were part of the same system. Frictions and tensions emerged as women retained some of their old views and, moreover, were routinely interacting with others who were not part of, or were resistant to, the Center’s project. Beyond these economic limitations, lack of everyday access to resources and fear of reprisal, including deportation, caused additional friction. Still, the Center introduced the idea of a critical lens on patriarchy as systemic and, furthermore, it was at the root of relationships, exclusionary policies and inequality. The Center focused on continually exposing women and men to new views and analytical frameworks and pushed them to wield these tools beyond Center spaces. In this way, the Center played a key role in enabling emergence.
IV NICARAGUA: EXCLUSION IN STATE-MAKING

March 8, 2013. Managua, Nicaragua. Against the backdrop of the glistening mall, a tribute to foreign investment and cosmopolitanism, a place where cold, stale versions of street food were sold at five times their typical price alongside low calorie salad-bars that cost a tenth of many Nicaraguan’s monthly salaries, I saw the fluttering purple banners and a rainbow of umbrellas as I walked up to the International Women’s Day March. There were women dressed up as nurses, nuns, workers and witches. They held up signs. One instructed: “Don’t put up with it, don’t cry, better start yelling and never stay quiet again.” Another declared “I am not a hot negra, I am an afro-descendent woman.” Young men teetered in spike heels, perhaps enacting the practice of walking a kilometer in another’s shoes. They held a banner: “I’m a man, I have emotions, I repudiate violence, I renounce machismo.” I searched for the Alliance, certain they would have eagerly left their homes long before dawn for the five hour journey. I walked back and forth along the side of the march with no luck, passing all manner of organizations, spotting the greats of Nicaraguan feminism snapping photographs with the celebrated author, Giaconda Belli. An announcement blasted over the loudspeaker: “our compañeras from the Segovias are close to arriving; we will begin marching and they will bring up the rear.” Sweating in the hot sun, the march pulled around the roundabout. Overhead, the Nicaraguan flag flew at half-mast commemorating Hugo Chavez’s death two days prior, which had been declared a national holiday in Nicaragua. Reaching a stage installed across the main thoroughfare, the march slowed and stalled. Suddenly, heads turn as photographers and reporters ran towards the marches’ end where a sizeable break had formed and a group of women in sombreros adorned with purple sashes held up a large banner declaring their affiliation, the Alliance. The women did not shrink from the attention but gathered facing the cameras with a banner proclaiming: “Active Rural
women struggling for our equality. We want Rest, Orgasms and Liberty.” There is a widespread assumption that rural areas demonstrate the most toxic masculinity and assume women there are the most oppressed. Few would routinely picture those producing coffee beans, cleaning homes and living tucked away in mountains as the pinnacle of a feminist social protest. But “Nicaragua is a strange country” as Dora Marie Tellez begins her testimony of her trajectory with the Nicaraguan Revolution in Sandino’s Daughters (Randall 1994). The assumption that women would experience revolution in equally liberating ways was not borne out but gave way to a feminist movement that defies convention.

U.S. scholars and progressive media have treated Nicaragua’s revolution as the one that triumphed, ushering women into the public and, more specifically, the political sphere. Yet, in everyday conversation, Nicaraguans speak relatively little of the community-minded interactions many imagine to have developed during the Revolution and persisted in the twenty-five years since its closure. Instead, their descriptions of family and community life often point to acrimonious relationships. They speak little of gender equality. Feminist scholars point out that there are linkages between national level political transformation and household politics (Stacey 1983; Jaquette 1989; Alvarez 1990; Hunt 1992). They examined the everyday reproduction of state formative projects in the private sphere.21 Scholars of Nicaraguan history, as much as community organizers, relate authoritarianism in everyday relations to Nicaragua’s post-colonial trajectory of civil war, foreign intervention and dictatorial governing currents. They argue that everyday interactions in home and community directly reflected the tyrannical currents in

21 Alonso discusses how state modernization attempted to disassociate the “personal violence and social authority” in Serrano, pre-liberal Mexico. Whereas state expansion celebrated the violent masculinity of “warrior” frontiersman, now liberals claimed this interfered with “free exercise of will and reason” by inscribing the “lack of free will on subjects bodies and to dramatize personal subjection to a sovereign” (Alonso 1995: 120). Household relations and function were (re-)shaped by state projects interrupting the household reproduction of frontier family private-centered patriarchal values by moving the educational-socializing project out of the home.
governing. Moreover, they were inflected by gendered, racial and ethnic social hierarchies. I draw on scholarship showing that the Nicaraguan Revolution aimed to create horizontal relations across scales: for participatory democracy and sovereignty in the formal political sphere, as much as everyday social relations. However, as scholars have argued, the Revolution’s founders and vanguard shed light on the readily identifiable underpinnings of the oppressive relationships.

Focused on rectifying economic oppression within the country and political economic oppression in a larger global order, they often reproduced a *mestizo* (mixed-race) nationalism. They made their critique without addressing other social systems that structured dominant culture, such as racial and ethnic hierarchies. They addressed gender hierarchies inadequately. These critiques were made by those who were part of the revolutionary movement but felt their concerns were not addressed in revolutionary institutions. As Nicaragua returned to conservative governance, institutions at varying scales demonstrated a declining value for participatory democracy. It was preserved in the practices of grassroots movements, community organizations, producer cooperatives and most notably through the work of Nicaragua’s autonomous feminist movement.

In this sense, the value for participatory democracy persists as a residual element of culture referring to those elements of a past dominant culture that are collectively valued and practiced. This rendering of history points to three particular features: first, the long history of unequal everyday relations; secondly, the absence of the development of citizenship associated with rights through national history; and finally, the ways that a cross-cultural feminism developed through the democratic opening in the Revolution and has aided in the consolidation of an emergent feminist movement. It is the learned ways of being in family relations that produce violence that pervades women’s lives, the lack of a sense of rights that pushes them abroad, and
the residual revolutionary and feminist values and practices that form the basis of their movement.

A. Governing, Authoritarianism and Gender in Everyday Life

In a 2003 article, anthropologist Anja Nygren wrote, “Nicaragua is a country overwhelmed by its history...suffering from civil wars, foreign interventions, unequal distribution of wealth and income, and socio-political polarization” (2003:370). Scholars of everyday violence in Central America have drawn connections between similarly powerful internal conflicts and the development of violent forms of relating (Hume 2009; Moodie 2010). More specifically, scholars in Nicaragua have used the concept of “patriarchal authoritarianism” to describe a system of governing that consolidated throughout Nicaragua’s history as a colonial province and independent state (Kampwirth 1993). This form of governing has translated into everyday forms of relating organizing relations between people in the everyday, through a “code of machismo” (Lancaster 1992: 274). In this dissertation, I argue on the one hand, that this code leaves Nicaraguan women migrants highly attuned to ways they may transform one particular facet of this code, the forms of relating by ordering, which people regard in their daily lives as a culture of mando or command. On the other hand, I show how mando produces violence of different scales as a structure of feeling. In this chapter, I explore the development and persistence of mando throughout Nicaraguan history and, more specifically, the related feminist activities that emerged during the Revolution in response.

Governing by mando was evident in the 19th century throughout the Americas but, in many cases, relaxed as states became secular and engaged in modernizing projects that loosened the oligarchic hold on political power and social relations. In Nicaragua, however, the implementation of rushed liberal and modernizing projects fostered mando. In the late 19th century, the language and logic of patriarchy and brotherhood informed efforts to entrench a
hierarchical structure of belonging to state, as much as household, along the lines of class, ethnicity, gender and race. It privileged elite males over other men and women, establishing the precedent of “accumulat[ing] political power by regulating gender” (Dore 2006: 2, 14)22. Patriarchal authoritarianism intensified throughout the 19th and early 20th century, consolidating power among national and international elites by limiting the development of practices granting widespread citizenship, participation and social rights among Nicaragua’s residents.23 The institutionalized repression that the Somoza dynastic dictatorship (1936-1979) ushered in after state “consolidation” would seemingly have the greatest impact on the lopsided gender dynamics of democratic participation in current public and private life, entrenching unequal relations in a culture of mando. I argue that the reinforcement of these systems of inequality is key to the form of dispossession taking place in the neoliberal era and the changing international division of labor. In the wake of the Nicaragua’s civil war in the 1980s and the implementation of austerity “stabilizing measures” in the 1990s, patriarchal authoritarianism became a mechanism of invisibilizing violence and migration or non-material dispossession that masks women’s affective and “productive” labor, contribution and sacrifice behind the guise of “suffering” and normative gender relations.

The same values and practices that enabled patriarchal authoritarianism in the governing sphere operate at different scales, namely the household, assigning power according to subject position within gender, race, class, and sexual hierarchies. These intersecting hierarchies operate through perceptions of appropriate activities and response, but also beauty, intelligence, access to

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22 For example, local male elites (“peasants” or ladinos) will hold power over “peons” while senior males dominate household relations (with men and women) (Dore 2006: 2). Some scholars point to colonial establishment of these patterns that household life and gender interactions developed out of a pattern of paternal irresponsibility established in the Spanish conquest indigenous family, household and community structures were eroded by the decimation of 93% of the indigenous population (Kampwirth 1993: 42; Charlip 2003).

23 It also informed laws sanctioning male infidelity and controlling female sexuality—influencing gender inequality in household relations in other ways (Dore 2006; Kampwirth 1993; ).
opportunity and work ethic (Lancaster 1992). These hierarchies are reproduced by women as much as by men. In spite of men’s overall ability to wield greater power in the public and private spheres, most men are equally subject to structural violence. In his ethnography of gender relations during the Revolution, Roger Lancaster argues that in Nicaragua, “masculinity [is constantly asserted] by way of practices that show the self to be ‘active,’ not ‘passive’” (1992:237). Drawing on Lancaster’s work, Karen Kampwirth asserted that masculinity in Nicaragua constructs “ideal” male behavior as “active,” with a public role lacking any notion of “paternal responsibility.” It constructs femininity in relation to maternal roles, which are characterized as ideally “passive and private” (Kampwirth 1993: 146). Lancaster proposed that these differences constituted a series of essential dualisms that comprised Nicaragua’s “cultural code of machismo.” He listed, among others, “masculinity/femininity, activity/passivity, violence/abuse and domination/subordination” (Lancaster 1992: 274) to which Kampwirth added “irresponsibility/responsibility and egoism/self-sacrifice” (Kampwirth 1993: 148). These “couplings” are generative of and generated by ideas and practices surrounding men’s and women’s activities. It is this set of underlying ideas that are transmitted in household relations, even if a household is exclusively made up of women, thereby reproducing patriarchal authoritarianism. Further, he argues, “playing by the rules of machismo may be a survival strategy for many impoverished women” tied up with retaining the respect of her family, community and access to everyday support (Kampwirth 1993: 46; Saakes 1991). Authoritarian regimes indirectly influence the growth of authoritarianism at different scales, particularly household relations. The result is that frustration with marginality in the public sphere is often

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24 This is reiterated by women headed households. Fathers were absent in thirty-four percent nationally and sixty-two percent in Managua (Stephens 1988in Kampwirth, 1993: 44). This trend is epitomized by the widespread use of the phrase “she has a child by me” rather than “we have a child together”
expressed in the domestic sphere where men and women exert physical, emotional, social (e.g. denial of access to education), and economic violence over unequal members of the household.  

The idea of a culture of *mando* emerges in conversation after conversation. Malena, a program coordinator at a civil society popular education organization in Managua, told me:

In our country, talk of democracy, citizenship and of being subjects of rights, are very new categories of debate and even newer in practice. Historically, as a society, we have seen [elites] engage in practices best characterized as verticalist or authoritarian. We have a dictatorial current running through our politics. This comes out of a warring, conquest type of formation. Throughout our history we have normalized the exercise of power. We equate directing and leadership with *el mando*, implying being above others, gaining their obedience. So this model is deeply entrenched.

Through her long career with this organization, Malena became highly experienced in initiatives throughout the country to develop Nicaraguans’ sense that they have rights and may exercise them. Her assertion reflects familiarity with communities throughout Nicaragua as much as the country’s history. Popular sayings and notions about how Nicaraguans interact with each other echoed Malena’s sentiments about the pervasiveness of authoritarianism. Arnoldo, a college-educated businessman from Nicaragua living in Costa Rica with his family, stopped by the office of the Center one afternoon to confirm the details of a series of workshops he would be giving to youth in migrant communities. In his late forties, his manner was thoughtful, serious and studious. He attended college courses in popular education at the University of Costa Rica to complete a second B.A. that would connect him to his community. He joined us for afternoon coffee and to savor some *rosquillas* (corn crackers) I had brought back from a recent trip to Nicaragua. As we commented on Nicaraguan community relations generally, he interjected, “the minute we get a little power, we just do the same as the other before us. We just try to wield it

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25 “The political participation of hungry people [is not] deliberation, they have the least access to deliberation and… [being] a slow process of discussion and compromise, is difficult for desperately poor people to accept” (Kampwirth 1993: 8).
over others. We are all little Somozas.” The conversation reminded me of discussions with my Nicaraguan husband years before, when service-providers in Nicaragua occasionally ignored my polite requests for assistance. He would sigh and say: “Laura, we only understand patadas (kicks). The legacy of the gringos and dictators stuck. Act like the other ex-pats. Demand service. You act like you are on the same level as they are. We Nicaraguans don’t respond to that. If you want something, order people around.” These conversations point to the way that mando operates in and is reproduced through everyday actions.

B. Nicaragua Marginality and Future Imagining in the Post-Colonial Period

The legacy of power and trade imbalances of the colonial period, in light of Nicaragua’s nearly trans-isthmian waterway, fostered dreams of national autonomy following independence. Beginning in the late 18th century, wealthy conservative leaders, landowners, producers and merchants\textsuperscript{26} envisioned the construction of major ports and a canal from the Port of Granada on Lake Nicaragua along the San Juan River, shipping goods to Atlantic ports of Latin America, the U.S. and Europe. The canal would invigorate Nicaraguan sovereignty (Wolfe 2007: 6; Burns 1991) by ameliorating dependence on nearby foreign ports for export, making Nicaraguan goods more competitive on the burgeoning world market. In the 19th century, following independence (1821) the development of a canal perpetually implied a confluence of foreign intervention: the “pressures and possibilities” of foreign desire to, not only, invest in, but also, control the waterway promised to grant and systematically threaten sovereignty (Wolfe 2007: 34-7; Burns 1991; Marti Puig 2014).\textsuperscript{27} By mid-century, U.S. businessmen Cornelius Vanderbilt and William

\textsuperscript{26} Those producers, landowners and merchants supplied cacao, cattle, indigo and cochineal for European consumption and production.

\textsuperscript{27} Throughout the early 19th century, the earliest Nicaraguan efforts towards sovereign trade, attracted the ire of merchants and officials from the seat of the Kingdom of Guatemala and later Mexico (Revels 2000; Burns 1991). For the U.S. a water route between Eastern and Western seabords was desirable. Pacific coast gold rushes augmented pressure for such a route to transport people as well as supplies.
Walker (Pearce 1982) had attempted to seize control of Nicaraguan commerce and governance, respectively. Meanwhile, liberals’ and conservatives’ competing visions of paths to development repeatedly brought them to armed conflict, disrupting internal modernization, the development of a coherent political-economic model and the construction of citizenship (Barraco 2005; Martin Puig 2014). Social order characterized by “class, gender and ethnic domination” organized the mundane activities of everyday life (Dore 2006: 53). The difficulty of achieving the cosmopolitan imaginings stymied generalized incorporation.

The disaster of courting foreign investment for a canal eventually precipitated a shift in the vision of Nicaragua’s development towards sovereignty through agricultural development (Wolfe 2007). During this period, transparently authoritarian governments sharply expanded state, military and police institutions. They coercively restructured agriculture and landholding patterns. They forced a transition from small-holder and communal subsistence farming to agro-export production. This “transform[ed] the foundation of Nicaraguans’ everyday lives” (Wolfe 2007: 2, 87; Burns 1991; Mahoney 2001). The concurrent legal conversion of indigenous peoples into disenfranchised wage laborers dispossessed of land was intended to forcibly incorporate peasants into the production system (Charlip 1994; Revel 2000). Through laws and state institutions governing citizenship, a gendered racialized hierarchy was erected that would

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28 Abolished at independence (1821), Walker was a U.S. slave owner who annexed Central America as the final slave state in 1859.
29 Liberal and conservative elites fought to extend their power (Wolfe 2007: 19; Burns 1991).
30 A discourse of a mestizo (mixed) nation emerged, constructing belonging against an indigenous past and an implicitly mixed present. It organized allegiance by locating and linking racial identification to Nicaragua’s structural position, forging a “fictitious racial opposition” to the U.S. (Gould 1998; Smith 1996: 151; Hale 1988; Barraco 2005; Wolfe 2007). The acknowledgement of an indigenous past did not provide a venue for non-elite participation instead, it undergirded practices of mestizo nationalism through projects, institutions, rhetoric and laws outlining the contraction of rights for indigenous peoples (Gould 1998; Roseberry 1996). Edmund Gordon notes that this distinction, carried through the 20th century, became a key point of tension between Atlantic Coast residents, whose identification with British activity on the coast clashed with the FSLN’s explicitly anti-Yanqui-imperialist ideology (1998).
redirect wealth to the top. Political elites supported this process believing Nicaragua required an “authoritarian, strong patriarch” (Dore 2006) to protect the country from threats to sovereignty, unity and modernity. Still, localized constructions of identity and politics constrained the grasp of the national state institutions (Dore 2006; Gould 1990). The emergent picture of 19th century Nicaragua is one of uneven influence of the state, where marginal peoples clearly exercised a degree of influence over state-formation a “condition that political elites attempted to remedy through coercion” (Gonzalez 2011: 35). Historians provide strong evidence of inter-elit conflict and incomplete articulation between federal, regional and municipal institutions. They show that in the meantime, indigenous and working class residents organized to express their discontent. Still, events of the 19th and early 20th century largely consolidated power among national and international elites by limiting widespread enjoyment of citizenship, participation and social rights among Nicaragua’s residents. The limited enactment of citizenship weathered feminist movements, peasant movements and revolutionary movements. Most notably, it persisted throughout the modernizing liberal and post-liberal periods, which had ushered in broader gender equality and forms of participation in other countries (Mahoney 2001; Gonzalez 2011).

31 Move towards sovereignty administrative-bureaucratic apparatus through national monetary and financial systems; investment in transportation and communication infrastructure, including railways, ports and roads. It absorbed church functions such as education and registration, ensuring a more active and socially embedded state (Mahoney 2001: 182-85).
32 Victoria Gonzalez-Rivera offers a critically different view of the history of women’s movements in Nicaragua, arguing that the women’s pro-dictatorship partisan activism during the Somoza era and the Sandinista-sponsored women’s movement erased the memory of Nicaraguan feminism dating back to the 1820s. She highlights the connection between feminist activism and middle and upper-class urban families in the context of Nicaragua’s the interrelation between region, (political) loyalties and interests and extended-family lineage structures. She draws on Carlos Vila’s argument that “The extended family with its far-reaching system of loyalties and interests, is a typical actor in stages prior to urban, industrial capitalism, and one of the foundations of Nicaragua’s social structure and political system until today” (Vila , in Gonzalez-Rivera 2011: 36). Women’s levels of education, literacy and engagement through national and international publications and social connections allowed them to influence politicians. They enjoyed appointments in government positions and economic resources to travel and participate in international feminist activities. Gonzalez-Rivera distinguishes this first wave feminism emerging in the 19th and early 20th century and second wave feminism stemming from the democratic opening of the Revolution.
33 It also informed laws sanctioning male infidelity and controlling female sexuality, influencing gender inequality in household relations in other ways (Dore 2006; Kampwirth 1993).
Until the mid-20th century, authoritarian governance was further entrenched through uneven state centralization and delayed democratization. Historian James Mahoney argues outside intervention in the national political economy resulted in the anemic development of state bureaucracies and delayed any capability to democratize governing (Mahoney 2001: 44-5). In turn, this precluded the loosening of racial, class and gender hierarchies in both legal code and social practice. In the early 20th century, when President Jose Santos Zelaya secured foreign investment to build a trans-isthmic canal, defying U.S. hegemony in the region, the “radical liberalization” path was aborted by U.S. intervention in 1909. U.S. President Taft instituted “colonial control” over Nicaragua that stunted socioeconomic development. Under the model of dollar diplomacy, the U.S. seized financial institutions, dominated government activity and trained armed forces to maintain the status quo (Mahoney 2001: 190).34 The extended Marine occupation inspired Augusto Sandino to lead a peasant army in nationalist guerilla warfare against U.S. incursion in 1926.35 His death at the hands of a National Guard, directed by Anastasio Somoza Garcia, eliminated the final threat to liberal dominance. Having fostered loyalty within the National Guard, Somoza Garcia then forced the U.S.-appointed president out of office, forging a regime upheld by a fully trained national army with complete allegiance to the Somoza family’s political and personal will (Mahoney 2001). The institutionalized subordination of Nicaraguan initiatives during U.S. Marine Occupation (1912-1920; 1925-1928) and the subsequent repression that the Somoza dynastic dictatorship (1936-1979) ushered in after

34 The Dawson Agreements (1910) set up a “U.S-dominated commission to resolve disputes involving contracts and concessions granted by Zelaya.” The U.S. took control of customs houses; the state department gave the national railway and bank to U.S. investors. The U.S. State Department appointed a commission to “supervise the national budget, fix customs duties and oversee the payment of all governmental bonds.” U.S. investors dominated the coffee trade, through control of financial institutions, loans, credit and a merchant company to export coffee and U.S. political advisors’ control of formal political channels (Mahoney 2001: 190-1).
35 In 1921, Sandino had gone to work in the Tampico mines in Mexico, where he developed an “anarcho-syndicalist” analysis, anti-imperialist, and nationalist sentiments. In 1926 he returned to Nicaragua. He led a gold mine uprising, temporarily joined liberal forces in Nicaragua, and eventually split, leading a guerilla force, to struggle for social justice benefitting Nicaraguan’s poor (Baracco 2005: 41-45).
state consolidation, entrenched the lopsided dynamics of democratic participation in public and private life along the lines of gender, racial, class and other relations. Historian Victoria Gonzalez argues that both US forces and the Somozas actively marginalized and eventually co-opted a non-partisan feminist movement that had been active since the 19th century (2011). Allowed to flourish, the movement might have stimulated debates surrounding intersecting lines of inequality within the country. Instead, the long history of Nicaraguan feminism was erased, allowing Sandinista feminists to see theirs as the first movement of its kind in the history of Nicaragua. Only in the past 20 years have scholars worked towards correcting this omission (Gonzalez 2011). To understand the conditions in which this complete erasure of feminist values and practice occurred, the following section of this chapter focus on portraying how more explicit exertion of power is complicit with political-economic shifts throughout Nicaraguan state history. I argue that the reinforcement of these systems of inequality are key to the form of dispossession taking place in the neoliberal era and the changing international division of labor.

C. Somoza Dictatorship and the Consolidation of the Gendered, Authoritarian Household

The Somoza period (1936-1979) normalized inequality and violence in 20th century Nicaragua. It attempted to erase the memories of opposition, gender equality and non-partisan politics. When Somoza Garcia took over the presidency, he initiated a dynastic dictatorship. He was followed by his two sons Luis and Anastasio Somoza Debayle. The dictatorship was

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36 Gonzalez-Rivera’s work is self-consciously focused on providing a diachronic exploration of the emergence of women’s and feminist movements in Nicaragua, an urgent point, she argues, in a context where participants in such movements had routinely dated the emergence of such movements to the 1970’s and the Sandinista insurrection. To this extent, she points largely to the mainstream documentation of such activity, to demonstrate the erasure of a “national historical memory” (2011:9) of women’s activist activities prior to this period. To this extent, the focus of her work prior to the Somoza era in particular, is focused on publications by Nicaraguan women and feminists (including men) themselves, which also limits her argument to a particular class, racial, occupational sector. Her consciousness of this limitation is demonstrated by her frequent mention of synchronic areas of research in which scholars might consider exploring.
characterized by its ruler-patriarch’s ability to outmaneuver challengers, play political opponents against each other and, in its final decade, explicit “rule by violence” (Kampwirth 1993: 67). Each maintained the allegiance of the National Guard in practice and, at the very least, the appearance of strong backing by the United States (Millett 1977). Notably, Gonzalez argues, “women’s support for the Somoza dictatorship helped to keep the regime in power between 1955 and 1979” (2011: 9). The Somoza dynasty reflects trends of the past, the connection between family and governance in the construction of “the strongest and most durable family dynasty in Latin American history” (Woodward 1985: 220, Kampwirth 1993: 51). Political scientist Karen Kampwirth shows they guarded the class structure and the status quo. While social welfare regimes spread internationally, in Nicaragua formal education and social services, especially childcare, remained inaccessible for most. While the Somoza family held half of the land, 50% of the population earned 15% of the income while landlessness grew to 33% of the rural population by 1971. In a country that remained largely agrarian, land consolidation (latifundismo) for agro-export production pushed farmers off the land fueling emigration to urban and other rural areas. The Somoza regime furthered the estrangement of women from institutional spaces by “cynically using the institutions of liberal democracy,” such as elections, constitutions and parliaments, “to justify its authoritarian rule [in turn] delegitimizing those institutions” that could promote laws empowering women (Montegero 1987 in Kampwirth 1993: 72).

Consent played a large role in maintaining the dictatorship. Rather than acting as a buffer against violence, the household space fostered authoritarian ways of being (Kampwirth 1993: 1, 38). Somoza advisors advocated the family as the site for extending paternalism by “reproducing

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37 Women earned the right to vote third to the last of Latin American countries (1955) and social security regulations actively reinforced “the defacto polygamy” that characterized Nicaragua since conquest” (Kampwirth 1993: 55-63).
or reinforcing authoritarianism, placing limitations on dialogue and venues for widespread political discussion” (Belli 1977 in Burns 1991: 81). They reinforced authoritarian household politics by employing patriarchal symbolism to leave traditions in place. Women were portrayed as “mainly responsible for passing on machista values to children” (Kampwirth 1993: 53). Karen Kampwirth describes Somoza-era family policy as “generally [being] one of omission.” However, she argues they were still responsible for the consolidation of authoritarian rule of the household by “link[ing] the legitimate exercise of national power to the legitimacy of absolute paternal power within the household.” The household became the site where Nicaraguans learned that politics were about inequality. In this sense “the authoritarian household was a subtle impediment to the growth of contractual government” (Kampwirth 1993: 37, 52). There, a rightless citizenship persevered. Citizens might receive concessions arbitrarily from the government. This anemic culture of rights was captured in Somoza’s proclamation that “in Nicaragua, I am the Godfather” (Velazquez 1986 in Kampwirth 1993: 65). The legacy of the Somoza years was the creation of a country of clients and nepotists accompanied by a vacuum in the understandings of the exercise of citizenship (Kampwirth 1993).

Although women did not win the vote until 1955, they were dually portrayed in scholarly and popular discourse as outspoken and involved in public life while simultaneously passive and subservient (Gonzalez 2011; Kampwirth and Gonzalez 2001). Men from rural areas often abandoned families when forced into season migration circuits to find employment. Managua tripled in population from 1950-1971, filling with women seeking service sector employment to support family. This is reflected in the statistics showing that women’s economic activity doubled in this period while households in Managua were 33-50% female headed. This undergirds present day “loose” family structure (Vilas 1986, Mason 1992 in in Kampwirth 1993:}
Kampwirth asserts that “a [Nicaraguan] ideology of female inferiority and passivity existed in uneasy relationship with a reality of female economic independence and power as household heads” (1993: 38). Meanwhile, laws codified women’s second class status and entrenched the imbalance in power among gender roles. Finally, a history of autonomous women’s organizing was erased during the early Somoza era and re-emerged in the midst of the revolutionary effort (Gonzalez 2011; Whisnant 1999). As revolutionary movement built strength, this tension galvanized women’s support of the Revolution.

Karen Kampwirth argues that the socio-economic and political exclusion of women during the Somoza period appears to have been a factor in revolutionary participation. She notes that “by 1979 30% percent of the FSLN troops were women, and a higher percentage of their leaders were women” (Flyn 1983; Randall 1981; Collinson 1990 in Kampwirth 1993: 77). Enlistment in the insurrection offered further evidence to this argument. The percentage of youths from a single head of households doubled the percentage of the overall population (Vilas 1986 in Kampwirth79). Women and youth broke with the past by participating in public politics, transforming private politics in “thousands” of households (Kampwirth 1993: 2-4). Furthermore, during the Somoza era, state violence was waged on non-violent tactics of poor women’s associations (Kampwirth 1993: 78). The Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) was formed in 1961, initiating guerilla warfare, which continued until its triumph. On July 17, 1979, the final insurrection of the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) triumphed over the 44-year Somoza dictatorship and ushering in a period of change. The goal of feminists during the Revolution was a transformation of the political economy of relations then structured by steep

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patriarchal and capitalist hierarchies. They sought to address gendered hierarchies structuring interactions ranging from the relation between parents and children to public officials and citizens; relations encompassed within the concept of *mando*.

D. Democratic Openings: Legacies of Transition

The triumph of the Revolution ushered in a government set on transforming the structure of the state. The ten year period of FSLN government following the triumph, commonly referred to as the revolution, was a project fraught with difficulties. Most scholars attribute the difficulties to the U.S.-sponsored counterrevolution. Many of its initiatives were unsuccessful in the long term, whether withering during its governing period or forgotten in the years following. Although flawed, many of them might have been adjusted or substituted without the pressure of external warfare. The revolutionary project certainly foregrounded most social movements developing and operating in Nicaragua today. For this reason, I portray the Revolution as a democratic opening, insofar as it inspired movements in its failure to support diverse and intersecting agenda. The feminisms that inform the Network’s strategies count among them. There has been extensive work in Latin America surrounding democratic openings, most focused on indigenous groups contending with the effective elitism of democracy. However, this dissertation explores the work of women navigating democratic openings on a bi-national or better, transnational scene.

Anthropologists working in Latin America have used the term democratic openings to refer to the processes through which new, more egalitarian ideas and practices of formal and informal interaction proliferate. It emerged in the midst of the transition from dictatorships to market democracies (Paley 2001; Murdock 2008; Gill 2000; Speed 2006). This encompassed the trend of extending citizenship to previously legally marginal groups, namely indigenous people.
Scholars refer to this process as “neoliberal multiculturalism” (Hale 2005; Postero 2007; Collier 1998; Warren and Jackson 1998). This occurred as states retreated from the practice of monitoring the exchange of ideas about social good within civil society and included changes that were formalized through laws and policies as well as largely social cultural transformations. New forms of governing and new changes in laws, policies and political participation were widely hailed for producing democratic participation.

As anthropologists explored how these transitions were experienced from below, they demonstrated the openings themselves did not foreground the sense that the voice of a broader public, much less that of marginalized groups, was being accounted for in government decisions. This generated tension among those who continued to find themselves excluded. It was this tension that galvanized new forms of organizing and resistance among groups attempting to broaden the meaning and practice of formal democratic participation. These movements conflated the right to participate with the right to determine culture and the right to engage in culturally-based forms of participation (Postero 2007; Alvarez 1990). For example, Rosa Aida Hernandez Castillo, Lynn Stephen and Shannon Speed characterize the outcome of organizing work in indigenous communities in Mexico as:

> embody[ing] the concept of citizenship in culturally grounded terms that recognize ethnic differences and provide legal flexibility in terms of how the rights and responsibilities of citizenship are actualized in local systems of governance, justice and political economy. [Hernandez Castillo, Stephen and Speed 2006: 37]

These groups shared many characteristics. Many had been or remained in conversation with groups that had initiated transitions “from below,” whether revolution (Criquillon 1995), mass mobilization (Blackwell 2006), or more localized incursions into formal political spaces (Alvarez 1990; Murdock 2008; Paley 2001). The Nicaraguan Revolution was a unique case in that the state was restructured towards a goal of widespread participation in government decision-
making. Still internal shortcomings in understanding the barriers to participation, mixed with the
narrowing of the revolutionary agenda in the face of external threats, curtailed this program.
Similar to the cases exemplifying the conventional notion of democratic openings, this tension
prompted long-term projects to produce widespread participation long after the Revolution’s end.

I approach the work of the Network as the outgrowth of two democratic openings. The
first was the aborted transformative processes of the Nicaraguan Revolution. Second, I argue that
they experience emigration to Costa Rica as a democratic opening, exposed to new circulating
discourses about rights and participation. At the time of my fieldwork, Nicaraguan women
migrants were caught between the changing course for women in Nicaragua in the nearly 35
years since the triumph of the Revolution and the shifting terrain of women’s rights and services
in neoliberal Costa Rica. The values exchanged within the Network build on the dynamic of
emerging and diverging feminisms during and following the revolutionary period. These
feminisms were the outgrowth of the revolutionary attempt to transform mando as a gendered
form of interaction. The Network emerged as Nicaraguan women confronted the limitations of
Costa Rican inclusivity, access to justice, and forms of participation. They negotiated discourses
of rights, citizenship and democracy while a transnational interdependence grew between the two
countries.

E. Attempts to Forge Participatory Democracy

Among the Revolution’s stated goals were to create a more egalitarian society through
the transformation of class relations (Lancaster 1992: 11), to restructure everyday gender
relationships and to inject gender-equity within structures of governance. The Revolution aimed
to break with a history of foreign interventions, imperialism and dictatorial rule by dissolving the
socio-political and economic structure of the country. It would build a new structure from a base
of participatory democracy. Although threatened from the beginning by U.S. foreign aggression, the Revolution itself had various shortcomings that limited its transformative potential. Ultimately, the Revolution provided the democratic opening for new concepts of gender and participation to emerge. But rather than emerge through the restructured state as originally envisioned, cross-cultural feminisms emerged through unofficial channels. As official rhetoric narrowly delineated a women’s agenda in relation to concerns of traditional gender roles, feminists found their cross-cultural agendas sidelined and forged ahead with their agenda through an autonomous feminist movement. In this section, I begin by discussing the way the revolutionary government was originally structured. This structure was widely condoned before and during the Revolution. It is clear there were shortcomings but also, it is important to foreground discussions of the shortcomings in the long-term with the external issues the Revolution faced.

One of the primary elements of the revolutions decline was U.S. policy and practice towards the government. U.S. President Reagan (1981-1989) feared the spread of sovereign movements in the region. By 1981, he had begun funding and training an anti-revolutionary force of ex-national guardsman, the Contras. The Contra war sapped the Revolution’s resources and government energy consolidated around state defense. The economy was plagued by a variety of factors, the Latin American economic crisis in the 1980’s, war drain on personnel and inflation, reincorporating veterans after war and the costs of war itself, and the U.S. economic embargo beginning in 1985. Fiscal austerity measures were adopted in 1984, 1985 and 1988 under the Sandinistas, warranting the comment that they had created free-trade and a business-friendly climate favored by the Sandinista’s opposition (Close 1999: 122-25). For this reason, many programs and processes collapsed. It is clear they had internal shortcomings. More
importantly, however, the government lacked the flexibility to delegate resources and attention to issues such as participation in the face of counter-revolutionary warfare.

The FSLN government implemented a brief effort with an interventionist state model. After taking office in 1979, the Sandinistas restructured public institutions with the philosophy that the state be responsible for economic accumulation. The FSLN aimed for a mixed economy with heavy reliance on state-owned enterprise and the development of a public sector, public services and programs (Close 1999: 17; 118-19). The economy was thought to work most efficiently if it created the conditions for full-employment. Jobs were created through the expansion of the public sector, while state-sponsored services and programs (e.g. health, social security, transport and education) ensured a mobile trained workforce (Close 1999; Harvey 1989). State agencies engaged in what Kampwirth characterizes as “a massive public education campaign” positioning violence as a social problem resolving “its most public forms (the death penalty)...and most private forms (domestic violence) through popular participation” (Kampwirth 1993: 134-6). Support for these different projects was high before and during the Revolution.

The FSLN attempted to create a governing structure that would institute participatory democracy. Its mass organizations would “represent the interests of each sector of society [in order to] carry out socioeconomic transformation in favor of the interests of the majority” (Nuñez 1986:240 in Mendez 2005: 29). Each organization would serve as the “direct communication link” between the Sandinista Party and “its social and political base” by sending appointed representatives to a national assembly exercising legislative and policy-making power within the governmental structure, the Council of State (Luciak 1995: 25; Vanden and Prevost 1993:51 in Mendez 2005: 29). The initial six organizations included the Sandinista Defense
Committees (CDS), the July 19th Sandinista youth (js-19), the National Union of Farmers and Ranchers (UNAG), the Association of Rural Workers (ATC), AMNLAE (Association of Nicaraguan Women, Luisa Amanda Espinosa), and the Sandinista Worker’s Central\textsuperscript{39} (CST). The Council of State also included representatives from all major political parties, including Somoza’s liberal party, the Catholic church and the right-wing business alliance (Isbester 2011; 162). This arrangement was intended to balance the influence of the revolutionary vanguard, embodied in the National Directorate. However the National Directorate had the final word when conflicting views emerged (Mendez 2005). Further still, leaders of the mass organizations often maintained close ties to the directorate, impeding the ability of the system to structure participatory democracy (Mendez 2005: 29-30; Chinchilla 1994).

At the outset, the Sandinista Revolution became the prime space for gender equality to move to the forefront. Popular will supported the creation of legal mechanisms towards fomenting a “household revolution” led by the FSLN (Kampwirth 1993: 103). Initially, government representatives argued that “the constitution provide[d] a base for a democratic transformation of the family.” Notably, Article 70 of the Constitution asserted that “the family is the fundamental nucleus of society and it has the right to the protection of society and the state” (Constitución Política 1987: 44; Kampwirth 1993: 106). However, according to Kampwirth, the new government ambivalently supported family transformation in actual policy and symbolism.

The Revolution endeavored to construct a “New Man” while women occupied, at best, a secondary position in the Revolution. In theory, the “cult of aggressive masculinity” would be replaced by one “envisioned as hard-working, devoted and family oriented” (Lancaster 1992: 40). The “New Man” would embody new qualities in the family and a “New Woman” would

\textsuperscript{39} An industrial worker’s union.
emerge, emancipated. Anthropologist Rosario Montoya argues that the state failed to change two key features “gender ideology associating women with domestic roles and a sexual division of labor that burdened women with responsibility for child care and domestic tasks” (2012: 21). Roger Lancaster notes that two masculine images emerged and forged an uneasy coexistence (1992: 40). Montoya elaborated on this point, arguing the Revolution still venerated “a nationalized protagonist in the figure of the New Man” (2012: 18). Moreover, Kampwirth points, out, it valorized figure of a revolutionary soldier (1993). Ultimately, Montoya continued the “New Man figure reproduced much of the masculinism of the ‘old’ man…and writings characterize the ‘New Man’ as guerilla fighter, by his violence and authoritarian discipline, features through which he is constructed against ‘women’”(2012:19). Even the content of educational materials ultimately reinforced patriarchal norms of gendered labor and forms of interaction.^{40} (Kampwirth: 1993). In this context, measures perceived to symbolize favorable gains for women actually aligned with their traditionally normative roles, including subsidies and services that assisted women in fulfilling household care-taking duties. They perpetuated a “cult of motherhood” by which women idealize self-sacrifice (Kampwirth 1993: 2, 123, 147).

Meanwhile, the Sandinistas’ Marxist analysis of inequality limited the resolution of gender equality to women’s access to land. Programs and services did “not live up to their own standards, set in Sandinista proclamations and laws” nor, ultimately, “the goals of equality proclaimed in the Constitution” (Kampwirth 1993: 121-4). The “pull of family tradition” chafed with the Revolution. This was most publically evident in the positioning of women as the “mothers of heroes” and official mandate for the women’s agenda to become a space for the wives and mothers of martyrs (Mulinari 1998; Kampwirth 1993: 2).

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^{40} Women interacting with children, while men were portrayed in the public sphere. School books, even in the revolutionary government, depicted fathers holding children’s hands while clenching a fist.
Given the country’s long-entrenched tendency toward authoritarianism, establishing participation and “democracy, mean[ing] the ‘wide distribution of decision-making power’” (Collins et al 1988: 262 in Kampwirth 1993: 7) required more than a short lived emphasis on democratization and gender equality. Feminist scholars argue that “the right to participate in national political processes, [is inhibited when the individual is] subordinated within the politics of another institution, such as the household” (Pateman 1989; Dahl 1985; Krouse 1982; Lowy 1986; Perez Aleman 1990; Kampwirth 1993: 8-9). Implementation of the practice of widespread decision-making intended to usher in a revolutionary cultural project was abandoned by the state as a counter-revolutionary campaign advanced. The FSLN’s project “struggl[ing] for class justice…against foreign domination… and to transform the family” was ultimately undone by the military organization of the Revolution leaving a legacy of “very much and very little democracy” (Kampwirth 1993:1, 72).

F. State Gender Campaigns and their Discontents

Despite significant scholarship discussing the challenges and limitations of the Revolution’s gender agenda, it is still widely characterized as progressive, as women were welcomed “in the street” and to fight alongside men. Moreover, women’s consciousness was raised. Observers commonly argued women developed a sense of rights and gained tools to critique, evaluate and participate in public life through literacy campaigns, popular education initiatives, community organizing and social services.\(^\text{41}\) It is widely acknowledged that revolutionary leaders strongly supported the creation of an organization focused on women’s concerns and the significant participation of women in the Revolution. However, the discussion

\(^{41}\) Certainly, one of my initial questions was, in a country where women participated in a Revolution, why do women choose to migrate, rather than challenge the state to provide support, services and employment?
of feminisms, in the context of the Revolution, often belies the ways women’s participation was structurally excluded and the extent to which feminisms proliferated through unofficial channels. FSLN commander Jaime Wheelock originally urged the formation of a women’s movement, an idea borne out through the formation of the Asociacion de Mujeres Ante la Problematica Nacional (Women’s Association Addressing the National Problem, AMPRONAC) in 1977 (Whisnant 417; Mendez 2005; Randall 1981; Lancaster 1992). Though widely regarded as a machista (sexist), Junta member Tomas Borge was committed to the feminist agenda and offered unwavering support for policies towards women (Montenegro 2005). Once the Revolution had triumphed, the gender agenda was institutionalized through the creation of AMNLAE. The focus dedicated to these organizations initially spurred hope for change. In reality, these organizations contained the reach of feminist practice.

The FSLN leadership mandated that “women’s issues” be channeled and addressed exclusively through AMNLAE, under the direction of the vanguard. Initially, as Criquillon recounts, AMNLAE worked within other mass organizations to promote and support women’s interests “encouraging women to overcome the obstacles they encountered that limited or prevented more active participation at both the grassroots and leadership level” (1995: 213). However members of the vanguard shifted their efforts towards defending itself against counter-revolutionary efforts (Montenegro 2005). As the Contra war gathered steam, AMNLAE was directed to support and promote communication between soldiers and mothers of combatants.

These tendencies became stronger as the Revolution shifted gears. AMNLAE’s original projects were subordinated, including significant efforts to enact a Family Code that gave “equal rights and responsibilities to men and women in regard to the care and raising of their children” (Criquillon 1995: 212-13). The vanguard resisted women’s insistence that they utilize the
women’s popular organization to coordinate gender-specific issues within the agendas of other mass organizations. In the end, AMNLAE’s agenda reflected the view that the issues of parenting support was the most important work a woman’s organization could carry out rather than engage in promoting public participation as did the state and other popular organizations (Criquillon 1995: 214). This agenda effectively sidelined and eventually co-opted the women’s movement to serve feminine interests (Criquillon 1995; Mulinari 1998). In this sense, U.S. aggression played a significant role in narrowing the transformation of Nicaraguan men and subordinating the transformation of women. It demanded revolutionary focus on outside aggression, thereby truncating internal development and reproducing mando in new ways.

Scholars and feminists have also written extensively about the intersecting internal views that limited the Revolution’s transformative potential. First, they demonstrate how revolutionary leadership was primarily concerned with class relations, arguing gender, racial and ethnic inequalities would be resolved through socialism, failing to see the tradition of authoritarianism as patriarchal (Gordon 1998: 9; Criquillon 1995). The FSLN principally addressed class-based inequality sidelining projects addressing racial-ethnic and gender marginality. In its vision of constructing a participatory democracy, the revolutionary program made correctives through the lens of mestizo (Hale 1998; Gould 1998; Gordon 1998) and masculine national identity (Montenegro 2002; Randall 2000). Historian Jeffrey Could argues that these beliefs were based on the “common sense notion that Nicaragua had long been an ethnically homogenous society” (1996: 5). Anthropologist Edmund Gordon notes “[the Sandinistas] thought of racism as a secondary mode of oppression… it was an epiphenomenon of class exploitation” (1998:8).[^43]

[^42]: “A democratic discourse of equal rights and citizenship that effectively suppressed specific indigenous rights to communal land and political autonomy” (Gould 1996; 1993: 5). Jeffrey Gould describes this categorization as “one of the elite’s most enduring hegemonic achievements” (1996: 5)

[^43]: The FSLN thought racism characterized the United States and South Africa, not Nicaragua (Gordon 1988: 8).
Anthropologists elicited the experiences of diverse ethnic groups and showed the forms of exclusion experienced by women, peasant, indigenous, Afro-descendent and Atlantic coast residents remained unaddressed in the revolutionary project (Hale 1988; Gould 1998; Gordon 1998; Montoya 2012; Lancaster 1992; Mendez 2005; Randall 1994).

While ethnic concerns were pointedly sidelined, gender relationships were concertedly made the subject of transformation although efforts to do so were ultimately deemed misguided. But efforts were often misguided. For example, public campaigns denouncing violence and the establishment of women’s centers were more effective in providing women with the means to denounce or leave situations of domestic violence than so-called “economic freedom” gained through employment (Kampwirth 1993: 154-5). On the one hand, this process can be framed as both a microcosm of the Revolution’s failure to transform the organization of social relations overall, ranging from public to private spaces, by mando. On the other hand, if patriarchy structures Nicaragua’s hierarchy of gender, class and ethnic relations, then it is precisely the failure to transform gender relations that limited the Revolution’s transformative potential. If the disassociation of many feminists from the FSLN is any indicator, it is the latter. In sum, feminism was effectively suppressed within the organizing logic of the revolutionary agenda and therefore in the operation of state institutions, over the course of the revolutionary period.

G. Gender Transformation in Everyday Life
Throughout the Revolution, interpersonal violence persisted as the project of democratic participation waned. Karen Kampwirth argues that continuing violence produced the sense that machismo and male irresponsibility were inevitable, evident in the oft-repeated trope that “Nicaraguan men are that way.” In his ethnography of everyday gender relations in Managua
communities during the Revolution, Roger Lancaster records repeated commentary about men and their family interactions. His informant Aida tells him:

> Put down in your book that Nicaraguan men are machistas, that they like to beat their wives and that they are irresponsible toward their children. Put down that despite the NEW FAMILY LAW, and despite the Revolution, men are difficult to change…while you’re writing about machismo, make note of how [my brother] Oswaldo has a fine salary yet doesn’t want to support his daughter, and how that women had to take him to Social Welfare to attach his salary so she could buy food and milk for their baby. [1992: 86 emphasis in original]

Lancaster’s example illustrates Kampwirth’s assertion that the authoritarian family structure and violence persisted across households. The proliferating saying “revolutionary in the street, feudal lord in the home” (1993: 130-33; 149) highlights how even those who espoused the ideals of new gender relations failed to put them into practice.

> Women’s roles were symbolically and structurally sidelined. Moreover, anthropologist Rosario Montoya points out that the disjuncture between the participatory democracy led from below, [the] tendency toward…patriarchal vanguardism[,]…the leadership’s stated goal to emancipate women and an ambivalent stance…evolved into decisive support for local patriarchies. [2012: 10]

A wealth of research into the limitations of the FSLN’s feminist agenda, has spoken to the lack of women in the upper-echelon’s in government and the marginalization of the gender-equality agenda (see for example: Randall 1981; Randall 1994; Lancaster 1992; Fernandez Poncela 1996; Perez Aleman 1992). Women’s engagement in revolutionary organizing was continually deemed transgressive and prompted episodes of intra-familiar violence. State agencies, such as the police, often reinforced the normalcy of men’s violent reactions (Kampwirth 1993: 135, Lancaster 1992). The revolutionary process was accompanied by a gendered agenda that was ultimately treated as “superficial” and outside of the transformation of inequality in Nicaragua. The influence of the gender agenda fluctuated as the state agenda
contracted around “threats” prohibiting intersecting systems of oppression from being addressed (Sagot 2010; Alvarez 1990).

H. Transformation Through the Lens of the Women’s Movement
An oversimplified vision of the Revolution evokes unease among many who felt it remained patriarchal and verticalist in both vision and practice of widespread participation (Gonzalez 2011; Gordon 1998; Montenegro 2005). In spite of these impediments, there were gains for women. Although right wing women’s activity had been common in electoral politics (Gonzalez 2003), the FSLN Revolution galvanized a new wave of feminist movements. Initially incorporated into the state agenda and institutions, the feminist movement split off and gave rise to a multiplicity of organizations when the feminist agenda was suppressed and as subsequent governments advanced antifeminist agendas (Randall 1994; Kampwirth 1993; Kampwirth 2010; Bickham Mendez 2005; Criquillon 1995). Criquillon highlights the reflective step other organized women took part in:

that it was not enough ‘to struggle alongside men’ for a more just and equal society... we had to resolve the problems that are specific to ourselves as women but that we also had to question the gender roles which throughout the world marginalize and oppress women while ‘we found a great resistance to addressing our own needs: the Revolution should be our priority, we were told, and the rest would follow.’ [Criquillon 1995: 210]

In spite of the absence of concerted support from the vanguard, due to the restrictions placed on AMNLAE’s agenda, by 1983 feminist initiatives received tacit support from other government programs. The popular education institute, IPADE, trained women and men in popular education and community organizing. New views of gender and participation were produced through their literacy campaigns and the community organizing initiatives. Others included the Women’s Legal Office (OLM), the Nicaraguan Institute of Economic and Social Investigations (INIES) and the Nicaraguan Women’s Institute (INIM). They pushed feminist agendas (Criquillon 1995:}
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214-15) in government policies and legal arenas. They created information centers to grow the movement, publishing and disseminating articles about women’s lives through mainstream media. They provided training for women to form cooperatives or for family planning. They organized women around “open meetings [to assess] the degree to which women’s demands were incorporated in the final version of the Constitution” (Criquillon 1995: 216). These non-government groups also became involved with the Revolution’s mass organizations such as the Association of Rural Workers (ATC), working to sensitize leadership to underlying causes limiting women’s participation.

Late in the revolutionary decade, the pressures of counterrevolutionary warfare and the economic embargo had narrowed the revolutionary agenda significantly. This extended to its mass organizations, including AMNLAE. Feminists held mixed feelings about AMNLE because it was subject to the whim of the vanguard. From experience, they recognized that even when widely-supported feminist initiatives emerged from within the organization they were still readily sidelined. For example, in 1986, the Sandinista Proclamation brought ephemeral hope. It surprised feminists by including: “the FSLN commit[ment] to guarantee the rights of women and to struggle with determination against the vestiges of machismo left us by the past” (Criquillon 1995: 219). For the first time the FSLN directorate made “explicit reference to machismo” (ibid). Shortly afterwards, a new AMNLAE leadership committee was selected with women from different social sectors while Bayardo Arce, a directorate member who previously challenged the need for women’s organizations, proclaimed “the struggle against a system of domination and the struggle of women are…part of the same struggle to transform social injustice” (Criquillon 1995: 221). The changes were precipitated by external pressure exerted by “autonomous” women’s groups to change the practices of AMNLAE. Among others, the women’s secretariats
of the mass organizations insisted that AMNLAE could become more democratic by incorporating them into its leadership. Women had shown AMNLAE and the FSLN they were all part of the “fundamental forces of the Revolution” and that they desired to speak “with one voice and [be] represented by a leadership elected” from the bottom up. However, the FSLN soon “froze” the process in light of the coming national electoral process. They installed a new leadership loyal to the party who would work to align its membership with the FSLN agenda. Criquillon felt this resulted in “the gradual atomization” of the movement and the loss of “horizontal communication and coordination” (1995: 224). Although feminists regarded AMNLAE as the principle place to channel women’s concerns, they simultaneously saw it as “a roadblock” prioritizing revolutionary needs over the consolidation of a movement (Blandon 2001: 14).

During my research, I pressed multiple scholars, feminists and popular education workers in Nicaragua about women’s inability to resolve violence, women’s migration and its connection to the Revolution. No matter how carefully I posed the question, many became understandably defensive of the Revolution’s accomplishments. In the context of a Revolution that was widely misrepresented and a country that continued to be popularly understood as wild and violent, my question was political. Both Leticia and Malena affirmed my assertion that violence was the hidden story behind emigration. Perhaps because of Malena’s work as a popular educator in Nicaragua, she viewed the gender goals of the Revolution in historical context but also, as an ongoing project. She shared her view with me:

In 1979, the Revolution broke with the authoritarian structure of society from the ground up without interrupting the ideology. It’s difficult to instate new ideas in new openings. Now they are entering the collective imaginary: for women to feel they have a place, for children feel they are subjects of rights, and that all value rights and participation but not into practice. [With a great deal of effort women have taken a step forward] Transition takes time. FSLN leaders approached problems in citizenship construction in terms of
communities who had been negated right to material well-being. They didn’t consider whether women could identify all the forms of inequality, whether they understand what full autonomy and gender inequality meant or what it means to decide over your body. They didn’t analyze all the power pushing back on us. So we ended up with what we label as a significant absence or deficit of citizenship. Those who fill their mouths with power are men, from the Supreme Court to the Catholic Church to the legislature. Men speak, men decide if a woman should live or die, if she receives—or doesn’t—a therapeutic abortion. We still lack a group of women that really begins to make noise.

The movement to transform gender relations diverged through unofficial channels (Bickham Mendez 2005; Kampwirth 1993; Randall 1981; Randall 1994). The feminist movement split off as feminists began to prioritize the creation of intellectual space for realizing localized feminist agendas, in response to the consolidation of local patriarchies. Subsequently, feminisms proliferated through a multiplicity of feminist organizations beyond FSLN state and party lines. As the critiques that emerged demonstrate, they conflated participation with transformation (Criquillon 1995). Moreover, in light of subsequent governments that advanced antifeminist agendas, these ideas and organization have continued to grow, diverge, and converge with each other as well as with partisan politics (Randall 1994; Kampwirth 1993; Kampwirth 2010; Bickham Mendez 2005).

I. Feminisms and Gender in Post-Revolution Government Policy and Civil Society

Most Network women’s migration stories collect within the decade following the Revolution. During this period, the governments of Violeta Barrios de Chamorro (1990-1996) and Arnoldo Aleman (1997-2001) promoted conservative social policies and neo-liberal economic policies. In the period following most women’s departure, there has been minimal attention to resolving these tensions, much less migration. The political, economic and social

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44 Of the initial 12 women promoting the feminist agenda, many continued work outside of AMNLAE’s state-controlled function. Within a decade, they had grown and those participated in Latin American congresses outside of state and remained keen on implementing a more radicalized feminist policy (2005).

45 Enrique Bolaños (2002-2006) was decidedly right wing in character. They were followed by the FSLN, with Daniel Ortega as president, (2007-2011; 2012-) with a decidedly conservative charter.
climate produced a decline in household solvency accompanied by rising social tension, public discourses promoting the “return” to patriarchal household arrangements and minimal emphasis on participation. Social movements and autonomous organizations initially proliferated, channeling dissent. However, soon after, any oppositional or alternative organizing was suppressed. The transformations towards participatory democracy and any concomitant emphasis on equalizing gender relations were relegated to the space of autonomous movements within a narrow civil society.

During the Revolution, warfare and a destabilization campaign perpetuated by the U.S. preempted the FSLN electoral defeat in 1989. President Chamorro represented upper-class, feminine interests. She campaigned as a “loyal wife and widow, reconciling mother, and Virgin Mary” (Kampwirth 1993: 3). During her government, gender and class policies moved to the far-right, curtailing efforts to redistribute property and extend state services to the poor majority. She precipitated the most significant restructuring (Metoyer 2000; Kampwirth 1993: 175) and David Close argues that she adopted the neoliberal philosophy of “work[ing] to get the state out of economic affairs” (Close 1999: 17). Following neoliberal prescriptions to stabilize the economy and reduce the budget deficit, the Chamorro government’s austerity program eliminated large portions of the public sector, privatized state owned enterprise, significantly reduced funding for social programs, cut food and transport subsidies, restricted credit policies and raised prices while devaluing currency (Close 1999: 123-5; 127-8). Chamorro attempted to avoid generating discontent regarding mass layoffs that resulted from the downsizing of state enterprise by offering an “occupational reconversion” program. The program provided economic

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46 This included a misinformation campaign in the U.S.
47 Sofia Montenegro argues, up through the Somoza dictatorship, women became property of their husbands or men around them—policies reversed during the Revolution but reasserted immediately in the following Chamorro government (2005).
incentives to those who left positions voluntarily to start businesses in the informal sector (Close 1999: 131; Fernandez Poncela 1996; Perez Aleman 1992; Mendez 2005). However, this only resulted in saturation of the informal market (Babb 2001; Fernandez Poncela 1996; Close 1999). These reforms generated significant economic pressure by producing spiraling unemployment and underemployment. Women who had been hired in state sectors were particularly affected by public sector downsizing. Beyond the lack of employment, the same cuts restricted the different ways the Revolution had attempted to ensure a dignified quality of life.

Karen Kampwirth (1993) argues that cuts to education, day care, health care were consistent with the gender symbolism the Chamorro administration utilized. Dismantling the public sector, educational spending was cut and health care spending dipped from $57.10 per person in 1988 to $16.92 per person. Cordoba devaluation cut real wages by 40% (Kampwirth 1993: 206, 212). This was accompanied by a concerted shift in discourse. School books explicitly promoted formerly normative gendered relations reinstating authority as the exclusive domain of the paternal figure (1993: 192, 196-8). Women’s subordination was deeply entrenched in the active-passive socialization of male and female children (Montenegro 2002). Publically, Chamorro emphasized women’s place was in the home, their role central to household reproduction. Her administration spearheaded a “save the nuclear family campaign” (Metoyer 2000: 100). The Nicaraguan Women’s Institute was replaced by the Ministry of the Family (Close 1999; Metoyer 2000). Women’s movements were prohibited from entering schools to educate about domestic violence while centers offering psychological and legal services for battered women were dismantled (Nygren 2003:386; Metoyer 2000). The occupational conversion plan not only brought women out of the workforce, but also de-staffed services for
women and children, such as day care service, shelters and workshops. Any public support of household solvency amidst the employment crisis was further dissolved.

During this period, while attitudes towards household structure changed, authoritarian structures of household persisted in spite of the absence of male members of the household (Kampwirth 1993: 245-6). During the war, violence had permeated all levels of society. All aspects of daily life were militarized. In particular, civilian relations came to mimic the military’s hierarchical social order and absence of dialogue in conflict resolution. This arrangement of social relations persisted after demobilization. It also provided the backdrop for rising rates of domestic violence during the post-war period in which demobilization brought army and counter-revolutionary forces home. Incidents of abuse were often triggered as women performed the same tasks that had been required of them during wartime and the post-war economy. Namely, they had assumed responsibility for ensuring household survival by working and organizing outside of the home. These requirements conflicted with the expectation that women remain in the home. In the absence of a custom of dialogue, they incited violent responses. Household violence was further enabled by policy as the process of denouncing violence became more complicated. New laws forced women to denounce any instance of domestic violence before a judge, rather than through centers providing services informed by “psychological, social and legal perspective[s]” (Close 1999; Kampwirth 1993: 204). The reforms emptied previously “secure” spaces of any meaning for women and children. Reforms created a blind spot, ignoring the effects of the militarization of everyday interaction during warfare that had mobilized 100,000 people each year for a decade. Moreover, they encouraged violence through a radical reversal in discourses surrounding the relationship between men and women and the idea of women’s status as full citizens (Montenegro 2005). Official policies had been reformed to follow
neoliberal and explicitly patriarchal logics of relationships at all scales (Montenegro 2002; Robinson 2003).

At the same time that official policies underwent transformation, the social movement milieu also experienced significant restructuring. Moving into the 1990’s, massive grassroots movements and organizations affiliated with the FSLN largely comprised civil society (Montenegro 2002). They were soon accompanied by emergent independent women’s, indigenous, environmental and human rights movements as well as a burgeoning NGO sector. The proliferation and rapid growth in the diversity among those movements contrasted with “increasingly restricted arenas for participation” (Montenegro 2002). The online journal, *Revista Envío*, has provided a site of publication and critique for Nicaraguan and Central American academics and intellectuals. Among the topics of discussion have been the questions of civil society and social movement decline in Nicaragua over the course of the 1990s and its virtual substitution by the late 2000s by NGOs (Montenegro 2002; Pons 2001, Grigsby 2005).

Specifically, they highlight the difficult transition that the feminist movement endured during the post war period in Nicaragua.

Ana Criquillon (1995) emphasizes the concerted attempts within the movements to encompass intersectional feminism. Reorganized after the Sandinista’s defeat, feminists began a “reactivation” process that moved away from “treating ‘the people’ as a block” and instead mobilized through a lens of diversity. Criquillon contends the transition was complicated by the surrounding political and economic transition, which changed the way women would and could associate with each other. Many women, once unemployed, no longer participated as union members. Other women viscerally rejected association with the FSLN. She concludes that these

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48 1,750 NGOs were registered by 2001 (Montenegro 2002).
structural impediments were accompanied by the loss of the optimism of the Revolution, replaced by memories of the persistence of *mando* across scales and more specifically, between women’s groups. For this reason, she argues, forging a feminist movement that incorporated diverse feminist interests was impeded by distrust among women’s groups because of “past attempts to impose hegemony and domination” (Criquillon 1995).

Furthermore, many feminists found the change in structure disconcerting. During the Revolution, the movement executed its initiatives in coordination with the government’s mass organizations. As the movement became completely autonomous, many had difficulty understanding how to implement horizontal collaboration among a different set of groups. Moreover, they were working towards a feminist agenda from the ground up among groups that were accustomed to a certain degree of autonomy. Those leading the development sought to create a cross-cultural agenda, to forge a movement rooted in the diverse identities, positions, interests and experiences of participants, which entailed new approaches. Beyond reform to state institutions, many within the feminist movement sought to make greater incursions into the everyday. They worked towards the permanent transformation of invisible gender systems that underlie visible problems such as domestic violence, unequal pay for equal work, women’s lack of access to education and healthcare and women’s inferior position in organizational hierarchies. To allow different branches and agendas to flourish, and create a “true” participatory democracy, they avoided a strict organizing formula and the tendency towards centralization (Criquillon 1995). Not only did feminists find this disconcerting, but also felt this goal conflicted with the desire to consolidate the movement (Montenegro in Barricada quoted by Criquillon 1995: 231).

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49 Criquillon describes how a methodological commission was formed by independent feminists and AMNLAE but dissolved over disagreements over proposed methods of moving forward and collaborating.49
By the 1996 presidential elections, the movement had moved forward. Initially, feminists resolved the issues of decentering and consolidating by creating seven “networks” of women who would work on issues of economy, environment, violence, sexuality, health, education, social communicators and political participation. Each group continued to promote its activities in different ways, with the goal of forging a coordinating group to maintain communication and discussion between the different networks (Criquillon 1995). These networks comprised the National Women’s Coalition. Nicaraguan scholar Maria Teresa Blandon, who participated in the process, writes that they envisioned a “pluralist alliance… unit[ing] women from extremely wide-ranging ideological, political and social backgrounds…[and] rejecting the FSLN as a vanguard organization” (Blandon 2001: 115).

Yet the coalition did not receive significant support. It experienced persecution from the government and a certain degree of atomization. The administration of President Arnoldo Aleman (1996-2001), followed Chamorro’s administration in leading a gender push-back. His administration disseminated a value for “traditional” gender roles in discourse while exacting increased repression on mobilization and maneuvers such as “tax terrorism” of opposition coalitions by the Aleman government (Kampwirth 2010; Grigsby 2005; Montenegro 2002). Moreover, a pact between Daniel Ortega and Aleman\(^{51}\) lent the support of the FSLN to privatization measures, using the hegemony of the party to demobilize social movements (Kampwirth 2010).

\(^{50}\) For Blandon, one difficulty of forming the coalition was the inherent tension between the attempt to include women from political parties and the tendency of these women to mediate involvement and activities through party interests, whether displaying party affiliations and promoting candidates and established non-politically aligned Coalition events, or excluding feminist members of the Coalition from public events that might negatively influence public opinion towards their party (123).

\(^{51}\) The pact consolidated “neoliberal governability” exchanging “political crumbs and high salaries” for permitting “selling off of public companies, telecommunications and electricity”; consolidating the privatization of public education under the school autonomy model; return of lands to Somocistas and landlords; destruction of the free public health system and repressing doctors associations (Grigsby 2005).
occupied space and funding available to social movements (Montenegro 2002; Grigsby 2005). Scholars and activists felt these NGOs operated without a historical approach to problems offering only palliative measures (Montenegro 2002). Moreover, Nicaraguan journalist William Grigsby contends, they designated themselves as social intermediaries for so-called target populations, representing them “without even consulting them” (2005). In this manner, he concludes they acted as “retaining walls against grassroots discontent towards the government and the system” (Grigsby 2005). In the end, the anemic development of the state, as well as the absence of institutionalization and democratic structure, prevented even movements supported by broad coalitions from being processed through official channels. They emptied democracy of effective public participation and representative party politics.

These changes produced increasing frustration, disillusionment and doubts about the potential for social movements to have an impact in Nicaragua. Political shifts generated deep mistrust among Nicaraguans towards government parties including the Left. Meanwhile, economic devastation has only become more acute and people migrate where they might have organized before (Montenegro 2002). Grigsby points out that the rampant view of the state as a personal and party coffer is demonstrated by the mentality that if you “have a post, exploit it!” He argues that this mentality has eroded the sense of the FSLN as an “instrument of change.” He also notes that in this climate, people have ceded decision-making “to the political class [they] so repudiate [and] have at least partially renounced their own sovereignty [generating a] profound crisis in the current model of representative democracy” (Grigsby 2005).52 Both the content of existing movements and the paucity of movements signals that the “need for a path to

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52 The remaining movements have been led by peasants from the north (2003-4); victims of Nemagon from banana plantations; teachers strikes; cane sugar plantation workers struggling with chronic renal insufficiency syndrome; and a women’s reproductive rights movement; and the consumer defense network.
participatory democracy [is] more urgent than ever” (Grigsby 2005) portending distrust in official channels to improve welfare.

J. New Responses: Labor Abroad

The effect of Nicaragua’s conversion into a “labor export platform” (Cortes Ramos 2006, Guevara 2010) should not be sidelined in the assessment of why broad-based coalitions have not organized in resistance to the deteriorating socio-economic and political circumstances within the region. William Grigsby (2005) highlights ways that the effects are widely-felt, for example, 72% of the population is forced to live on less than USD$2 a day. He argues the lack of mobilization resulted from a generation gap in terms of political awareness. Grigsby regards this as the outcome of various trends, chief among them the “neoliberal-imposed education system” (2005), the depoliticizing effects of NGO interventions and the erosion of the FSLN as an instrument for change. However, he feels that the chief cause for the absence of political awareness is emigration. He contends that emigration deflates organizing efforts. Those who immigrate to Costa Rica are the most adversely affected by the political and economic circumstances and who have the fewest resources and lowest education. Meanwhile, those who most commonly wield the tools of social analysis, including professionals and high-school graduates, gravitate towards the U.S. Their remittances constitute 15% of the GDP and surpass the country’s annual exports, becoming the main support for the economy. Approximately 25% percent of Nicaraguans residing in Nicaragua rely on remittances: 700,000 to 900,000 live off family remittances with between 1.2 and 1.5 million Nicaraguans living abroad. Moreover, he notes that it is former Sandinistas who remain abroad, while Somocistas return. Thu, there are various facets of emigration complicit in the decline of social movements.
Moreover, Costa Rica is a simple route and has become a mundane, low-risk option in the popular imagination. While in 1992, Perez Aleman cites “the U.S, Canada and Mexico” as the principle destinations for Nicaraguan migrants; by 2000 more Nicaraguans migrated to Costa Rica than the U.S. (Perez Aleman 1992: 247). This migration is particularly feminine in character when compared to past waves of migration, with women constituting 51% of migrants to Costa Rica in the current wave (Cortes Ramos 2006).\(^{53}\) Migration serves as a safety valve that has “decreased the social pressure by reducing the demand for jobs and public services” in addition to boosting the Nicaraguan economy by “contribut[ing] to their microeconomic subsistence and help[ing] mitigate the macroeconomic trade deficit” (Cortes Ramos 2006). Remittances in 2003 slightly exceeded the sum total of Nicaraguan exports (Robinson 2003). Nicaraguans migrating to Costa Rica filled jobs that had been abandoned, or created, as Costa Ricans were absorbed into new expanding sectors. As middle class women moved into the service sector, Nicaraguan women were hired as domestic workers in their homes. Nicaraguan men took jobs in the expanding construction and agricultural industries, making up for the insufficiency in the size of Costa Rica’s workforce to fill the new labor requirements (Cortes Ramos 2006). The labor of Nicaraguans has allowed the Costa Rican economy to function at all levels, and further, to continue its economic expansion (Goldade 2009: 487; Cortes Ramos 2006).

Migration manifests a burgeoning relationship of transnational interdependence between Nicaragua and Costa Rica. The redirection of wealth from top to bottom sectors is made possible by the migration of Nicaraguan women between the countries. These high rates of migration towards Costa Rica elicit discussions of women’s migration in the context of the changing

\(^{53}\) Other mass migrations are largely male in character, particularly in Nicaragua’s past. (See chapter 5)
international division of labor. It is in this neoliberal antifeminist turn, a trend that continued in the four governments following Chamorro (Kampwirth 2010), in which state and popular reproduction of the normalcy of women’s abuse and suffering and of non-interference in the private sphere (Kampwirth 2010; Sagot 2010) became mechanisms of non-material dispossession. Thus, in the neoliberal era, patriarchal authoritarianism renders invisible their struggle to overcome violence and poverty. It obscures their emigration, that of their family members, the disarticulation of their families across borders and finally, their labor towards upholding the Nicaraguan and Costa Rican economies and households. Women’s migration stories consistently point to the desire to resolve the pernicious effects of intimate, social and structural violence rooted in persistent gender inequality, pointing to the failure of the Revolution to precipitate a widespread democratization of the household during the Revolution and in the 26 years since its dissolution. Within each country, the discourses that organize relations between internal population towards “others” and towards the international community of states erase women’s experience. This renews the process of dispossession as gender inequality persists and complicates women’s ability to assert their “right to have rights” (Dagnino 2003: 29).

In the midst of the struggles over mando, Sofia Montenegro articulates the persistence of the “code of machismo,” which Lancaster describes as a reflection of the structure of Nicaragua’s sexual system (2005:11). The family is a site, Sofia Montenegro argues, of reproducing this dichotomy where everything associated with femininity is rejected. Youth learn to repress the expression of sentiments by five years of age. It produces an aggressive and resentful attitude of male children towards females and passivity among females (2005). Montenegro argues emotional repression, on the part of men also produces feelings of guilt and hatred towards other men, as well as towards women. Only when consuming alcohol, she notes,
is the expression of sadness and longing for intimacy, love, vulnerability, or eroticism permitted. Any form of rejection by women in this state can “rapidly transform into ire and resentment, giving way to violence…[denoting a] profound emotional, sexual and affective misery” (2005:11-12, translation mine). Montenegro concludes,

sexuality is linked to the development of a democratic imagination…and the democratic imagination [in turn] the ability to bring to the public plane the conflicts institutionalized in the family which have always been silenced …to debate society’s quality of intimate life [and] question the masculine and feminine norms…towards an alternative development that contemplates the human being as its center. [2005:12, translation mine]

For Montenegro, it is clear that quality of intimate life is related to the quality of public social relations, politicizing private and public social relations.

In turn, Nicaraguans anticipated that the return of the FSLN to the presidency (2007-present) would provide a unique space of intervention for a women’s movement that grew out of the Revolution itself. 54 The reelection of Daniel Ortega in 2006 55 was regarded as a symbol of hope that people had lost their fear of U.S. intervention. However Ortega’s return highlighted the conservative turn of official Sandinismo. In the interim, as Nicaraguan public intellectuals Sofia Montenegro (2005), Andres Baltodano (2006) and others have argued, social movements have contracted.

Malena argues that Nicaragua is at a moment where there is transformative potential as more discourses favoring women’s rights and participation circulate publically. However, she emphasizes campaigns to change laws or encouraging women to act differently are insufficient to produce transformation. One in particular, encouraging women “not to allow it” 56 (violence) is oversimplified. Instead, she advocates campaigns providing a new way of seeing women as

54 Estimated one person dead per household.
55 The likely election of MRS candidate Herty Lewites before his untimely death was also signaled new hope.
56 Mujer, no te dejes.
necessary for change. Her suggestion targets dominant culture rather than women, as the object of transformation. She argues that through innumerable spaces, including the “fundamentalist education system” and the media, women learn to see themselves:

as an appendage of another person, not a subject of rights nor worthy alone. [They learn] that God designated the woman to obey her husband and raise children. There are no mechanisms nor spaces in society for women to exchange ideas. If a woman socializes it’s labeled *cuecho* (gossip). And [campaigns focused on women fail] to make women reflect: ‘could it be that in reality I need to put up with these levels of violence from my husband to be good?’ She continues thinking that leaving him makes her a bad woman.’

Malena argues the same system of morality is connected both to women’s notions of public participation and to their ideas about rights. The government, as patriarch, is to be followed without questioning. For the same reason, Malena calls misinformation about rights a form of abuse that all women experience. She argues “[This reflects] a deficit in women’s citizenship. She doesn’t recognize that the government violates her human rights when they deny her basic services.” The same dominant values, she argues, structure women’s experience when women emigrate in response to violence. There, “they *atropellan* (trample) your worker’s rights. Women don’t say anything because they may not realize they hold human rights when they are in another country, documented or not.” Malena argues that women feel insecure about any type of request for change, since they lack knowledge of the rights they hold. Malena’s responds to the need for systemic change. She points out the weakness in citizenship reflects a system of values and meanings that is patriarchal and authoritarian. On this basis, she argues change requires more than a campaign instructing women to take responsibility for removing themselves from abusive relationships. Instead, she ties women’s will to remain in a relationship to the system’s value for women as part of marital relationships.
K. Conclusion

Three debates captured the public’s attention during my field work: a renewed pursuit of a canal funded by Chinese investors, the denial of pensions to Nicaragua’s senior citizens and the failure to implement law 779, protecting women from domestic violence. They reflect the ongoing pursuit of transnational investment, the disaster of foreign-imposed austerity and the continuing suppression of gender equality. Nicaraguan cultural critic Pablo Antonio Cuadra asserted Nicaragua was born out of conflict and that Nicaraguans embody a “fusion of antagonisms, a unification of contrasts” (1978: 19-21; my translation), a search for autonomy while courting intervention. The Nicaraguan nation-state has consolidated at recurring junctures of international engagement and intervention, regarding access to and control of international trade. Nicaragua’s contested modernist and cosmopolitan imaginings are tied to its unique geographic features in the context of a globalizing world economy and interfere with its recurring quest for autonomy and self-determination, though allowing elites to accumulate wealth. These past and present conflicts, as the country’s poets and writers suggest, are reproduced in everyday relations. Nicaraguan leaders’ authoritarian tendencies in reacting to its subordinate status in the global acumen is reproduced in the household. There, the structure of social relations encourages men act to exert control over women and children compensating for their inability to wield control in the public sphere. Women are far from complacent with regard to the perpetual attempts to control them. Lacking knowledge of rights, analytical tools and sense

57 The Spanish conquest of the indigenous and the struggle between Spanish-New World elites, who encountered Nicaragua from the North (Mexico) and the South (Panama), respectively, Cuadra asserts, literally and figuratively, one might surmise that Nicaraguans construct their homes so “nothing could keep the nomad from reinitiating his march” (Cuadra 1978: 37).

58 Though this initial source of conflict builds on Spanish and British colonialism within the Nicaraguan territory, it now draws on the greater part of a century of repressive, neocolonial, bellicose US occupation and intervention. 11 US marine landings in Nicaragua since 1983, beginning with William Walker. His self-declaration as president was made more ominous by its recognition by U.S. President Pierce (Kampwirth 1993: 50).
of collective exclusion to envision and respond to *machismo* as a system, the abuses women suffer remain a persistent source of discontent and stress.
V. EMERGENT WAYS OF LEAVING VIOLENCE

It is almost 9 pm in San Jorge, just a few miles South of Costa Rica’s northern border. We have been awake since 5 am making the four-hour trip from San Jose squished in the Center’s pick up. We had flown through the mountains along the slick new toll way that wound from the Central Valley to the Pacific, gleefully took a brief dip in the warm gentle waves of the Pacific, and then wound our way back up into the mountains, heading north, this time, towards the border. We spent the afternoon reading over plans for the next day’s workshop, assigning tasks and preparing materials and packets to sensitize municipal workers to the impediments immigrants face towards accessing justice. As evening rolled around, we launched into rehearsals of role-plays for the following morning. To illustrate the challenges of accessing judicial justice, Lila assumed the persona of an undocumented migrant mother, Alejandro, a Swedish volunteer, assumed the character of her Costa Rican-born young son and I her Nicaraguan-born young daughter. Salvador, a Costa Rican psychologist hired to run workshops with migrant men and Costa Rican public employees, acted the part of the policeman at the local post. I giggled as Lila began to speak, hanging her head, hunching her back and never meeting his eyes. Usually confident, she acted flustered, wringing her hands constantly as she recounted a beating from her husband. Alejandro and I stood at her side in awkward silence, hands-clasped, eyes fixed on the floor, nodding-without-looking-up when prompted. Salvador, for his part, acted aloof, challenging everything she said, voice stern and calm, as if protecting himself from the labor of filing a complaint. He repeatedly protested that she would just retract the accusation the next day when she and her husband inevitably made up. In response, Lila stuttered, wept, and patted our heads. She spoke of the trouble of getting us health care, food, scholarships for public school expenses. She played on our actual phenotypes; she reacted to his inference that because
of my blue eyes and Alejandro’s curly light brown hair, we might not be hers. These are points of suspicion for Costa Ricans, expecting Nicaraguans to have darker-complexions, referencing the confusing business of being Nicaraguan or Costa Rican.

Lila was nothing like the flustered alter-persona she conjured and whose struggles she performed, but she knew that woman well. In real life, she would use the long wait in lines at the border to inform other migrants of their rights, ensuring they do not pay “scammers” for any services, taxes or stamps before arriving to the migration window. When performing, Lila easily conjured women migrants’ anxiety. At a woman’s day march a few months earlier, she had unleashed an impromptu monologue at a women’s day march, wondering how she would juggle everything: children, remunerated work and the contradictory demands of everyday life.

Everyone at the Center recounted a rural health fair, where she ran up to local police officers, who were observing the activity, screaming, “help me, my husband is coming after me with a machete, he’ll kiiiill me!” just to see what they would do. The police offers, jumping out of their calm surveillance of the family affair, excitedly told her “Señora, correse (Ma’am, get out of here, run)” Center coordinators used this incident to argue that the police are unprepared. Their automatic reactions do not correspond to the security they are supposed to provide. In the context of a deficient support system, the Network emerged at the intersection of women migrants’ voluntary and involuntary exclusion from rights.

Lila strolled through immigrant neighborhoods on weekends, knocking on the doors of members of the network, reminding them to attend an activity, instructing women to maximize the Network’s presence at government events by speaking up with their stories or accompany them as they attempt to confront everyday challenges. When Lila acts, she clearly pictured and depicted the difference between the woman, unaware of her rights, unsure of her worthiness, and
alone in her struggle and the organized woman, learning to make demands, appearing with support, confident that she and her compatriots deserved to be listened and attended to as much as anyone else.

A. Emigrations and Emergences
This chapter explores how violence against women impels them to migrate. It shows how their bodies and memories accumulate experiences of violence as they negotiate a terrain of inequalities along the lines of gender, class, race, ethnicity and nationality. Immigration does not simply pertain to the period after migrants depart for Costa Rica. Women’s stories demonstrate violence at home and abroad. I point to violence in interpersonal relations, war, and symbolic and political economic exclusion. Each are forms of structural violence but can be differentiated by scale (Gardner 2010; Sheper-Hughes et al 2004). Moreover, *mando* is implicated in each. I show that emigration is implicated in the pre-emergence of the Network, a collective action that is unrecognized as such and is articulated through Network activities.

Lila imitated Nicaraguan migrants based on her interactions with them, as much as the way members of the Network depicted themselves before emigrating. Through the process of migrating, Nicaraguan women came to address an unacknowledged collective tension. This chapter pivots around the concept of emergence, originally described by Raymond Williams. Anthropologists have drawn on the concept of emergence to discuss everyday practices and their roles in hegemonic processes: reproducing, reinterpreting and shifting dominant ideas. Williams (1977) suggests dominant cultures influence “ways of seeing, values and meanings [without] exhausting all human practice, energy, and intention” (125). The idea of emergence portends the possibility for new “spheres of practice and meaning” to consolidate and transform dominant culture over time (1977: 126). Ethnographic descriptions of social movements in the last decade in particular have drawn on this characterization of hegemony as process rather than a totalizing
experience. Williams builds his description of hegemony based on Antonio Gramsci’s assertion that the process consists of ways “interlocking political, economic and cultural forces operate to order society…to specific distributions of power and influence” (1977: 108). Based on this, Williams continues by showing that hegemony is carried out through “a whole lived social process as practically organized by specific and dominant means and values [resulting in] a saturation of the whole process of living” including political, economic and social activity, “lived identities and relationships” (1977: 108-110). Postero adds that these lived processes “are not experienced as oppressive, but instead are expressed in daily lives as a feeling of ‘simple experience and common sense’” (2007:9). Hegemony is a

whole body of practices and expectations, over the whole of living: our senses and assignments of energy, our shaping perceptions of ourselves and our world. It is a lived system of meanings and values—constitutive and constituting—which as they are experienced as practices appear as reciprocally confirming. [Williams 1977: 110]

Postero, as others have, draws on Williams to frame resistance as inherent to hegemony (see, for example, Lagos 1993; Inhorn and Wentzell 2011). In particular, dominant cultures “re-assign areas of experience new meanings.”

In this chapter, I draw on the stories of women in the Network to show how emigration, and other ways they negotiate violence, represents a pre-emergent practice responding to nested experiences of violence. Williams describes emergence as distinct from other “fixed forms” where the “tension between the received interpretation and practical experience can be made explicit.” In this manner, Williams distinguishes emergent or pre-emergent from a recognized cultural form that has been articulated. Emergent forms, in turn, can be a collectively experienced tension: “an unease a stress, a displacement, a latency: the moment of conscious comparison not yet come, not even coming” (1977: 130). As example, he relates the difference between descriptions of poverty as a “general condition” in early Victorian England and its later
recognition as “relating to the nature of the social order” (1977:134). Among Nicaraguan women’s stories, there was consistency in the presence of violence. Although violence against women was normative, they narrated their stories in ways that expressed their growing unease with its occurrence. Many sought to resolve violence in different ways including emigration. None described any notion of gender systems. Emergence is not necessarily related to the consolidation of transformative initiatives. But recent anthropological work heeds the everyday experience of tension between shifting systems, noting that the experience and its recognition are key elements in the formation of movements. Here, the collection of Network women’s life stories illustrates the collective experience of tension as it begins as unconscious experience.

Furthermore, women’s personal stories were not typically considered in discussions of the origins of immigrant labor from Nicaragua. The economic and social positions were sufficiently marginal that they were often conflated with the motivating factor in emigration. Notably, if asked directly why they migrate, women would reply almost automatically “because of the situation,” referring to Nicaragua’s economic distress and political instability. Costa Rica activists promoting tolerance towards immigrants depicted skilled educated Nicaraguan women upholding the Costa Rican economy while supporting families and economic stability back in Nicaragua. This trope was utilized by Costa Rican scholars and activists to counter ideas that Nicaraguans “come to do harm” (Fouratt 2014). These arrangements clearly operated in the Nicaraguan-Costa Rican context. But when women spoke at length about their lives, they wove migration as a single event amongst the many ways they navigated violence. Commonly circulating explanations also elided Nicaraguan women’s description of migration to Costa Rica as mundane, an individual decision. They stated it was “something to try” to resolve physical, emotional, economic and institutional violence. While emigrants’ departure and remittances
diffused social pressure for programs, protections, and employment (Cortes 2006), women’s lives in violence were ignored. Yet circulating accounts were not all wrong. Violence was compounded by the process of the changing international division labor, insofar as Nicaraguan women provide a low-wage labor source. The prominence of forms of violence other than economic marginality in spurring migration, was underscored by the Network’s concern with various forms of gender-based violence.

During meetings, women of the Network asserted they had “learn to live in violence as if it were normal.” They expressed that it was their way of attempting “to just get along” and to avoid provoking physical violence. They withdrew from community and family and ceased to study, becoming objects rather than people. Friends, family and neighbors can be reluctant to intervene by referring to these situations as “private matters.” These arrangements provide examples of the ways violence is normalized into invisibility (Scheper-Hughes et al 2004), restricting the widespread deployment of participation, citizenship and social rights, across gender, race and class (Montoya 2012; Kampwirth 1993; Dore 2006; Gould 1989).

In public, Network women clamored for the right to keep family, obtain resources, to migrate and to find dignified work. These were truly relevant subjects for the group. However they were most immediately concerned with helping each other achieve a life without violence. Although they examined topics such as gender, parenting and motherhood abroad, they reflected most expansively on violence. They sought to understand what was at the root of violence and what perpetuates it. The “story” of migration and immigrant organizing that I had predicted based on my readings of Center’s past documents and scholarly texts, my interviews with migrant family members and my engagement with Nicaraguan communities, was absent. In its place, women routinely signaled forms of domestic and “institutional” violence they experienced
in their daily lives in Nicaragua and abroad in Costa Rica. Poverty was rarely an explicit topic of conversation, but a constant shared state that conditioned any discussion of resolving violence. Contrary to my expectations, women rarely focused on their status as immigrants. It became clear that this was secondary in importance to the gender-based violence they were unable to resolve through migration. Network women shared a concern with the violence, silence and exclusion that perpetuated and accompanied migration. It was each woman’s personal attempt to resolve violence through migration, among other strategies, that linked them.

Prior to migrating, women had adopted a myriad of strategies to resolve violence. Women had negotiated their subordinate position in their everyday interactions, attempting to minimize conflict with parents, spouses, and employers. They had also attempted to break out of the spaces and “webs” or social fabrics constructed around inequality. They changed households, emigrated from communities, renounced employment and left relationships. Though few members of the Network had joined women’s organizations in the past, their own accounts of their life histories reflected continual efforts to improve their quality of life and that of the people around them. Their stories of violence were not stories of victimization but rather stories about women as protagonists in their own lives. Drawing from participants’ life histories, this chapter will explore women’s encounters with violence in Nicaragua, their attempts to mitigate violence, and its relation to their decision to migrate to Costa Rica.

Characterizations of women’s migration as a labor migration elide the forms of exclusion produced by intimate everyday forms of gender-based violence, as well as social violence. Instead, they associate migration with the kinds of violence typically enumerated in definitions of structural violence. Their stories shed light on processes, from below, though which towns and countries become what Anna Guevarra calls gendered “labor export platforms” (2010). The
normativity of violence does work in conjunction with the contraction of the economy, services, and the abandonment of the Revolution’s transformative project. Together, these shifts perpetuate the redirection of wealth generated by women’s bodies towards the top, stemming from the structural violence of stabilization measures in Nicaragua and its push-pull relation to economic growth in Costa Rica.

B. Migration and the Global Economy

After a morning meeting, Monica and I wandered down the hill from the Radisson hotel, across the river and up into downtown. I invited her to lunch before returning to the Center’s office, asking her to finally tell me her story at length. “I was doing fine, working in a clinic,” Monica began,

I had my networks, I made sufficient money to lend small quantities to other people. I had a good partner and just one son who was already 22. I was in charge of the general room in the clinic. One day a woman who stopped by regularly for blood tests saw me in the middle of the craziness filling out charts and attending the patients. She said “Don’t you want to go to Costa Rica with me?” I said “Oh myyy, wowww.” She got me excited, distracted and overwhelmed me. In Nicaragua we believe that Costa Rica is a wonderland. That’s what they tell you. But then you arrive to this country, it’s a whole other story. And by then you’ve left your family behind, all your things behind, and you don’t even know where the hell you’re going to sleep or what the devil you’re going to do to survive. On top of that, people turn their backs on you. So in my case, [that women] got me a job in a retirement home as a nurse’s assistant. But then she took it instead.

Stories like Monica’s were not uncommon. Women were repeatedly told that Costa Rica offered solutions, even when they did not feel they had problems. As an emergent discourse, it reinforced the larger process of dismantling by encouraging emigration to resolve marginality and gain mobility. Ultimately it generated consent towards integration into new political-economic arrangements.

In response to the need to provide an anthropological perspective on the global division of labor, ethnographers have generally focused on depicting subtle shifts in the management of household economies that push women abroad. In the neoliberal era, as the state shrinks, the
relationship between a state and its people is redefined, eliminating the expectation, developed under social welfare systems, that states ensure citizen well-being by instituting federal laws and expanding national social services. Neither gender-focused programs nor violence prevention programs are typically included among descriptions of provisions of social welfare states for citizen well-being. Still, social welfare services mitigate some inequalities, particularly in areas of social reproductive activity (Metoyer 2001; Close 1999). Now, as household heads are expected to take more individual responsibility in meeting the social reproductive needs of their families while contributing to the labor and capital requirements of the market, these attributes of the social safety net are gone. Any tacit protections vanish with them.

Numerous ethnographies elaborate how migrants, and more specifically women, engage with the global economic system portraying agentive women migrants’ actions and reflections as strategies of navigating economic, political social and affective terrains, without losing sight of their structural inequalities (Guevara 2010; Constable 2006; Benhabib 2001; Wilson 2014; Salzinger 2003; Freeman 2000; Mills 2003; Grasmuck and Pessar 1991). Ethnographic work with women migrants has also demonstrated that while migrants have few available options besides migration, a desire to migrate may also inform women’s decision. Migration is increasingly viewed as a way to leverage unequal gender relations within the household. However this view may be hidden behind more acceptable justifications (Grasmuck and Pessar 1991; Pessar 1995b in Brettell 2000: 111; Garcia Castro 1986). Migrants express desire to migrate to uphold their families. However, Constable asserts money is “the easy answer, the

59 In their ethnographies of Filipina and Sri Lankan domestic workers, Constable and Gamburd have both argued that often migrants avoid expressing desire to work abroad though they often develop this sentiment based on a variety of experiences (Gamburd 2000: 144; Constable 1999). Beyond providing an escape from harsh economically situations at home, for example, some women enjoy the cosmopolitan lifestyle, particularly the opportunities to marry abroad or learn new skills; further, skills which may be depreciated at home (e.g. “unfeminine accomplishments” such as scholarship) may be more appreciated abroad, given both gender, class or caste, or racialized position (Gamburd 2000: 145). But these desires can also be based on the lack of income at home or a feeling of alienation at home after spending extended time abroad (Constable 1999: 205).
most acceptable answer, [while other answers are] more painful, less comfortable, less socially acceptable, but equally important” (Constable 1999: 211-12). In addition, expressing desire to migrate would draw away from the perceived selflessness and loyalty assigned to migrants, which may bring increased status in home communities (Gamburd 2000: 144). These examples of migrant narratives present a more complicated view of desire in migration. Network women’s stories reinforce the idea that these are complex decisions and present their own combination of motivations. In this sense, migrating to protect oneself from abuse may fly in the face of the selflessness expected from Nicaraguan mothers. Network women remain internally distressed by their desire to experience the freedom Network women describe. Instead Nicaraguans may describe conspicuous consumption habits as a signal of the entire family’s new wealth. The movement of many women assuages women’s guilt for leaving in the face of such adversity.

As these discourses take hold, they may also travel and take on new meanings. For example, Jason Pribilsky couched the desire to migrate into changing ways of being. He argues that in Peru, migration to the U.S. becomes a mundane rite of passage: perceptions of adulthood and marriageability are tied to migration. Thus migration becomes part of a “culturally idealized trajectory,” working its ways into expectations of family and community obligations and life course (2007). In this context, labor migration among women becomes a common household practice. Migration is equated with sufficient effort to overcome a declining economy (Pribilsky 2007; Freeman 2000, Grasmuck and Pessar 1991, Benhabib 2001, Constable 2006). Similarly, Guevarra demonstrates that in the course of adopting strategies to overcome marginality in the global economic system, Filipina migrants are touted as “national heroes” though allotted few

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60 Including, where women feel that migration serves “to enhance the power and status of immigrant women within their households” and are reluctant to relinquish the advantages gained while abroad (Brettell 2000: 109-110).
accommodations at home (Guevara 2010). Meanwhile, Lynn Stephens shows the difficulty of being perceived as competent for holding political office in sending communities in Mexico if one is not a returned migrant from the U.S., given the transnational implications and embeddedness of local politics (Stephens 2007). In each of these examples, immigration is incorporated into the system of value and everyday ways of seeing and morality, practice and place. Good citizens migrate. But the emergent discourse about Nicaraguan emigration to Costa Rica reveals mixed sentiments.

In Nicaragua, by the time someone has approached and invited a woman to migrate, most already made a series of adjustments to mitigate the circumstances they find themselves in. In Nicaragua, I visited Cecilia, 60, who participated in the Alliance. Her daughters, close to my age, all in their 30’s, worked in the tobacco fields. Two had professions: Aminta was a nurse, Sara, a teacher. They studied in the nearest cities, but were unable to find employment nearby. They would struggle if they sought work elsewhere. Remaining in the town, they could share small homes, childcare, labor, food and each other’s company. Each had a child within two years of each other in age. Their collaboration was evident in their kinship terms: the boys referred to their aunts and uncles as mama and papa. Aminta volunteered at the hospital weekly, hoping for an opening, while Sara works on an accounting degree on Sundays. They told me that Nina, the youngest, never took to studying. She relayed that she envisioned migration as her only alternative. On various occasions, she asked me about life in Costa Rica, knowing I had lived there. Well aware of her mother’s efforts to keep women from emigrating, she always asked in a low whisper.

One afternoon, Nina and I sat on the porch chatting. The neighbor, a woman close to us in age, stopped by, marveling about Costa Rica. “Let’s go” she said. “Don’t worry about papers,
you’ll see it’s easy, everything works out.” She ran off a list of jobs, describing each one as better than the former, working in pineapple, in banana, in landscaping, in restaurants, in homes.

“You’ll make $400, $800 dollars a month!” she exclaims, a salary far from what migrants typically earn. “The *ticos* are lazy and idle,” she continued. “So there’s plenty of work for us.” Lili repeatedly grabbed my arm and whispered loudly “I really want to try to migrate…”

Though mundane, emigration is not uncontested. Though emigration to Costa Rica implied a displacement of only 600 kilometers, or 372 miles, it was often discussed as a form of abandoning children and families. Given the prominence of this view and the absence of a widespread acknowledgement of gendered violence and its effects, migrant women’s description of “a good life” abroad might in fact have been a form of justifying their emigration. Encouraging others to do so might have assuaged their own feelings of guilt and discomfort. If women’s value was commonly tied to their performance of mothering, then, since they were unable to engage in the social activities of raising their children, they might have highlighted their economic activities. Still, it often had a deleterious effect. For family that remained, it reinforced the sense that they had been abandoned by women. In turn, women emigrants sensed that that their families criticized them for remaining in Costa Rica.

But the commonality of women espousing the view that Costa Rica offered wonders rendered emigration from Nicaragua to Costa Rica a mundane activity. In the previous chapter, I argued that the socio-political-economic field has always extended beyond Nicaragua’s borders. This was reflected in the way that decisions made in the country have always been made in relation to the support or interference of other states. This was described by the FSLN as an absence of sovereignty. In this chapter, I argue that since the mid-nineties, Nicaraguans had

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61 Common way that Costa Ricans refer to themselves.
experienced transnationalism in their everyday lives as they imagined the lives of migrant family members and neighbors abroad or contemplated migrating themselves. Through these daily considerations, they participated in transnational social fields (Stephen 2007; Pribilisky 2007). More specifically, the Nicaraguan collective imaginary shifted towards Costa Rica. It became another place to try, perpetuated by the sense that the border is easily transited and that wealth and well-being were attainable for those who made the journey and worked hard.

C. Converging Forms of Violence

If mando, produced by the violence of dominant culture, had been the only provocation, would emigration to Costa Rica have happened earlier? One explanation could be that economic restructuring in both countries stimulated the push-pull relationship. Another could be a rise in violence, though this would be difficult to document. Another explanation was the "militarization of social relations" (Martin-Baro 1990). Finally scholars have noticed a marked rise in interpersonal violence when there is a "flux" in gender relations (Massey 1994). During the course of interviews with more than 40 women migrants who participated in the Network, two common themes emerged in relation to violence. First, their stories reflected how mando organized domestic relations from childhood forward. For example, mothers “giving daughters away,” kicking them out or ignoring daughters’ safety to protect husbands. Meanwhile fathers are largely absent. Many Network members sought marriage as recourse from household violence. Instead of relief, they found themselves inserted into different, but still abusive relationships. Secondly, their stories reflect ways that mando is manifest in Nicaragua’s broader social context of civil war. In some stories, women demonstrated how power had been wielded among the ranks of the FSLN army, the same army that was defending the Revolution and its project of building a democratic society. Mando was also reflected in the ways that one army or another demonstrated that they exerted power over civilian populations, particularly those
suspected of sympathies to the opposing forces through sexual violence and intimidation of women and children. Their experiences were indirectly corroborated in ethnographic work, such as that of Anja Nygren (2003).

Describing their departure from situations of violence, most indicated that simply leaving seemed to be their best option. They expressed a sense of impotence in confronting their partners, families or the social situations producing violence around them. Women’s stories and commentary showed that in spaces ranging from the household to government, the “arrangement of interpersonal relations” (Lancaster 1992: 174) involved practices of “ordering” and exercising power over others. Lancaster notes that in Nicaragua female children were taught submission by extensive rules and corporal punishment while male children were rarely punished, “inducing a certain insensitivity and irresponsibility” (1992:43). Physical and emotional violence continued to be expected, encouraged, and normative reactions to women’s transgressions in their adult lives (Lancaster 1992). *Mando* organizes expected modes of interaction as well as ways that individuals and groups signaled that they wield power in a broader social setting. As women discussed these violent relationships, they framed them as normative. The same set of expectations lead other family members to permit, even encourage, women to remain within these relationships. This occurred in spite of the fact that these same relatives had endured similar forms of interpersonal violence. Thus, family members both suffered from and perpetuated domestic violence. As they retold their stories, Network women reflected on multiple ongoing and varied ways they worked to overcome or survive it, among them migration to Costa Rica.

When Nicaraguan women attempted to remove themselves from situations of violence, they confronted an absence of institutional support to aid women (Kampwirth 1993). The
weakened institutional response to violence had cultivated women’s avoidance of formal channels. Mentioned in the previous chapter, structural adjustment and a conservative turn in politics supported decisions to defund and limit both government and civil society initiatives that make incursions into domestic violence (Nygren 2003; Metoyer 2000; Kampwirth). Further, the corruption and unresponsiveness of “police and public institutions” had deepened the divide as women mistrusted them (Nygren 2003: 386). Scholars also argue that women regarded abuse as shameful and chose to conceal it, particularly from neighbors, whom they often distrusted (Nygren 2003; Montoya 2012). Finally, the dismantling of state programs had made the maintenance of a single-family household increasingly difficult as salaries dwindled and employment opportunities declined (Beneria 2003; Enloe 1999). In this climate, Nicaraguan women largely resolved violence on their own.

Lacking institutional protections, women often moved alone to new communities to distance themselves from violence. The process of separation forced women to make a variety of difficult accommodations, often without documentation such as birth certificates, identification cards or independent inscriptions to service such as insurance. First, they were obligated to seek new forms of generating income to support children, younger siblings and elderly parents amidst declining economic opportunities and low pay for women’s work. Second, establishing a new household required that they find affordable housing. It also entailed arranging access or mitigating impediments to services and programs. Finally, they operated without the support and knowledge of long-cultivated relationships with community members. Most of all, these new sites of residence often did not offer women any particular protection from ongoing or future violence. As they presented the organizing work of Maya women in broader struggles, anthropologists Rosa Aida Hernandez Castillo, Lynn Stephen and Shannon Speed pointed to the
structural violence women in particular are exposed to such as the dispossession of “social rights, [namely, rights] to subsistence protection and social consumption, rights to work-linked benefits, rights based on gender and rights based on race and ethnicity” (2006: 36). This sheds light on the Nicaraguan’s women’s sense of possibility mixed with ambivalence as women negotiated power-laden social fields. They envisioned Costa Rica as a non-contiguous but adjoining territory. It was not only far enough to cause the disarticulation of family but was also replete with the possibility of social rights in practice, whether wealth, cosmopolitanism, freedom, acceptance, equality or simply, as migrants often repeat, “a place where women and children have rights.”

D. Negotiating Violence and Deciding to Migrate

Throughout these stories women indicated there were signs of violence on their bodies that were embodied as much as practiced. This symbolic violence (Bourdieu 2004; Gould 1998), the violence of an internalized sense of inferiority, affected the way they thought, how they acted and responded. It affected their appearances, their health, their energy, their weight, aging processes, illness, their choices of dress and make-up. It influenced the spaces they inhabited, particularly their sense of isolation in spaces such as the household, a neighborhood, or a community. It also produced their exclusion from other spaces. They discussed their own roles in reproducing violence, whether raising their children without hugging them nor expressing their love or in the way they assigned tasks in the household. Women’s labor, contribution and pain underwent erasure in a culture where suffering and sacrifice were naturalized and rendered desirable traits in women (Kampwirth 1993). The implications of this “solution”—women’s departure from a particular space and situation of violence—still fit into a broader structural shift,
which I will discuss shortly. However, I would first like to provide an example of how Valencia experienced violence and how it influenced her decision to migrate.

In her vivacious extroversion, Valencia dealt out the care she herself was denied by parents and partner. Whenever I called Valencia, she showered me with caring names: my child, my doll, precious, lovely lady. As we walked around La Merced Park she gave a familiar greeting to those milling around the church and sitting on the benches. She knew the vendors in the markets and their stories. At Network activities, other woman called on her to start an afternoon of dancing. She appeared at every activity. She exuberantly carried out surveys in the park. She spoke with women in the settlements near her home, two long bus rides from downtown. She drew energy from the freedom she felt that she enjoyed in her relationships in Costa Rica, though speaking warmly of her home in Nicaragua and her adult children, all of whom remained there. As Valencia talked about her past and present relationships, it became clear that her response to a difficult life was to ensure no one be given the chance to hurt her now. She evokes the anguish she endured as she tried to understand the abuse and rejection she experienced at the hands of those she thought should care for her.

Squeezed between other immigrants sitting on cement benches in the hot Saturday sun at Merced Park, Valencia recounted the story of her life in Nicaragua. Her relationship with her mother and complete absence of relationship with her father demonstrated a disregard for children that mando cultivates. Her father abandoned her mother after Valencia was born, who in turn abandoned Valencia and her older sister. Her mother took on a new partner when Valencia was a toddler; shortly after, her grandfather and uncle walked into the home to find him attempting to rape Valencia. Forced to choose between daughter and spouse, Valencia’s mother
opted for the latter, already pregnant with his child. Out of ignorance, Valencia felt, her mother
protected her husband over her children.

    My mother, she made mistakes…she didn’t know what she was doing. I feel sorry for
her. Maybe she did it because she was so young. I once told her “it would have been
better if you’d given birth to a dog and spared me the life I’ve lived.” [But] I was the one
who lost in that situation, because I made her cry and felt bad for mistreating her.

The story repeated, and many years later, Valencia was the one to protect and adopt her two
young sisters, after their father, the same man, had raped them, leaving them “crying, bruised and
bleeding with their clothing ripped.” When Valencia denounced him in court and sent him to jail,
her mother beat the two young girls so badly they couldn’t sleep from the pain. Though they
celebrated their motherhood frequently and exuberantly, women’s actions often reflected learned
adaptations of heaping care on spouses if they wanted to keep them.

    Valencia’s next experiences demonstrated how these attitudes are expressed in the
custom of “giving children away.” Often, women reacted with a certain resignation. While she
grew, Valencia was passed from one guardian to the next, hoping one would become a caregiver.
Initially, her mother “gave [Valencia] away” to be raised by two elderly women who had never
married. They died, one after the other, and Valencia recalled little about them except that they
paid for her schooling. The pain of abandonment remained fresh. Valencia’s principle reflection
from that period was that her mother had missed significant markers in her life, “she wasn’t there
for me when I came home from school; she was not there to see me give my first communion.”
When her first caretakers passed away, the teacher they had hired took her in, also an older
unmarried woman. Valencia described how the woman cared for her and helped her greatly. She
put her into public school and showed her affection, bathing her, brushing her hair and ensuring
she didn’t get lice at school. But the woman also died and Valencia was taken in by the woman’s
nephew and his wife who made her work, raising their three daughters from infancy. Valencia told me that they became her sisters. They remained close and all lived in Costa Rica. “But it wasn’t easy,” said Valencia. She had to wash their clothes in the morning, cook for them, clean the home and attend school in the afternoon. In fact, working as a domestic servant was a common experience for children that were given away. Families would take them in, but mitigated the added cost by demanding their labor. Valencia’s story was similar to other Network women’s stories in demonstrating that women become wary of these arrangements at a young age.

Valencia’s response in particular, spoke to ways that women begin to recognize patterns of abuse and seek to break out of them without understanding the deeper structures. Valencia sought marriage to establish a separate household. She pursued a supportive relationship by getting married at 14. She had four children with him and they remained together until all were grown. However, she found herself in the same pattern. Throughout her marriage, her husband was continually unfaithful. Moreover, he regularly dealt out blows that left her arms and shins “purple with bruises.”

It’s been a life de solo llevar y no traer (all giving and no receiving). At 42, I said to my husband, “I’ve had enough! I give you respect, but you don’t give it to me. When I complain, you hit me.” I begged him to change. I gave him chances. He continued mistreating me and wanting me to remain by his side.

She stayed until she felt she had ensured that each of her children, particularly her daughter, would not “go down a similar path” to the one Valencia travelled. In 2005, she separated from her husband and moved to Costa Rica. One day she “took a pair of shoes, a pair of sandals and a bit of clothes, and left him there.” She never returned, except to visit when he was dying. She emphasized she had remained attentive to their needs, sending money or medicine when needed.
In the way she rendered her life history, Valencia narrated an unwavering pursuit of relationships free of violence. She moved from one household to the next town, from one country to the next. Her response, in itself, was to exchange one relationship, in a designated space, for a relationship in another space. Of the change, Valencia reflects:

I’ve been dealt blows all my life. I used to cry whenever my husband would mistreat me. I would ask “why god, why? I’ve never been terrible, I’ve never had a mother, I’ve never had a father, and now I have a husband who doesn’t appreciate me.” I wondered. They say “you reap what you sow.” But [I learned] I didn’t have to continue living the same life. That life is about trying to understand and love yourself, to respect others. Now I live life tranquilly. I welcome all those that want to come in.

It is notable that, like Valencia, in response to the request they tell me about their childhoods, their lives growing up and how they came to migrate, women skipped over other details to recount violence. I had expected to hear about lives of work, education and labor. Instead, I had to pointedly ask after these experiences. When I asked about the Center and the Network, I expected to learn about the struggle for immigrant rights. Instead, the stories they told pointed to family disarticulation long before migration. They told of missed opportunities and employment on the margins. They told me about abandonment and violence. They characterize their lives by recounting the role violence played in them. Their propensity to work abroad is often misconstrued as a demonstration of their intention to migrate. Although Valencia’s impetus to migrate was violence, she sought employment to underwrite her independence. The sense that only migration could provide the economic means for independence implied it was generated by and generative of the idea that Costa Rica offers new possibilities. Secondly, it built transnational interdependence, produced by and reinforcing global economic restructuring. Most women I interviewed gave the sense, much like Valencia, that their decision to depart for Costa Rica was made with little forethought. The decision was not inconsequential. As their organizing activities suggested, women’s lives continued to be inflected with similar and new forms of violence.
The commonality of migration to Costa Rica and women’s anticipation that fellow immigrants would connect them to potential employers fed the sense of the “ease” of emigration. The first day I visited the Center, I met Lila and Monica who, as program coordinators, heard countless immigration stories. They explained, “everyone tells you a beautiful tale of Costa Rica. That there is no poverty, no one is in ruin, that it’s easy and that you’ll earn tons of money. They present migration to Costa Rica with another face.” Many migrants, they said, began to live like their employers. They copy their fashion, buy their things at the same stores and begin to live “on credit like the ticos.” Many migrants fixate on the warm fashionable boots return migrants would wear when they appeared because they looked out of place in the Nicaraguan towns where people dressed for comfort in the dry heat. Those who returned to tell such stories underwent a change in mentality. Lila told me that migrants would invoke Costa Rica’s carefully constructed image of itself. She elaborated, as many, how they “describe everything as rose-colored.” Their stories spurred others to “try” emigrating and then remained abroad with the prospect of a different life.

Sensing they were left to their own devices, women departed. Amidst these circulating discourses, people were moved to leave from one day to the next and to stay until it worked out. To care for the family was to migrate. In Nicaragua, a young activist told me “everyone in the university is the child of a migrant.” The irony was that while advancement was made possible by migration, the mother that left was seen to have “abandoned” her family. Ways of understanding and situating violence in the everyday were influential here. The equation of migration with the opportunity for a middle-class lifestyle elided how violence of multiple types was at the root of migration for many.
E. **Slantwise Behavior**

Nicaraguan women’s lives and movements responded to seemingly crushing structural violence. At the same time, their descriptions of their lives showed they questioned the marginality and abuse they encounter. Though negotiating significant structural impediments and, at times reproducing dominant structures, their actions represent an agentive negotiation. In their 2007 article, Howard Campbell and Josiah Heyman attempted to describe agentive actions and choices, such as avoidance, that are unintentionally defiant, but do not fit easily into the categories of expressed domination or resistance. While many such activities have been described as resistance, influenced by James Scott’s description of simple everyday actions that he described as “weapons of the weak,” (1985) they are wary, as Scott himself and many anthropologists acknowledged, of their depiction as resistant activities. Activities, such as foot dragging, are “not necessarily directed at the immediate source of appropriation…follow the line of least resistance and … have interestingly mixed intentions vis-à-vis power orders” (Scott 1985: 35 in Campbell et al 2007: 6). Still, the agency warrants recognition. Certainly, as Joseph and Nugent point out (1994), state formation is not comprised of a bi-polar axis of domination and resistance but a range of behaviors that reinterpret, if unintentionally, dominant culture. Campbell and Heyman use the term “slantwise” to describe such actions that are made in this fashion and that are described from the “outside-observer based (etic) category” (2007: 34). In these instances, the association with defiance is defined by the scholar his or herself and not a meaningful framework for the actors themselves. They suggest this category permits us to “deepen the existing analytical category of naturalization and resistance…[to include] actions that both intentionally and accidentally feed into and play off of power relations” (2007: 3). This “category” points to ways that the negotiation of power occurs through individual and collective, intentional and unintentional actions that shape the social order. More specifically, Campbell and
Heyman utilize the category to describe undocumented Mexican migrants’ “zig-zag” border-crossing activities, settlement in “squatter” conditions, mixed language use and evasion of U.S. government attempts to “enumerate” residents and, through a census, activities that land them squarely between “intentional resistance and naturalized hegemony” (2006: 20).

Slantwise behavior provides an apt frame for understanding Nicaraguan women’s emigration because it points to an unrecognized and unarticulated sense of unease and explains an unrecognized collective tension. Campbell and Heyman point to behavior reflecting pre-emergence, an unarticulated sense of unease and unrecognized collective tension. It is reflected in the circulating notion that immigration resolves and in the learned forms of managing what women refer to as Nicaragua’s “situation.” Women utilized the border to seek firmer terms against abusive situations. Their comments reflected a resignation to bear the burden of ensuring their own welfare. Often an individualized sense of responsibility is attributed to a neoliberal sensibility. In this case, I argue, navigating violence reflected the distrust generated throughout the war, the assumption of rights as citizens, the sense there are mechanisms in place to enforce rights, and the isolating effects of interpersonal violence. Moreover, women make reference to their concerted attempts to break with established social networks, such as family and friends back home to avoid being pulled back into violence. Network women’s assertion that “Nicaragua women migrate because of violence” pointed to a now recognized issue. Their emigration was not intentionally defiant nor compliant, though ultimately was complicit in producing consent for privatization in both countries but also in galvanizing the Network’s initiative to organize, producing an alternative culture.
F. War, Gender-Based Violence and Migration

Though a great degree of emigration to Costa Rica took place in the midst of Nicaragua’s neoliberal political economic turn, a significant number of emigrants arrived *en masse* in response to gendered wartime violence during the struggle between the FSLN government army and the U.S.-funded counter-revolutionary forces (Contras) (1981-1990). Bellicose interactions exemplified relations of *mando*. Within the armies, soldiers found themselves subject to violent hierarchies. Civilians described being treated like pawns by armies traveling through and demonstrating control of contested areas. The commonality of rape of women, particularly civilians, points to this effort. But if we follow the understanding of “the code of machismo” as dictating displays of power between members of the same gender, then the explicit exertion of violence of soldiers over civilian men did not detract from the argument that the violence was gendered.\(^{62}\)

In general, women recounted the fear of being caught in the skirmishes or bombings. Silvia told me the tension she experienced while immobilized, giving birth while bombs flashed overhead in the capital city of Managua. Ileana recalled how, on occasion, her family and her neighbors were regularly forced to leave everything in their homes behind to run to the edge of town and take cover in large drainage pipes. But another type of fear also came through in women’s stories. Alicia described how she often encountered bodies left in the street, or sometimes, dumped outside homes, having been killed somewhere else. Maria Teresa told me how her family lived in fear of a knock at the door when soldiers passed through. Once, upon

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\(^{62}\) Even then, they were incorporated into the unfolding milieu of transnational interdependence; the Costa Rican government received extensive support for receiving them. Writing about Costa Rica, anthropologist Bridget Hayden shows that Salvadoran and Nicaraguan wartime refugees were labeled “illegal” in the 1980s; in the popular imagination they were conflated with “undeserving” undocumented immigrants. In reality, the government explicitly concealed extensive international economic assistance allocated for refugees (Hayden 2007).
answering the door, her cousin, a woman who was not involved in the Revolution in any direct way, was shot in the forehead.

The ways revolutionary and counter-insurgency or counterrevolutionary warfare in the 1980s transformed everyday life in each country of Central America has been the research focus of various anthropologists, among them Moodie (2010), Manz (2004), Green (2006), Lancaster (1992), Quesada (2005), Nygren (2003), Foxen (2009) and Burrell (2009), Zilberg (2011); Dickson-Gomez (2009); Hale (1998) and Gordon (1998). One common theme they highlighted was its effect on their sense of security and sense of community. Specifically, Linda Greene (1999) and Ellen Moodie 2010 showed it was, in fact, the ‘not knowing’, the ambiguity of violence that made it particularly effective but also penetrating into people’s lives. For the women of the Network, it was not knowing why or who was being chosen, when they would be taken and, many times, who was administering violent acts. It was a climate of anxiety and risk, not knowing what would come next nor whom to trust, with no certain understanding of the state, the opposing forces, and their actions well outside of the purvey of internal regulations. Trust was further eroded when government forces required the complicity of individuals in identifying subversive activities by neighborhoods.

Much of the writing about the Nicaraguan counterrevolution focuses on the tactic of destroying infrastructure, clinics and schools, in addition to imposing an economic embargo, “squeezing the economy until it screamed” (Lancaster 1992). There has been less focus, as in Guatemala or El Salvador, on the use of “fear” as a tactic: instances of “ambiguous” violence exacted on people. Instead Nicaraguan literature has focused on the “risk” of participating in the war as a Sandinista or a Contra (Quesada 1998). Moodie describes how in the midst of

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63 Perhaps in the celebration of the triumph of the Revolution, deciphering its progression and failure, the transformative initiatives of the FSLN to promote civilian efforts and participation have taken center-stage. Meanwhile, in Guatemala and El
kidnappings, disappearances and overall repression, the absence of a full explanation was most perplexing. “Not-knowing enveloped everyday living,” she argues that “violence and militarization suffused people’s embodied interactions with the world” (Moodie 2010: 37).

Certainly, Nicaraguan women who lived in communities that were geographically but also politically isolated from the Pacific center, in the Southern border region and Atlantic, experienced political violence in manners not described by those in the Central regions.64 They recounted the impunity of soldiers from either side passing through, untamed, unsupervised, unaccounted for. Network women’s fear resounds as they recount these periods. Sarita recalled:

> Once the contras began to circulate, things changed—there were bombs and gunfire, and you would see people walking by, wounded. And whenever the activity started up, you would have to go running or they would kill you too—or if you didn’t run, you’d make a hole, like a house, to hide in.

While U.S. scholarship often describes the experiences of the war outside of the framework of violence in Nicaragua, Network women’s experiences provide a bridge to this literature.

G. Emotional Labor in War

Lancaster writes about the sexual division of labor, in the sense of danger derived from the war, the masculine act of proclaiming the honor of service and the feminine act of opposing the draft and opting for the safety of sons, husbands and brothers (1992). Perhaps, then, there is a sexual division of emotional labor, as well, in the sense of danger in these isolated areas. Women feared gendered forms of exerting violence on their bodies. They were not only killed or tortured. Instead, they were also victims of sexual violence. Stories circulated about mothers, grandmothers and young girls being raped in front of each other. Meanwhile, men’s fear focused

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64 The majority of writing about the Nicaraguan Revolution, Lancaster (1988; 1992), focuses on the Pacific region while Hale (1998) and Gordon (2001) have focused on the Atlantic communities, describing their marginality in the Revolution due to historically developed cultural differences, and the vanguard’s view of racism as a corollary of marginality and not a direct, structuring “element” of inequality.
on capture and enlistment as evidenced in scholarly accounts of the war as well as the stories of my research participants. Still, while men were away, women were fearful for them. Most commonly, however, the war enhanced the prevalence of mistrust and inequality, entrenching the sense that exerting power over others was the path to protection and resolution. In isolated areas where the sense of not-knowing was only matched by intermittent violence, many women fled to Costa Rica or sent sons there to avoid the draft.

Lucrecia, for example, pronounced she was thankful that “soldiers [never took] her brothers away to fight with them.” Still, one night, hooded soldiers appeared at Lucrecia’s home while the family was eating. They took her uncle, an older man, forcing him to walk “without a shirt on, without the right to say anything, out in the dark, with just a flashlight.” Her family never found out who took him away nor where they had left him. Had they followed them, Lucrecia said, “we would have been killed.” Her family continued to wonder about his fate. Another cousin, she mentioned, “they took his eyes out and made him walk.” Their stories point to violence with no clear origin. Her uncle, whom she indicated was older and not political, was not an identifiable enemy to either side nor was he a potential soldier, given his age. Her cousin, also uninvolved in the war, was tortured. For Lucrecia, the war ruined her country.

For Lola, a member of the Alliance and the Network in Nicaragua, the guerilla war and the Sandinista period proved revelatory but for different reasons. Her first encounter with the Revolution was with students visiting from Managua who began discussing the origins of inequality with village members. The province became a Sandinista stronghold. This was attributed to the unwavering support of farmers in the area. Support was not only ideological. Many say the Revolution was fought and won in the Segovias. Lola recounts waking up at one o’clock in the morning to guerilla fighters softly knocking at the door, requesting food. She
would get up to pat out tortillas. Sometimes, villagers would help to fight the National Guard. But after the triumph, the interaction with the FSLN changed. Her oldest son was drafted into the army. Despite her agreement with the intentions of the revolutions, she came to see their efforts in a new light. She said the captains would search for ways to exert power over the soldiers. If they had to cross a river, for example, army captains would make soldiers cross in the deepest part and some would drown. Once, a fellow soldier in her son’s troop wanted to go visit his dying mother. Denied permission, he fled. When they found him, they shot him as a traitor. Her son, often one to talk back, was beaten, nearly to death by his own captain until another soldier intervened. Lola had to hide him in order to keep him from being jailed. The captains would hide their own abuses by looking for ways to kill or imprison the soldiers after they had completed their service. Lola recognized the ways an authoritarian hierarchy was perpetuated within the army itself. In effect, she pointed out, the new democratic regime was being instituted through autocratic relations. Moreover, these relationships crossed into everyday life. In this way, the army that fought to preserve Nicaragua’s participatory democracy played a role in reproducing the same everyday relations the Revolution proposed to eradicate. Her comments point to her discord with the progression of the revolutionary project through her experience with the army’s actions. In this sense, she spoke to an unrecognized tension with the limited deployment of revolutionary Nicaragua’s new organizing logic of horizontalism.

H. Her Voice Still Echoes In My Head

Women from other rural areas, particularly those widely perceived to support counter-revolutionary activity, speak to the disconcerting encounters between civilians and soldiers. Their stories spoke to the way the authoritarianism Lola recounted within the army, also marked interactions with civilians. Moreover, these relations demonstrated a particularly patriarchal logic
in demonstrating power through the control of women. Lucrecia and Ana Lucia, both Network members, spoke of their growing unease with life in their towns during the revolutionary period. They depicted their unease at being prompted by a declining sense of security. This was brought on by civilian-military interactions, in which both armies violently exercised power over civilian populations. Their real and perceived sense that they could not guarantee their own safety overwhelmed any other sense of the Revolution. Their migration responded to this unease. While aware they shared their predicament with members of their villages, neither recognized fully that their experiences revealed how their lives and their bodies had become sites of battle in war.

Lucrecia spoke very little of her childhood. She conveyed that the war disrupted a quiet self-sufficient farming life in the countryside. It “dispersed people” permanently who might have been better off if they had been able to remain. Since her father was working in Costa Rica and as the oldest of eight children, she recalled traveling by horse to sell the pork, beef and plantains they produced on the farm or picking beans to earn money for staple foods. Her job was to cut firewood, fetch milk and transport water. By the time she was fifteen her father had returned to help the rest of the family cross over into a Costa Rican refugee camp. She was pregnant and accompanied by her partner.

The war disrupted life in the town and brought a particularly gendered violence. She referred to the Sandinistas and the Contras simply as “las dos bandas (the two sides)”, favoring neither. Frequently, one army would come through, followed in short succession by the other. Villagers were asked if they had seen “the other band” but would act as if they knew nothing. They feared that getting mixed up between the sides would cost them their lives. When retelling the story, she mulled over which side committed atrocities. Mostly, she expressed concern
residents of the town were caught between the two. One day, soldiers showed up at Lucrecia’s neighbors’ home. She was terrified:

Vieras (you see), soldiers would arrive and they would come and kill and eat your livestock. They didn’t end up causing any harm to us except to say they were going to “refresh their eyes,” looking at us. Then they brought the best cow over from the neighbor’s house, cooked it over a big fire and gave meat to my mother.

Though safe in this instance, she remained unnerved by the unpredictability of the situation.

Stories circulated about mothers, grandmothers and young girls being raped in front of each other. Moreover, Lucrecia indicated that the situation would have been different if the two sides had clashed. Men, young and old, were taken away to fight and killed if they resisted. Or perhaps, soldiers might set the homes on fire, in the midst of fighting. Bearing witness to these incidents terrorized residents. “Once,” Lucrecia recounts:

Mama was out picking up our rations, I was about 10 at the time. [Just about half a block away], my sister and I saw two men riding on horseback approach a tall, robust woman who had been visiting our home. They dismounted and hit her with a machete and a stick. Since then [her voice has] remained etched in my memory, crying “chiивается, heelllp me.” We hugged each other and cried. I saw the woman raise her skirts to shield her face. They carried her to a ridge above a passing river. There, they cut her and she yelled, desperately; she ran down to the river. Then we heard one ugly horrible cry that hung in the air. Soon after the men returned, their clothing full of blood. They had raped the woman, right there on the rock where we wash our clothes, and they cut her up and left her underclothes there, thrown off to the side in the bushes. The next day they tied her body to the tail of the horse and they dragged her body downstream.

The most horrible part for us was that afterward, they knocked on our weak door, which we had blockaded. They said, “cipotas (children), where is your mother?” We didn’t speak, just crouched down, cried and held onto each other tightly. They said, “You haven’t seen anything nor heard anything. If you say something, we will kill you just like that woman.” No sooner had my mother arrived and closed the door, than the men returned. “Maria,” they called, out, “ask your daughters what they saw”; my mother replied “they didn’t see anything; they were sleeping when I got here.” What sleeping? We were dying of fear. Then they threatened her and left. We’ve never forgotten. It was horrible.

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65. A phrase used to refer to looking at women.
66. A Nicaraguan way of referring to/addressing children.
The tactics terrified residents and left them with a sense of impotency: resist, tell of the incidents, or attempt to intervene and you would suffer the same fate. The fear generated by actual encounters was augmented by that of not knowing who the perpetrators were nor who would be affected next. Lucrecia could only speculate that those who visited her home were correos (messengers) for one army or another. As the fighting continued, refugee camps began to open across the border. Once her father returned, the family crossed over together to get away from the fighting. To summarize how she felt about her home country, she said, “I always say that Nicaragua is beautiful, I enjoyed my life growing up. But the war interrupted all that, messed it all up. It dispersed people. And now, it’s not just the war but the poverty.” In this way, the war transformed rural places. As anthropologist Anja Nygren writes, their sense of these isolated areas that were once associated with production and tranquility became infused with fear and danger (2003). For women like Lucrecia, they associated rural areas with vulnerability and to gain greater security, left them behind.

I. We Began to Leave Bags Packed

The first time we met in San Jorge, Ana Lucia and I slowly sipped coffee. For two hours, she recounted an idyllic rural life, punctuated by increasing bellicose incidents, until it was completely disrupted by the war and pointedly gendered forms of exercising dominance. She described her life as “wonderful.” She had a little boat and would “take off and go fishing.” Or she help make cuajada67 (cheese) at her neighbor’s home, bringing it back to her mother. “We lived well. And then it began to change.” She heard people were beginning to arm themselves. In the night she could hear soldiers “grabbing people to kill them. And uyy you would have to

67 Nicaraguan farmer’s cheese. Sold in the markets but also prepared in many homes.
throw yourself to the ground, if the two sides met up and a firefight began.” Out of fear, she told me, neighbors began to leave “one after the other.”

For three years, her family “put up with it.” They would keep valuables buried and leave bags packed, ready with clothing and food to grab and take into the woods. A messenger would warn them, knocking on the doors as soldiers drew closer, a little more than half a mile away. Then they would flee into the woods, “no matter the hour, leaving everything behind. But after a time, even fleeing failed to protect them.

We were fleeing all the time; it wasn’t just occasional anymore. We became more afraid. And then it happened, [armed soldiers] caught us in the woods at midnight. They left us alive, but as god brought us into the world [naked]. It really hit me hard because I was left with child.

Shortly after the birth of her child, Ana Lucia’s family decided to flee to Costa Rica with five other families.

For eight days, they walked through the mountains, some barefoot, towards the town of Rio San Juan. There they could cross the San Juan River to Costa Rica. Ambushed twice, they began walking in the creek, so they wouldn’t leave footprints. “That’s how we saved ourselves. The bullets were coming close; we could hear them whistle by….ffffuuuiit ffffuiiiit fffuit.” To avoid extra weight, Ana Lucia carried her baby, nothing more. Feeling weak, she contemplated leaving her baby behind. “I tried to. I left her on a path where only horses walk. And there would be only panthers and forest things. I left her. I was the distance of a block away when I saw her move her hands at me, I wanted to cry. Although I was dying of hunger, I couldn’t leave her behind.” She returned for her child and shortly after, they crossed over to Costa Rica. As they crossed, planes overhead began to shoot at them. Those who hadn’t crossed swam alongside the boat, while the rest threw themselves into the trees. Across the river, Costa Rican immigration
received them. Though safe from harm, Ana Lucia lamented the change. “I cried everyday, missing Nicaragua. I left all the animals behind, that I enjoyed raising. I left my farm behind.”

Ana Lucia, Lucrecia and even Lola’s stories present a view of a fight to defend the Revolution that was particularly punitive for civilians. Their reactions—hiding sons, fleeing, migrating—were intended to shield themselves and their families from violence. But they were not accompanied by attempts at resolution nor a deeper understanding of the system producing violence. In this sense, they represent slantwise actions, actions that avoid the tension and immediate effects of wartime violence. Certainly, as Ana Lucia, Lucrecia and Lola’s stories indicate, wartime violence could be terrifying for civilians. But it was not until later, when they became organized women, they would reflect on these experiences as attempts to dominate, repress and silence the will to respond of those caught in between. Furthermore, they would come to see them as part of a pattern of gendered, hierarchical interactions.

J. Isolation and Violence
While capture and enlistment only last through the duration of the war, the “militarization of the mind” (Martin-Baro 1990) and by extension, social relations, infused with a notion of demonstrating domination over women, persist. More specifically, as deep inequality substituted for the ravages of war, gender-relations bore the marks of a way of being in which the control of women purports domination. In meetings, the women of the Network demonstrated they were particularly attuned to the forms and effects of violence. Violence, quite simply, became something women were obligated to shield themselves from, whether leaving households and caring for themselves from a young age, to leaving spouses, often with multiple children in tow. Violence stripped women of security, any protections supposedly conferred by the “social fabric” of intimate, familial and community relations. It literally damaged their bodies, their minds, their sense of themselves and their ability to form relationships within their communities.
It isolated them, requiring them to be “self-sufficient” in guaranteeing their well-being in the absence of trusting relationships that effectively guarantee collective safety and security. Marriage and household relations become key sites of struggle as they exercise agency “within particular structures of power” (Hodgson and McCurdy: 2001: 6, 14).

Nancy Sheper-Hughes and Phillipe Bourgois argue that family “is among the most violent of social institutions” (2004: 1). Certainly, women’s stories demonstrate the reproduction, in the home, of gender-inequality. Their parents, single mothers in particular, seemed to jostle with their children for power in the household and among partners they considered worthy, towards achieving well-being. Biological fathers were absent, in many of these cases, which were points of regret and resentment for mothers. Women’s stories spoke to ways their childhoods lacked the protections they expected households and, more specifically, parents to provide. Instead, in the following story, Anita, much like Valencia, was forced, from an early age, to become self-sufficient, protecting herself. As she recounts her story, Anita made note of her own struggles to free herself from violence while protecting loved ones. Her story exemplified the isolating tendencies of family and intimate violence.

K. Anita’s Story: The Violence of Family:
I watched as the fat slowly dripped from strips of pork that dangled from a wrought iron bar, suspended above the fire of the cinderblock wood stove. The afternoon light filtered between the wood slats of the kitchen wall. Anita patted out thick tortillas with her large hands, shaping them into perfect circles, a quarter of an inch thick and 8 inches across. “My husband loves these,” she murmured. She set them on a metal plate on top of the stove’s grill. Once they had cooked on one side, she flipped them over with her hands. After a day of recounting her mother’s abuse, she added, “my mother taught me to reach in and flip them with my bare hands.” She continued, grabbing another hot tortilla. “She would press my hands down on the grill so I would
learn to support the heat.” At fourteen years of age, the day she ran away from her mother, Anita woke up early. She brewed coffee for her mother and she patted out tortillas ensuring they were perfect. “I made them just the way you like them, mami” she said. “And you?” said her mother “so friendly?” “I always take good care of you mami, but you just don’t see it,” Anita replied. “vos estás loca (you’re crazy)” her mother snapped back. As she described how she learned to make this simple food, she incorporated the violence of her upbringing. She painted her story as one of life-long struggle and of continuous attempts to better herself, superarse. She pointed out forms of structural, interpersonal, intra-familiar and social violence on both sides of the border. Migration reflected her attempts to overcome this violence and attain economic self-sufficiency. Anita’s story pointed to the ways machismo inflects relationships between women, and particularly, women within a household.

Regardless of her past relationship with her mother, midway through my fieldwork she traveled to Nicaragua to care for her dying mother, sleeping at her bedside for over a month in a Managua hospital. The experience sapped her energy. Her skin seemed to hang off of her. She lost weight, though her stomach protruded uneasily. Her body and will seemed to have given out. She now answered a typical, yet sincere “how are you?” with a sigh, her mouth sagging at the sides. I received the news that she died just after I returned to Chicago from field work.

Her activities reflected all that the Revolution offered and left out, highlighting the participation of women and men in the reproduction of mando. Her life seemed a story of missed chances; the scrap-wood home she lived in on the edge of a squatter settlement stood in sharp contrast to the life of an internationally educated doctor she felt had been at her fingertips. Anita was neither the most “empowered” nor the most oppressed of organizers. Her home life was not the most egalitarian. Elena would tell me Anita had admitted to her, in confidence, that she really
hadn’t adopted the practices of the network into her home life. Her story came full-circle as much as possible when she passed away. Her dreams of an activist, intellectual, cosmopolitan life stood in stark contrast to her life on the margins, a fitting parallel to Nicaraguan nationalist visions of a cosmopolitan future in the midst of a deeply impoverished present.

Her mother imposed a strict regime on her life from early age. As the oldest child of her single mother—she never knew her father—she was made responsible for her younger siblings, yet was not conceded any particular freedoms in exchange for the added obligations. She said, “I never had a childhood, I didn’t have anyone helping me.” Anita often sought experiences she saw children around her having: attending school and graduating, attending church and completing first communion. But her mother would prohibit her participation or refuse to assist her in obtaining the books and materials. Instead, as “the oldest child, at six, I learned to be a mother, caring for my brothers and sisters. I cooked, sent them to school and took care of everything. My mother would leave them with me early and go off, from 4 am until 10 at night.” Anita’s mother cleaned houses, picked cotton and harvested tobacco. As Anita grew, her mother required her to work alongside her, while carrying her siblings. Later, her mother sent her to work at a factory. Anita was beaten frequently. When she was 12, her mother bloodied her face, dragging her down the street by her hair. Occasionally, other family members came to her defense. On one occasion, “my grandfather tried to intervene, threatening to take me away, and beating her.” In response, her mother moved them to another city saying, “let’s see if you’re grandfather comes and tries to take you away.” Anita recalled thinking of her mother’s treatment as normal, but had come to see it as neglectful and abusive.

68 Her mother registered her with just one last name. In Latin America, people use two last names, the first is the father’s, the second is the mother’s. The father’s is the “principal” last name though both are used in formal settings. This is state mandated and can be particularly interesting as the state will insist that the child be given a woman’s legal husband’s last name, even if the biological father is someone else.
Her mother’s neglect extended to a larger refusal to protect her from abuse by others. One day, fetching water from the well before daybreak, Anita felt someone squeeze her hand. Standing behind her was a man who had been following her around. Her mother remained unphased when Anita had told her. She described fighting the man off, being tied up and then losing consciousness as he knocked her out. She commented: “I don’t know what it is to lose your virginity.” She woke up alone and in pain unsure of what had happened. The man appeared a few days later at her home, while her mother was there. Anita yelled “to make him leave.” She recounts “he turned to my mother and said, ‘I’m going to show you, your daughter is no longer a girl.’” It was then she realized what had happened. She begged her mother to help her report the incident to the police, but her mother refused and threatened “if you denounce him, you lose your rights as a child” and began to curtail her activities. Anita had been studying at night and working during the day, towards fulfilling a dream of being a doctor. She sniffs and wipes tears away as she tells me her mother prohibited her from attending school. Anita expressed that she had been overwhelmed by the restrictions on her ability “to advance herself” or to have friendships. The physical abuse increased. “Occasionally [baseless] gossip reached my mother’s ears that I had been with a man; she would hit me. Oooo, she wasn’t playing around. ‘Whore!’ she would yell.”

The shift spurred Anita to leave her home. She sought change through new relationships. In many ways, she submitted to her mother’s authority. She did not make further efforts towards legal proceedings nor did she invoke rights. Instead, she asked a young man at the factory, who had been flirting with her, if he loved her and if he would take her away. He agreed and the next morning, after making her mother tortillas with cheese, she left with him. Her new relationship introduced new patterns of abuse into her life. They lived far away from any friends and
family. Her new partner locked her in their room during the day. She felt coerced into having sexual relations with him. Anita eventually escaped to Managua, but subsequently realized she was pregnant and returned to him. For a short time, she felt things went well. They set up a business and had two children together. Then, her partner began an ongoing relationship with her children’s caretaker. This time, to avoid abuse, she left to join the FSLN.

By joining the FSLN Anita gained skills, developed confidence and accessed new opportunities. While providing resources she had been denied, her participation did not lead her to consider the gendered patterns of abuse she had been part of. Nor did she begin relationships in which she would be supported in her desire for change. As Anita showed me photos from the triumph, she recounted “I was called Estela. That was my name and after the triumph they asked me, ‘Estela, what do you want to do?’ ‘Study,’ I said.” She began nursing school, receiving the highest grades in the class. She earned a scholarship to study medicine in Cuba. “All I needed,” she said, “was a signature from my mother to go.” Once again, she was constrained by her mother who refused Anita’s requests for a signature. The scholarship was re-assigned, Anita recalled, her voice breaking. She began to feel “my mother had only been a mother to my brothers.” Her mother signed for Anita’s brother to study engineering in Bulgaria. He returned, having trained in iron casting and having developed a “healthy marijuana habit.” Anita lamented, “he went, not me, because I’m a woman.” By this time, Anita had tired of government work, although it allowed her to pay her mother to care for her children. Still, it required her to work closely with her former partner who, by this time, had joined the army. In this sense, the Revolution offered her opportunities to overcome some of the impediments she faced to supporting herself.

69 A fishing village on the Southern Pacific Coast of Nicaragua, within 20 kilometers of the border with Costa Rica.
Anita eventually decided to migrate when she realized she was continually exchanging one abusive or neglectful relationship for another, despite her intention to break with them altogether. Anita had two more partners, giving birth to five more children throughout the 1980s. She expressed that her options continued to be shaped by these individuals, as well as her relationship with her mother. The tension arose when her last husband died, drowning after drinking and swimming, and her children blamed her. Anita “went crazy.” Her mother came and took them. Some friends took her to a psychiatrist who she felt helped her improve and gain clarity. But once she brought her children back, wary of leaving them with her mother, she confronted the pressure of supporting seven children. She “didn’t even have enough money to buy corn dough for tortillas nor milk, not even sugar for water. [At night] I gave my children water and put them to sleep on their stomachs so they wouldn’t feel as hungry.” After a time, she began to question herself. A friend offered her employment in Costa Rica, describing “life there as rose-colored.” She felt migration would offer the economic mobility to raise her children and free herself from the fear of being without a partner. Hearing of her decision, her mother appeared at her house pleading with her to leave her children and later threatening to “make her life hard” if she did not. This final interaction sealed Anita’s determination to migrate, find employment, and create a new life for her children and herself. Anita made her decision rapidly and commenced a harrowing journey across the border.

In spite of a story in which she described herself as trapped between a weakness for men and dependence on her mother, she continually pursued new manners of breaking this cycle. Emigration seemed to offer a new way to break it under desperate conditions. Throughout her story, she expressed conflicted sentiments, proclaiming her adoration for her mother while producing one story after another of how her mother had neglected and abused her and her
children. Similarly, she produced stories about one union after another in which she had been abused. Her rapid attempts to remedy these forms of exclusion brought her into increasingly precarious situations. In this sense, her behavior reflected discord with the everyday manifestations of patriarchy and effects of the social hierarchy.

L. Abuse and Neglect and the Border: Common stories

Violence wove in and out of women’s lives while the border offered distance and another future. As women and their families sought to remedy their subordination, they crossed the border. Some, almost unwittingly, crisscrossed the border in their attempts to wield distinct laws and forms of sociality against their spouses. Many, such as Aurelia, were pushed into these relationships by childhood abuse. They utilized the border and, moreover, a new society when parental and community support was unavailable. Aurelia described her childhood with anguish. She was sold off by her father to serve as a maid for another family. She told me: “it’s painful for me to think about my childhood. In reality, I didn’t have one.” Anita always felt she was capable of supporting herself. She felt she had a “business mind” and once, escaping from her employer, lived on the street for many years selling food. Eventually, she moved in with her mother and worked on palm plantations. But she did not feel welcome in the home. By the age of fourteen, she sought partnership and went to live with an older boyfriend “after knowing him for a year.” Similar to Valencia and Anita, she had sensed that a partnership would offer new possibilities.

Much like the others, Aurelia’s husband became controlling. He had recently returned from the war. He showed aggressive from the beginning but she felt he took care of her. Aurelia stopped working after 4 months because her husband didn’t allow it, since she would be surrounded by her male co-workers. She could only leave the house if he accompanied her. He wouldn’t allow any family planning, claiming she might cheat without his knowledge. She came
to feel she “lived badly with him.” He would come home drunk, hitting her even when she was pregnant with their first child. Aurelia moved in with her mother briefly but once the baby was born, he came to take it and wouldn’t allow her to visit unless she agreed to return with him. Soon she was “filled with [seven] children.”

She did not initially go to Costa Rica to get away. The experience gave her new perspective. While there, she encountered a community that was preoccupied for her wellbeing. She migrated with her husband and children because he had family there. Initially, she found life difficult in a new country with an aggressive husband. “In Nicaragua I had my family nearby. I felt more protected.” Still, she began arranging to take him to court, although she later “lost courage.” Subsequently, her neighbors denounced his mistreatment but “the way the laws are, they put him in jail and subsequently let him go.” Though unsuccessful, she began to sense she would ultimately receive more support in Costa Rica. This was reinforced when he took her back to Nicaragua because the laws were different and, more importantly, where he had been a policeman and “could do whatever he wanted.”

The initial experience gave Aurelia the idea of migrating alone, for protection. She proceeded to make multiple attempts to escape. “Since it wasn’t good for me back there, I came here to Costa Rica with my children.” She supported them by picking coffee, not minding the “hard work.” But eventually, her spouse found her through his contacts. He beat her “until he had left me looking like a monster.” He forced her to return to Nicaragua where her suffering worsened. She somaticized the stress the beating caused her. She commented “I suffered so badly that I became quite skinny.” Her feeling of desperation was such that she “got to the point of asking him to kill me. He put a knife up to me, he asked if this was what I wanted. I said, ‘kill me, because this life of a dog I’ve got isn’t a life.’ He responded ‘I won’t, for my children.’” Yet,
Aurelia had not lost her will entirely. She enlisted the help of a friend to get travel to Costa Rica alone, in order to establish herself in a more secure place. She lamented having left her children “alone with a tiger” since he mistreated them too. She made multiple unsuccessful attempts to retrieve them but, ultimately, had to wait until he crossed the border with them eight months later. Once she had them, she felt she could start a new life. She began a relationship in another town with a man who didn’t drink, was serious, and wasn’t aggressive. “I remained cautious, but he never has hit me.” Aurelia was able to resolve her immediate problem but continued to depend on the goodwill of her partner as well as the disposition of community members and state officials to assist her. In this manner, she expressed discord with the way she had been treated but did not recognize neglect and abuse as a shared experience nor the product of any particular system of gender relations.

In other instances, women utilized the border to seek firmer terms against abusive husbands. Some were sent abroad by family members, others left of their own accord. These stories reflected a solitary search for well-being. Anita was continually at odds with her family. Valencia remained in solidarity with her siblings, but routinely, at odds with all other family member or friends. Aurelia utilized emigration to gain access to more favorable legal system and social network. In Nicaragua, each experienced a sense of distrust and the need to single-handedly remedy one’s problems. What does this individuality reflect? On the one hand, scholars attribute acts that reflect an individualized sense of responsibility to a neoliberal sensibility, labeling them “techniques of the self” (Postero 2007: 218; Moodie 2010). On the other hand, navigating violence reflected the distrust generated throughout the war, the assumption of rights as citizens and the sense that there were mechanisms in place to enforce rights, and the isolating effects of interpersonal violence. If a sense of rights developed during the Revolution, it had
faded from a dominant to a residual project, preserved among those continuing to organize. Women’s comments reflected a resignation to bear the burden of ensuring their own welfare.

As they described how they viewed wartime violence and interpersonal abuse, women indicated they had responded to violence towards them as if it were the result of isolated circumstances. In cases of abuse, they had seen it as the result of the particular ways that their mothers arranged their relationships with siblings and step-parents. Moreover, they had viewed violence by partners as a personality flaw. The violence of war was attributed to the particular dynamic of groups of soldiers sensing immunity, suspicious of an enemy and unchecked by oversight in isolated areas. They had not considered the systemic rootedness of these values, beliefs and practices. Relatedly, they also did not recognize that these different expressions of violence were multi-scalar manifestations of the same system. In this sense, their discord represents one stage of pre-emergence. By migrating, however, they demonstrated a collective discord, the motivation to displace themselves, to remedy the situation. This movement further concretized the process of emergence. As the following chapters will show, it is through migration, their ability to recognize their shared journeys as women migrants and victims of violence that they articulated collective discord. Moreover, it was the realization, upon migration, that their suffering and efforts to remedy that suffering would be rendered invisible in both countries and at different scales.

M. Conclusion: Mechanisms of Dispossession and Women’s Migration

On my last day in Nicaragua, I was invited to a forum in Managua. The discussion brought women from a wealth of organizations together to discuss violations of rights in the workplace. Towards lunchtime, Deborah Graddisson, the director of the national Women’s
Institute\textsuperscript{70}, spoke about intra-familial violence. She described how men in Nicaragua routinely and expectedly exercise control over women, particularly their wives, through economic, emotional and physical means. Enacting masculinity pushes men to exert power in this way while, she said, “we women learn to tolerate violence.”

The political economy of Nicaraguan women’s bodies is structured by the dynamic interaction of violence and other mechanisms of dispossession under the guise of “normal” relations between men and women. This occurs in a broader context of poverty and bellicose relations such as state engagement in war as well as the retraction of social rights, services and programs. Women of the network unwittingly engaged the body politic as they migrated to overcome violence produced in the context of the “code of machismo.” The body served as a political “site” in the sense that its meanings were contested. Systems of oppression, whether inflected by gender, race, class or nationality, assign meaning to the difference in bodies whether hormones, pigmentation, genitalia or muscle mass; whether the power of a body related to its material accumulation or interpretations of the body’s location and movement across space.

Anita, Aurelia and Valencia considered themselves to have experienced lifelong adulthood. Anita and Aurelia summarized their early years by saying “I had no childhood.” Valencia told me “in a sense, I had neither father, nor mother… life was veeeeery hard,” elongating the “e” in “very” for emphasis. Their childhoods were replaced by the obligations of caring for themselves as parents neglected them: child-rearing, assuring social reproduction, and guaranteeing their own well-being. These turns of phrase point to the sense that their lives, and more specifically, their independence, were anomalies. They point to the risk they were exposed to by their parents, by the abnormality in their view, that their parents failed to accept the work

\textsuperscript{70} In the process of being elevated to a Ministry (July 2013).
of parenting, much less protect them. Not having a childhood occurred despite the presence—or in the absence—of family. It took place in the power terrain of household life structured by *mando*. Further still, they later realized that the maternal and paternal figures perpetuating violence were themselves caught in webs of violence. In the moment, however, they made the decision to enter into a civil union or marriage in order to remove themselves from the immediate reach of the households where they had experienced abuse. They sensed that the structures perpetuating violence were contained within the household. They rarely mentioned contemplating whether the individual himself would help them, per se. But in reality, the violence of the original household routinely fit the logic of machismo that structured the new relationships they formed. The departure from the childhood household can be characterized as the first emigration to escape violence.

Lucrecia and Ana Lucia’s experiences with war were distinct in that they shared the experience with their families but the threats and attacks nonetheless represent gender-based violence. Scholars Cynthia Enloe (1999, 2007) and Catherine Lutz (2009) have argued that the conquest of women is equated with the conquest of a country, as women’s identity is tied to the national identity. Still, this may be seen as further embedded in the project of primitive accumulation. In Nicaragua, many of the particularly embattled areas of the Atlantic Coast were sites that had been neglected by the Somoza dictatorship but were of material and strategic importance to the Sandinistas. Thus, there seemed to have been exceptional uses of violence on the part of Sandinista army, with regard to the attempt at incorporation of the Atlantic Coast. While processes of dispossession were ongoing, it is clear that these acts were distinct, in that these families did retain networks and were not working in benefit of the Nicaraguan state (Nygren 2003).
Their effective invisibility also brought these stories of violence together. In the context of *mando*, these forms of violence were rendered invisible through their normativity. Furthermore, restructuring and its effects on household welfare, whether declining access to services, rising unemployment or growing vulnerability, remained invisible. The retraction of state-extended social rights, programs and services (Harvey 2006; Collins 2012; Coll et al 2012; Hernandez Castillo et al 2006), stripped women of the relative wealth that these “protections” had allowed them to retain in the face of intimate and social violence. In the absence of a social safety net, and more acutely, women’s lack of knowledge that there might be one to access, was complicit in the decision to migrate. In this context, “the situation,” as Nicaraguans referred to the political economic context, was more directly implicated in their ability to resolve violent relationships and seek recourse to support their moves towards independence. *Mando* was implicated in the constant extraction of wealth from women’s bodies, normalizing women’s suffering and laying the groundwork for them to see migration as their only remaining recourse.

The women of the Alliance discussed the ironies of the mandated silence surrounding the high rates of emigration, particularly women’s emigration. They felt that the same current and past presidents, who were celebrated as “people’s” leaders, suppressed any acknowledgement of emigration and the forces instigating their departure. Moreover, they dismissed the centrality of women’s contributions. They reported that advisors to the Ortega administration had told them that they were aware of emigration, its causes and effects, but were prohibited from discussing these matters in public or in policy discussion. Meanwhile, family members of migrants who remained in Nicaragua relayed that information about household economy, including remittances, was requested when obtaining new bus passes in the city, opening bank accounts or obtaining services such as phone and internet. They told me that benefits such as housing
subsidies or food subsidies, were often refused to households with emigrants. Policies towards emigrants and dual-citizens were being adjusted each year. Still, migration was tacitly made invisible from official discussion by omitting any mention of it.

Through women’s life histories, the compounding effect of different scales of violence became clear. Violence had articulated with other mechanisms of dispossession to push women into the exterior, into an exploitative market beyond the borders of the nation-state, the site where citizen rights are constituted if not precisely fulfilled. It became so apparent in their daily lives that they found themselves obligated to attempt to remove themselves from it by engaging in various strategies of negotiation with family and acquaintances and through one emigration after another. But the normalcy and corresponding invisibility of violence and emigration also continued to obscure the origins and commonality of this violence. It permitted the governments to claim that Nicaragua was a democratizing country, a people’s government, drawing on the legacy and collective memory of the Sandinistas’ gender reforms. Violence was implicated in women’s movements in and out of households, from the campo to the city, into the guerilla and the Revolution, from one town to another, from the homes of parents to those of spouses and to new homes abroad. Marginalized women had scant resources and capital to draw on. In this sense, they migrated without having articulated the underlying causes nor the commonality of violence. This absence of consciousness was paramount to the unarticulated “unease” that Raymond Williams (1977) described. For this reason, the ease of migration to Costa Rica and its economic possibilities readily elided its violent origins. Abroad Network women became “organized women,” as they referred to themselves, amid their new visibility to each other and in response to the silence surrounding migration and the violence systematically leveled on them.

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71 Recent work characterizes the Ortega-Murillo family as new Oligarchs; this characterization, though including some Sandinistas, does not extend to the FSLN party perse.
VI CONSTRUCTING EXCLUSION IN LAND OF PURA VIDA

_Pura vida_ (pure life), is the favorite tattoo of passing tourists and study abroad students who want to take a little bit of the “pure life” home with them. The phrase appears splashed across the back of their legs, arms, backs, after a night of rum and dancing. The attempt to capture the imagined pure life they embodied throughout their week hiking, surfing, biking, yoga-bending, sipping smoothies and munching on fruit. It will remain embedded in their memories, as a paradise of paved roads leading to boutique hotels dotting white sand beaches in a country whose poverty is tucked back from the road and doesn’t fuel discomfort. The words _pura vida_ and “tribal” designs are popular requests for my tattoo artist friends in Costa Rica, requests they loathe to oblige. Brightly colored wildlife--including parrots, iguanas, monkeys, frogs and panthers--are used to form the letters, spelling pura vida on clothing and posters.

Knowing Costa Rica, to the outsider, is knowing Pura Vida, as if it were the great secret, like some modern-day fountain of youth. “You work in Costa Rica?” people used to inquire, smiling. “Life at the beach must be easy,” asserts a dental technician, as she fills my mouth with water, so I am unable to explain that there is an entire country between the two coasts. “I love Costa Rica, it’s my favorite place!” exclaim people at parties, “don’t you?!” I keep quiet. Now is not the moment to explain the damage that idea causes. “Costa Rica?” say Peace Corps alumni, disparagingly; “that’s not a country where we work. How is the beach?”

Internally, _pura vida_ denotes that “we’re all ok.” Pura vida, among Costa Ricans, is simply the language of everyday life. It replaces both “what’s up” (_Qué, pura vida?)_ in greetings and the affirmative response, “everything is good.” It can be used to intone “thank you” and can be used to say goodbye with goodwill. Sometimes it substitutes for Costa Rica itself: over the phone from abroad, Ticos ask “and how is everything there in _la pura vida_?” Guide books
borrow *pura vida* to describe “ticos” to outsiders. Journalists stretch the phrase to infer Costa Rica’s perceived harmonious relationship with the environment, the lack of military force and its democratic history. *Pura vida* could now be the equalizer, the shared language of everyone from *diputados* (representatives) to inner-city youth, of dread-locked surfers and academics, of passing tourists and ardent nationalists. Costa Rica peacefully welcomes all, the phrase implies. It signals the continuum of the “peasant utopia of post-independence” into a “middle class harmony.”

But through a critical lens, *pura vida* does the work of masking. It describes Costa Rica’s complicated “way of seeing”: the belief in all of the images of Costa Rica above, but also, in the knowledge that everyday life isn’t always so. For example, Costa Ricans increasingly question the conflation of Costa Rica’s absence of army with a widespread practice of peaceable sociality. Yet there is a widespread reluctance to question the structures and sentiments that support militarization, lest it force the admission that democratic practice is not inherent to the country nor its citizens. This situation reflects a non-confrontational, if passive-aggressive culture. For Costa Rican activists, it is non-confrontational in the sense of avoiding applying a critical lens and they often find themselves isolated. Nicaraguan women often laugh and repeat, in voices dripping with irony, “yes, everything here is *pura vida*” as they describe their struggles. Invited to give a presentation at the University of Costa Rica’s Center for Women’s Studies, an activist and feminist research institute, I repeat this phrasing. The researcher’s faces brighten and they laugh and nod in understanding. Nicaraguan women capture the same sentiments researchers experience in their daily lives. They share with staff of the research institute the attempt to push beyond the veneer of being a place where “women have rights” and challenge the persistent structural inequality of patriarchy and its renewed heyday under neoliberalism.
*Pura vida* is therefore emblematic of the powerful discourse organizing national relations. It hides far more than it reveals. The image of *pura vida* renders immigrant claims of exclusion doubtful, equating their complaints with the regrets of usurpers who must have done something wrong or were simply undeserving in the first place. It is part and parcel of the view that Costa Rica has a high human development index and does not require international funding to support the influx of immigrants. It turns immigrants’ problems into problems of their country of origin. When immigrants reflect on these difficulties, they exclaim in protest, “*ahh siii, todo pura vida aqui. Estamos en el pais de las maravillas.* (Ohhh yesss. It’s just *pura vida* here. We are in wonderland).”72 Misunderstandings ensue. *Pura vida* encapsulates the projection of Costa Rica as a space of democracy, peace and environmental harmony. The phrase is not surprising given the country’s dominant-as-exceptional imaginary.

Costa Rica is imagined as exceptional within the Central American region for being “European, masculine, middle class, democratic, peaceful, and civil” (Edelman 1999; Sandoval 2002). Following independence in the 19th century, this discourse was deployed externally by elites to differentiate it from Nicaragua as territorial disputes ensued between them. In the twentieth century, the idea of Costa Rican “exceptionalism” was deployed internally by discriminating “true” Costa Ricans from indigenous, afro-descendants and peasants whose racial, political and socio-economic markers deviated from exceptionalism ultimately determining who could exercise citizenship. This extended to a small population of Nicaraguan seasonal laborers working in border regions. Costa Rican activists and scholars who have questioned exceptionalism in their publications, still frequently invoke the country’s status as one of the few “long-standing democracies” in Latin America. At its broadest, this dissertation speaks to the

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72 In reference to “Alice in Wonderland” (*Alicia en el País de las Maravillas*).
way control of Central America is leveraged through the differential treatment of the countries that make up the region. Developments and interventions in any country inextricably affect the others (Robinson 2003; Pearce 1981). In this way, the region was reconstituted as a subdivision of the world state system in the period following independence from Spain. In this sense, Costa Rica’s perceived wealth and political stability should not be seen as an anomaly but tied to the marginality of the rest of Central America, particularly Nicaragua.

The particularities of this manner of exercising power in the region are not widely-acknowledged. Instead, the differential status and treatment of each country has been naturalized through internationally-circulating financial discourses about each. Costa Rican exceptionalism developed through efforts to distinguish the country from others in the region. It has also become the justification for the investment that bolsters the country’s public institutions while disinvesting from others within the region. More importantly for understanding Nicaraguan women’s experiences in Costa Rica, exceptionalism has become the structure of feeling, organizing a host of values and practices around the country’s institutions at all scales. It generates consent around policies towards other countries, such as resistance to regional market integration. It also produces particular practices towards so-called others in the country, such as hostile treatment of migrants from other Central American countries. The previous two chapters of the dissertation focused on the production of mando in Nicaragua as a particular form of relating that limits democratic participation. In this chapter, I describe how ideas about Costa Rica’s exceptionalism produce exclusionary practices towards people viewed as outsiders within the country.

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73 I say this at the risk of reifying the region as a static unit. Similarly, in his book, Global Shadows (2006), James Ferguson explores the uneven development produced by neoliberal policies throughout Africa. He selects Africa as a unit, at the risk of reifying it, by addressing it as a unit. Still, he presents “Africa,” not as a large continent with great variation, but similarly positioned within an “imbalanced world order.”
A. **Exclusion in the Exceptional State**

Practices of inclusion and belonging in Costa Rica are carried out with degrees of intensity that adhere to intersecting subject positions attached to racial, class, gender, spatial and citizenship status. Throughout its history, Costa Rican governments have wielded citizenship to denote belonging. This is exemplified in the recent extension of national identification cards to indigenous groups in the 1980s and the exclusion of generations of Costa Rican born Afro-descendants from citizenship until the 1950s. Although Costa Rica depends on Nicaraguan labor to support its flourishing export economy, Nicaraguans experience limitations to both legal and cultural citizenship (Cortes Ramos 2006; Clarke 213; Stolcke 1995). In practice, the notion of exceptionalism generates a widely-held assumption that Costa Rica’s institutions are inherently democratic and that its laws, policies, procedures and institutional arrangements are sufficient to fulfill their intended objectives. In turn, any corruption is considered to be the work of governments and state officials, rather than a problem of the state assemblage itself. There is a general assumption that Costa Ricans participate in and reproduce this democratic practice, while racialized others, assumed to be unfamiliar with democratic practice, weaken it. In turn, this generates ambivalence towards providing services created by and for so-called true Costa Ricans to those who present a threat. Beyond this, it feeds into the persistent work of obscuring the decline of the social-welfare state responsible for Costa Rica’s international reputation. This chapter explores the origins and development of this ambivalence as well as its manifestation in women’s lives.

In *Understanding Central America*, John Boothe, Christine Wade and Thomas Walker open their chapter on Costa Rica by describing the t-shirts being sold at tourist stands at the time
that proclaimed “Costa Rica es diferente (Costa Rica is different)” (2006: 53). Throughout Costa Rica’s post-conquest history, its leaders have urged Costa Ricans to defend its exceptionalism from outside threats. Originally used to rally an army to resist Honduran efforts to forge a Central American republic in 1870, exceptionalism became the structure of feeling through which Costa Ricans understand themselves in relation to surrounding states.

Throughout Costa Rica’s post-conquest history, its leaders have urged Costa Ricans to defend its exceptionalism from outside threats. Originally used to rally an army to resist Honduran efforts to forge a Central American republic in 1870, exceptionalism became the structure of feeling through which Costa Ricans understand themselves in relation to surrounding states.

The system of values roots national identity in class, racial and gender distinction. Marc Edelman eloquently elaborated the discourse of exceptionalism and its implications:

> traditional historians, politicians and average citizens alike portray it as a redoubt of democracy and peace in a Central America forever plagued by tyrannies and internecine conflicts, as a bastion of egalitarianism and reformism surrounded by societies polarized between wealthy elites and impoverished masses and as a “European” island and outpost of civility in an uncultured mestizo and Indian sea. [Edelman 1999: 45]

Sociologist Carlos Sandoval elaborates the ways this national identity is defined against other identities within and outside of the borders of Costa Rica. He demonstrates that subject positions are also spatially constructed. This discourse:

> seems to expulse those attributes that do not coincide with the desired nationality. The white, implicitly masculine, middle class population emphasizes the central regions of the country. It subverts other internal identities such as indigenous, Afro-Caribbean and peasants that do not belong to the city, modernity and the nationality par excellence. [Sandoval 2002: 5]

Ultimately, the discourse of exceptionalism exaggerates some differences and obscures similarities to other states as research over the past thirty years has shown. Nicaraguans are the unnamed “other” in the spatial and racial markers of national self-imaginary (Edelman 1999: 45; Cruz 2005). Once within the borders of Costa Rica, they are labeled as “invasive” and are referred to as “Nicas,” a derogatory term compounding behavioral, racial, economic and political

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74 A popular shirt sold in Nicaragua proclaims sincerely yet irreverently “Yo amo Nicaragua en puta” arguably the “Nicaraguan” version of “I heart Nicaragua with, as Thomas Walker argues, are part of Nicaraguan spoken culture in Under the Shadow of the Eagle, vulgarities included. Rough translation: I f*ing love Nicaragua.

The discourse of Costa Rican “exceptionalism” has become dominant through concerted efforts and has been used throughout the history of the Costa Rican state to shape relations to dissenting and non-conforming groups challenging the arrangement of power. Exceptionalism is reflected in state officials’ rhetoric about the presence of Nicaraguan migrants. In order to generate consent, discourses borrowing from Costa Rican’s shared understandings of Nicaraguan presence in the country as a threat deflect criticism for the role of neoliberal policies in declining services and security (Hayden 2003). By positioning Nicaraguans as a threat to exceptionalism they are viewed as illegal and marginal. They can be blamed for the decline of the services and programs of the welfare state. William Roseberry (1996) has argued that the ability for a discourse to become hegemonic is located in its resonance with the broader population. This new turn built on a dominant understanding of Nicaraguans that derives from past geopolitical conflict. Though a persistent, if latent perception, it is recalled in contemporary discourse. The discourse marginalizes an internal population of Nicaraguans who are central to economic processes. It also allows state officials to obscure their role in dismantling the social welfare state. I argue that because Nicaraguans inhabit marginal spaces, physical, economic, social, and political, the dominant view of Nicaraguans is not contradicted by Costa Rican’s actual daily experience with them. Discourses of distinction are reproduced with little struggle, reinforcing Nicaraguan marginality and social distance between Costa Ricans and Nicaraguans overall.

B. Creating the Discourse of Exceptionalism
The Costa Rican nation-state was consolidated approximately fifty years after receiving independence from Spain in 1821 (Palmer 1993; Palmer 1995). Although Costa Rica was
declared independent from the rest of Central America in 1838, the population did not yet share an idea of national identity that cut across class, ethnic, racial and spatial divisions (Palmer 1993). Previously the southernmost province of the Viceroyalty of Guatemala, Costa Rica was treated as a colonial backwater given the insignificant presence of mineral and human resources to be exploited. Colonial leaders were informed of the province’s independence from Spain approximately one month after it was declared in Guatemala (Palmer 1993). The creation of infrastructure that would play a significant role in forging a sense of nationhood began with the initial phase of the “liberal” state in 1870. At this time, state leaders established an educational system, initiating “the ‘ethical’ or ‘educator’ state’” phase (Gramsci 1971: 247, 258 in Palmer 1993: 52). As the population grew so did the gap in wealth and occupations. Elites saw a need to create an “imagined rather than lived…homogenous political community” (Palmer 1993: 53). However, another decade lapsed before the discourse of exceptionalism could take root. During the 1880’s, territorial disputes with Colombia (now Panama) and Nicaragua increased the importance of the “consolidation of the modern nation state” (Palmer 1993: 60). In 1885, the Guatemalan dictator declared his intention to consolidate Central America into a single republic by will or force. The Costa Rican coffee oligarchy felt threatened by these announcements but also realized they offered an opportunity to bring the nation together under a common cause. Conveniently, what historian Steven Palmer refers to as a critical mass of intellectuals had been reached, “staffing the expanding ideological apparatus of the state and oligarchic society” (1993: 57). Most notably, liberal intellectuals, closely aligned with the state, staffed the daily press that had been established the previous year. Palmer argues the editors were attuned to the “role [that the] continuous, evenly paced dissemination of liberal news would have in projecting a hegemonic culture” (Palmer 1993: 63). At this juncture, the oligarchy began to formally
introduce a discourse of Costa Rican exceptionalism to justify its resistance to joining the Central American Republic. To make this version persuasive, intellectuals rapidly reworked the meaning of national symbols and history.

The discourse of exceptionalism contrasted those characteristics said to be shared among Costa Ricans with those of other nations in the region. These efforts reflected the tendency of “official discourses of nationhood [to] re-present the nation as historically continuous and geographically discontinuous” (Radcliffe and Westwood 1996: 79 in Sandoval 2002: 19). However the assertion of such a discourse required a reconstruction of the country’s past, which illustrates an interesting process of the creation of national discourse. The configuration of Costa Rican national identity is based on an imagined “shared past, homogenous racialized imagery, and a sense of uniqueness based on cultural difference” (Sandoval 2002: xvi). These attributes of identity draw on “spatial and temporal” markers to distinguish Costa Rican culture from that of other countries. It is characterized, first, as an idyllic rural democracy during the colonial period and by the expansion of a predominantly middle-class citizenry in the contemporary period. Secondly, it is portrayed as a “nation inhabited by a ‘white’ people” since colonization. Finally, it is shown to be uniquely egalitarian, democratic and peaceful across its past and present (Sandoval 2002: xiv-xvi; 26; 76). The press delivered this modified version of the history of Costa Rica under the idea of a shared past.

The employment of whiteness as a unifying national identity was unique to the region. Literature suggests dominant discourses portrayed the population as white since the 18th century, though it remains unclear when this commenced or why this was chosen as a national discourse (Sharman 2006; Gudmundson 1986; Palmer 1993). By 1851, Felipe Molina had published a historical volume on Costa Rica declaring “with an insignificant difference, all inhabitant of
Costa Rica belong to the white race…the population is homogeneous…” (Palmer 1996 in Alvarenga 2008: 9). At the end 18th century, the Virgin of Los Angeles, a figure of the Virgin known locally as *La Negrita* (the black Madonna), was appropriated from the free part-black population of the highland Central Valley as symbolic for the broader population. Anthropologist Russell Sharman argues the story of La Negrita was formerly regarded as a “threat to hegemony” because it contested the sense of racial, economic and political homogeneity. In the 1880’s, the Virgin was restored as a shared public symbol. Sharman shows that her image itself was whitened at the same time that “the tracks of [Costa Rica’s] non-white population ‘disappeared from the documents and the collective memory’” and Costa Rica’s history of slavery was erased (Melendez Obando 1999:53 in Sharman 2006: 847). The meaning assigned to her erased the presence of an early Afro-descendent slave population supporting claims of both a racially and economically egalitarian society (Sharman 2006).

The second figure to be resurrected was the hero of the Central American campaign against William Walker (U.S. filibuster). Juan Santamaria’s heroic actions during the war, now known to all Costa Ricans, were forgotten throughout most of Costa Rica in the decades immediately following. He had remained a local legend in his province of Alajuela. Notably locals celebrated his memory by his common name, Erizo, which made reference to his coarse curly hair. In turn, this explicitly referenced his mixed European and African ancestry (Palmer 1993: 70). In the search for figures to forge a unified national history, liberal intellectuals rediscovered his story. Palmer argues Santamaria’s image was resurrected in such a way as to depart from that of the two predominant figures, “elite war hero” or the undifferentiated unknown soldiers from the popular classes. To construct Santamaria as the “prototype of our

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75 Palmer estimates that before 1850 the African population constituted 20 percent of the population, indigenous 15% and the rest mostly Mestizo with a small percentage of Spanish (Palmer 1995: 77).
heroes,” they created an identity for him. Palmer argues that the newspaper editor, liberal ideologue Pío Víquez, “went to work on the contradiction” of a national hero who did not fit the “general liberal effort to declare Costa Ricans to be a homogeneous and predominantly white race” (Palmer 1993: 70). Though acknowledging Santamaria’s curly hair, Víquez emphasized Santamaria’s facial features shared the “features of our race” (Palmer 1993: 70). Furthermore, intellectuals and state officials ceased to refer to him as Erizo, substituting his given name Juan Santamaria. At the same time, intellectuals continued to describe Santamaria as a peasant, transforming him into a symbol with “popular resonance” and a hero in whom “subordinate groups could see images of themselves” (Palmer 1993: 72). The idea a peasant could be widely venerated also served to erase the history of differentiation in wealth and status between elite and commoner that was found within Costa Rica’s pre-coffee villages (Gudmundson 1986: 22).

By the beginning of the twentieth century, this played a key role in the development of a clear sense of a shared national identity accomplished through use of images of “voice[less] figures defined by the oligarchy” (Sharman 2006: 847). Further revisionist work effectively naturalized an otherwise concerted attempt to distinguish Costa Rica’s history from the rest of Central America. At the same time as intellectuals promoted a common understanding of Costa Rica’s racial origins, they also assigned new meaning to events in Costa Rica’s political history. Palmer argues that Costa Rica’s participation in a Central American effort to suppress William Walker was renamed as the national campaign (Palmer 1993: 62). The effect was to emphasize a past history of concerted separation from the rest of Central America. By 1892, Costa Rican Geographer Francisco Montero Barrantes had published a 700-page volume of the history of Costa Rica positioning the “National Campaign” as the “war of independence” (Palmer 1993: 61), thereby rhetorically elevating its importance as well as that of Juan Santamaria’s importance
in national history. The book not only provided a unifying version of history, but also provided materials to be used in primary schools (Palmer 1993: 61). Finally, through print media, including history books and newspapers, evidence of any form of non-democratic government was erased. Palmer emphasizes that intellectuals downplayed the unpopularity of the liberal dictatorships in order to lay the groundwork for the ethical state. (Palmer 1993: 57). Relatedly, political scientist Consuelo Cruz asserts the dictatorships before and after this period were repositioned as “democratic, if paternalistic governments which ultimately protected the common good in Costa Rica” (Cruz 2005: 109-11). Cruz links this portrayal to the sense of Costa Rica as inhabited by a “naturally civil population” who viewed conflict as a “national disgrace” (2005: 95-7). Ultimately, Palmer argues, liberal intellectuals laid the groundwork for a “truly popular national discourse” to “entrench” the new liberal state (Palmer 1993: 72).

The resulting sense of Costa Rican identity, now denominated exceptionalism, has been characterized by scholars as a “nationalism embedded in a discourse of distinction” (Cruz 2005: 92). The adoption of a discourse of exceptionalism not only joined the population under national discourse, but also established a hierarchical relationship among different regions within the state. Furthermore, it entrenched the perception that Costa Ricans are superior to groups outside of state borders. Notably, this coincided with the shifting use of the discourse. On the one hand, it was deployed specifically to differentiate Costa Rica from Nicaragua as territorial conflicts deepened between the two states. On the other hand, it was used towards new migrant populations, including Jamaicans and Nicaraguans, who were being recruited to perform plantation labor within Costa Rican borders (Donnan et al 1999; Palmer 1993; Sandoval 2002). This historical perspective undergirds the intensity of Costa Rican reaction to the current migration of Nicaraguans based on their entrance en masse into the center of the nation.
Exceptionalism has shifted from occasionally imagined differences with a distant country to an everyday way of seeing neighbors. Moreover, the nostalgia for an imagined idyllic also reinforced an affective attachment towards contemporary dominant culture.

The direct claim to whiteness is unique. Anthropologist Marisol De La Cadena notes there has been a trend of “Latin American ambivalence towards whiteness” (2001:19). Classification as white was reserved for people of Anglo-Saxon decent while European elites were categorized as trigueño, having light skin with dark hair (De La Cadena 2001; Wade 2008). Furthermore, most national histories link the racial present to a historic process of mestizaje, literally meaning the mixture of ancestries and referring to sexual relations between indigenous and Spanish groups. These racial discourses undergird national identities. There are subtle differences but at some level, all uses imply an indigenous past while celebrating a Spanish-influenced present (De la Cadena 2001; Smith 1996). Generally, Costa Rican sociologist Carlos Sandoval asserts, “being mestizo is …interpreted as synonymous with whiteness” (Sandoval 2002: 84). It is plausible that Costa Rica’s selection of whiteness was a reaction to the use, in Nicaragua, of a mestizaje discourse. However, the mestizaje discourse was not widely utilized in Nicaragua until the early twentieth century, when the discourse of nation in Nicaragua took hold (Smith 1996: 151; Gould 1998). The principle result is that the Costa Rican claim to whiteness is distinct from others and therefore distinguishes Costa Rica from other countries.

Although the Costa Rican discourse of exceptionalism shifted from claiming distinction in relation to the region to claiming distinction from Nicaragua, the discourse of mestizaje in Nicaragua never seems to have been used to counter Costa Rican claims to superiority (Sandoval 2002; Alvarenga 2007; Edelman 1999; Amorretti interview 7/21/09; Cortes Ramos 2006). Costa Rica claims to be the “Switzerland of Central America,” alluding to pacificity amid bellicose
activity. According to this imaginary Nicaraguans represents otherness (Sandoval 2002: 62; Amorretti interview 7/21/09). More explicitly, in contrast to the Swiss reference, it elicits aggression (Edelman 1998). Nicaragua and Costa Rica have been engaged in territorial conflicts since the period of independence. Those conflicts, referenced in historical literature, include the annexation of Guanacaste ongoing negotiation characterized as “bickering” over rights over the San Juan River, in negotiations over the site of a trans-isthmian canal, in rubber-tapping activity on the border, and in use of Costa Rican territory for staging counter-revolutionary activity (Clayton 1987: 335; Edelman 1998; Sandoval 2002). Molina’s 1851 volume surveying Costa Rica, declared Costa Ricans to be “industrious and peaceful” while Nicaraguans “offer a contrast to this picture” (Molina 1851:22; in Sandoval 2002: 89). Though tensions diminished as both countries engaged in state building processes inspired by the campaign against William Walker, renewed disputes over the border at the beginning of the nineteenth century led to portrayals of Nicaraguans as violent and criminal (Sandoval 2002: 89-90; Edelman 1998).\textsuperscript{76} Chaos, according to Costa Rican state elites, was something “afflict[ing] the rest of Central America” (Cruz 2005: 98, emphasis mine). From early on, Costa Rican elites attributed open conflicts in the country to the contaminating influence of Nicaraguan interference or intrusion (Cruz 2005: 95).

C. Borders: Defining National Space

Anthropologists argue that nation-building processes, in which imagined national communities are forged, entail the creation of categories distinguishing how sectors of the population will be “inserted into [internal] relations of power” (Stephens 2008: 426). Often such

\textsuperscript{76} However, there has never been a sense that Costa Ricans pose a threat to Nicaraguan culture. Despite an absence of literature analyzing national discourses about these events, my research indicates that Nicaraguans contest the meanings of these events assigned by Costa Rican consensus. This became particularly clear when I conducted participant observation with an association of Nicaraguan migrants in San Jose, Costa Rica on the day of celebration of the annexation of Guanacaste. While Costa Ricans position the annexation made by the Guanacastecans, who voted to succeed from Costa Rica, “preferring its culture” migrants at this meeting reminded each other that this was the day Nicaraguan state officials were placed in front of a firing squad by Costa Rican officials, and forced to sign the province over.
discourses distinguish between ethnically distinct regions, rooted in ethnic and regional attachment to these spaces. They view some as better representing the nation than others. Thus, they argue crossing *borders within the state*, or “transborder crossings,” may warrant as much attention as crossing transnational borders (Stephen 2007; Khosravi 2010 Appelbaum, et al 2003; Radcliffe et al 1996). Examining transborder crossing entails questioning how the imagined attachment of race, ethnicity, gender and class to a space influences social interactions within the space. Identifying the Central Valley as the ideological center, regional borders in Costa Rica demarcate what Khosravi terms “colorlines [between] culture regimes” (2010). Each region is collectively imagined as occupying a place in a particular hierarchy of belonging to the nation.

Today new markers of Costa Rican exceptionalism subvert residents linked to regions that do not conform to urbanism and modernity. Indigenous, Afro-Caribbean and peasants, for example, are linked to regions beyond the Central Valley where racial, political and socio-economic characteristics are denigrated according to the meanings and values comprising exceptionalism (Sandoval 2002; Stocker 2005).

This dynamic is exemplified in Karen Stocker’s ethnography of the interaction among members of indigenous families divided across the border of a designated indigenous territory in the Guanacaste province of Costa Rica (Stocker 20005). The designation of an area as indigenous territory and the subsequent effects on social relations demonstrates the process Appelbaum et al regard as the way that “race constructs space [as much as] space constructs race” (2003: 11). Stocker (2005) shows that members of the surrounding community assumed all those who lived within the designated territory were indigenous. Meanwhile, siblings of indigenous people that lived outside the territory were not necessarily considered indigenous. Stocker also demonstrates particular socio-economic characteristics were associated with the
discursive racial make-up of the territory. She notes, for example, that when those living within indigenous territories attended high school outside of the territory, they were uniformly labeled and treated as delinquent, including those who were honors students. Stocker demonstrates these distinctions were also relative. The intra-province hierarchy was subordinated within the interregional hierarchy as most Costa Ricans from the Northwestern province of Guanacaste experienced significant discrimination in predominantly white areas such as the Central Plateau (Stocker 2005: 27).

This way of understanding the nation shaped the way migrants were incorporated into the country, from early on. The notion of a homogenous white population also shaped categories of inclusion for Anglophile African descendants who filled much of the early labor requirements in the railroad construction from the Central Valley to the Atlantic and worked in banana plantations under the United Fruit Company in the early twentieth century (Alvarenga 2008: 4). Costa Rican officials had initially attempted to recruit European labor for this work but failed. Historian Patricia Alvarenga asserts that Afro-descendants were labeled invasive. Their distinct racial appearance, customs, language and religion were designated “alien and improper” and their presence was deemed a “necessary evil” (Alvarenga 2008: 6, 17-18). State sanctioned exclusionary practices institutionalized their social inferiority. Until the mid-twentieth century they were prohibited from seeking employment outside of the Atlantic lowlands and even those born in the country were legally considered foreigners unless they sought and paid for documentation (Harpelle 1994; Harpelle 2001: 129).

The settlement patterns of different racialized groups often becomes fixed through people’s commonsense notion of space. Likewise, the borders between these areas become fixed in their perception as what anthropologist Sharam Khosravi calls “colorlines”: borders between
spaces constituted by perceived racialized difference (Khosravi 2010: 98). When these lines are transgressed, those who are perceived as outsiders go from “other” to threat. In spite of the Costa Rican discourse of homogeneity, it is clear that a clear distinction is made between Costa Ricans in the Central Valley and those residing in other provinces. Namely, the Central Valley is considered to be the heart of exceptionalism. This builds towards the explanation of why discourses blaming Nicaraguans have been so effective in deflecting attention from neoliberal restructuring. Costa Ricans from the Central Valley have long been attuned to practices that do not reflect common definitions of urban modernity and are sensitive to the entrance of those who do not conform with practices of exceptionalism. The shared sense of exceptionalism among urban residents draws on the idea of middle class distinctiveness. Inclusion is extended to those who embody “visible, perceptible, non-indifferent, socially pertinent difference” (Bourdieu 1998: 9).

As exceptionalism is attached to urban modernity, Central Valley residents mark “distinction” through speech patterns, accent, knowledge of technology, conspicuous consumption patterns, skin color and navigation of urban spaces—even noting whether people cross the street correctly—to identify and critique outsiders (Sandoval 2002: 76-81). When inhabitants of other regions enter the Central Valley, they are subjected to significant discrimination (Stocker 2005; Alvarenga 2008; Harpelle 2001). Even Costa Rican residents of rural areas avoid the city because they experience othering (Sandoval 2002: 80-1). In casual conversations many noted that they find visiting the city tiring and cumbersome requiring they make significant efforts to blend in. I argue this activity is as significant for citizens as non-citizens. Furthermore, while Nicaraguans are seen as outsiders throughout Costa Rica, they are viewed as particularly antagonistic within the metropolitan center of the country. Given this
tendency to distinguish the Central Valley from the rest of Costa Rica, it is worth exploring ways that the contemporary entrance of Nicaraguans into the Central Valley metropolitan area, or a “transborder crossing,” has heightened the sense that Nicaraguans present a threat.

Nicaraguan migration to Costa Rica is not new, nor is xenophobia towards them. Though largely an unwelcome presence, Nicaraguans historically remained within spaces already associated with racial and cultural difference. Labor migrants had been crossing the international border since the 19th century as land ownership consolidation occurred in Nicaragua but remained on the periphery of the country. They worked on coffee plantations in Northwestern border region and on banana plantations and pineapple in the Pacific and Atlantic coastal regions (Gould 1998; Wiley 2005; Hamilton and Stoltz Chinchilla 1991). Alvarenga argues that since the 1940’s, Nicaraguans had provided much of the manpower for this agricultural work. She notes workers already considered Nicaraguans to be delinquent, pernicious and to have a “warlike spirit” (2008:19). This prejudice was shared by “white,” Afro-descendent and indigenous workers. Any activity Nicaraguans engaged in was positioned as running contrary to Costa Rican values because Nicaraguans themselves were viewed as inherently criminal. Nicaraguan migrants’ explicit political support of the modern state proved insufficient to counter the Costa Rican dominant lens on Nicaraguan presence. She provides one noteworthy example: although Nicaraguans fought on both sides of Costa Rica’s civil war in 1948, all were classified as communists afterwards and “cruelly persecuted by authorities” (Alvarenga 2008: 19). Dominant views were reinforced at the time of the triumph of the FSLN Revolution in 1979. The border gained new prominence transformed from a “political frontier into an ideological frontier” (Wiley 2005: 427). According to Sandoval, widespread perceptions of Nicaraguans compounded more overt ideas of “turbulent politics, riotous nature, kidnappings and violence” (Sandoval
2002). However Nicaraguans still did not typically enter the metropolitan space. The neoliberal turn changed this.

D. Restructuring, Unease and Migration
Unlike widely discussed examples of neoliberal restructuring in Latin America, such as Chile and Argentina, where reforms were simultaneously implemented under military dictatorships and through shock treatments, coercion has not been central to restructuring in Costa Rica or Nicaragua (Paley 2001; Klein 2007; Barahona, Guendel and Castro 2007). However, there has still been a “rush towards free-market policies” in both states, which has caused “crises of legitimacy.” Thus the introduction of neoliberal governing measures has required that states renew nation-building processes to create consent for structural adjustment (Edelman 2000: 91). Migration from Costa Rica to Nicaragua has played a key role in facilitating this transition in both states without significant struggle or coercive measures. In a sense, each state has depended on developments in the other to legitimize the process. As Edelman notes, unmediated experiences of the changes generate dissent. For example restructuring towards agro-export generated peasant protests in Costa Rica during the 1980’s (1999). Thus neoliberal restructuring of the state required new discourses to resolve the contradictions it presented to long-standing understandings of the state-citizen relationships. Specifically, the changed economic status did not meet the claims to exceptionalism that derived from Costa Rica’s social-welfare governing model of the previous forty years.

Costa Rica adopted a social-welfare state model in 1948, implementing a wide range of social programs and social services (Edelman 1999; Barahona et al 2007). The model was largely successful, providing widespread enjoyment of sufficient quality of life for thirty years (Edelman 1999: 3). U.S. investment in Costa Rica during the 1980’s may have added to the
discourse of exceptionalism by maintaining the prestige of receiving investment and allowing Costa Rica to restructure the state gradually. But the country defaulted on loans amid the debt crisis severely affecting Latin America. Subsequent governments accepted a series of loans whose conditions followed neoliberal logic. The first structural adjustment loan (SAL I) was signed in 1985. It redirected industrial development from domestic and regional to international markets. It also introduced production of “non-traditional crops” (tropical export crops: macadamias, ornamental plants, cut flowers), lowered tariffs, eliminated crop price supports and reduced state enterprise and personnel (Edelman 1999: 79-80). SAL II, signed in 1988, improved the infrastructure for agro-export and continued the privatization of state enterprise and reduction of personnel (Edelman 1999: 80-1). A final loan was secured from the Inter-American Development Bank in 1995, by assuring reductions in state personnel and tightening monetary policy (Edelman 1999: 81). Initially the shift produced minimal resistance, not because of the model’s own buoyancy but instead, because of U.S. funding.

During this period, Costa Rica was the second largest recipient of U.S. economic aid, strategically permitting gradual restructuring and promoting the redistributive power of the marketplace and electoral democracy. Anthropologist Marc Edelman points out that the logic behind this funding was to “build a democratic, prosperous, and stable showcase” in between Sandinista Nicaragua and Panama under Manuel Noriega ((Edelman 1999: 78; 83). Costa Rica was second to Israel in the amount of U.S. aid received per capita at the time (Robinson 2003: 136). Edelman argues that funding was more important in “bringing stability and fueling the export boom” than the neoliberal reforms. None-the-less, neoliberal economists hailed Costa

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77 Edelman notes that between 198-85, $592 million in economic aid was provided, amounting to 35.7 percent of Costa Rican government budget.
78 In total aid, it was second to El Salvador (Edelman 1999: 78)
Rica as a successful example of what U.S. president Ronald Reagan called “the magic of the marketplace” (Edelman 1999: 83). By the early 1990s, Costa Rican president Rafael Angel Calderon Fournier claimed, “the world bank and IMF declare us to be a human and economic miracle” while former president Oscar Arias and Central Bank director Eduardo Lizano maintained that Costa Rica could be the first developed country in Latin America (Edelman 1999: 3). In reality, this “boom” was built on foreign aid. Furthermore, the gradual dismantling of public services was key in avoiding upheavals in the 1980’s (Robinson 2003: 136-7; 144).

By the late 1990s, economic downturn was becoming apparent. Restructuring first resulted in increased informal employment, touted by the International Labor Organization as “small private enterprises.” (Edelman 1999: 87-89). Other measures called for the expansion of Costa Rican industries, including the diversification of agro-exports, export manufacturing and service exports. Many Costa Ricans residing in the Central Valley did enter new sectors of the workforce such as call centers, manufacturing, services, tourism, and agro-exportation. Still, people experienced shortages in public services, such as shortages of medical equipment, medicines and personnel in the social security system. Rising poverty was often discursively masked by lowering the “poverty line” or the minimum amount of income that the government declared to be sufficient for households to meet their basic necessities. Still, Edelman notes that prominent economists showed the number of people unable to meet those needs was far greater than the number declared to be living below the poverty line (1999: 88). These changes created a dual sense of the economy: increased opportunity in the job market and decline in public services. This only convoluted any sense of the source of declining welfare.

At the same time, Costa Rica lacked sufficient workforce to fulfill the requirements of these new industries (Cortes Ramos 2012). The full implementation of the neoliberal measures
required the presence of Nicaraguans in the Central Valley (Edelman 2000; Cortes Ramos 2006). Nicaraguans migrating to Costa Rica filled jobs that were abandoned as Costa Ricans were absorbed into new sectors or created as industries expanded. As middle class women moved into services, Nicaraguan women were hired as domestic workers in their homes. Nicaraguan men, likewise, took jobs in the construction and agricultural industries, which Costa Rican men no longer filled (Cortes Ramos 2006). While in 1992, Perez Aleman cites the U.S, Canada and Mexico as the principle destinations for Nicaraguan migrants (247), by 2000 more Nicaraguans migrated to Costa Rica than the U.S. (Robinson 2003). The labor of Nicaraguans became a key element allowing the Costa Rican economy to successfully diversify and expand (Goldade 2009: 487; Cortes Ramos 2006).79

Migrants’ growing presence also accompanied the growing sense of loss of classlessness, prosperity and homogeneity. As discussed in the previous section, Nicaraguans did not typically enter the metropolitan space prior to the 1990s nor were their numbers so large. In contrast, contemporary annual rates of migration exceed the aggregate numbers of migrants from the past. Thus, the current migration differs in intensity and Nicaraguans now constitute close to seven percent of the Costa Rican population (Cortes Ramos 2006; Robinson 2003: 278).80 Since the 1990s, these shifts in the ethnic and gendered division of labor in the Central Valley have generated a sense of unease. There has been little discussion in scholarly work of whether contemporary Nicaraguan incursion into in the Central Valley metropolitan area heightens the sense that Nicaraguans present a threat. Certainly, however, they have documented how rising xenophobia accompanied the turn towards the use of migrant labor in the country, more

79 It is worth inquiring whether there was some level of negotiation between the governments. Nicaraguans who migrate to Costa Rica have less financial and social capital than those who migrate to the U.S. suggesting this has been a safety valve for those without the capital to go to the U.S. and therefore greater potential for unrest (Landquist and Massey 2005).
80 This number is frequently inflated to 800,000 or 15% of the population; when I worked and lived in Costa Rica prior to graduate school, this was the number I saw used in the media, but also by scholars.
generally. While increased employment is credited to foreign investment, economic downturn is attributed to Nicaraguan presence. The reaction to Nicaraguans and the ability to utilize their presence are also clearly related to their incursion, specifically into the spatial-racial location of the discourse of exceptionalism. It is through this dominant understanding of the region that Costa Ricans interpret and assign meaning to the presence of Nicaraguans crossing the border into Costa Rica and, further, entering the space of the Central Valley. It influences a shared perception that it is the most progressive and exceptional area of an exceptional country. Because of the intensity and spatial characteristics of the current Nicaraguan migration, discourse about them has shifted from that of an undesirable other to that of a threat to exceptionalism.

E. Migrants, Exceptionalism and Stability
Costa Ricans’ preoccupation with Nicaraguans’ presence in the country deflected attention away from the actual adjustment process, namely the dismantling of the public sector, the shifting parameters for measuring well-being and the true need for migrant labor. The emergent sense of threat leads Costa Ricans to overlook the reality of the restructuring process. This oversight creates tacit consent for the new political economic arrangement. This illustrates William’s assertion that some emergent features are “really elements of some new phases of the dominant culture” (1977:123). Among these emergent features, some challenged authorities while others, even when seemingly oppositional, could reinforce confidence in it. In this case, Nicaraguan presence and rising Costa Rican poverty could have signaled shared marginality from similar forces and threatened exceptionalism. Instead, the predisposition to see Nicaraguans as different produced a renewed nationalism and calls on the government to restrict migration overall and migrants’ circulation, more specifically. The emergent downturn renewed Costa Ricans’ conviction of the nation’s exceptionalism and therefore dominant culture.
Signs of unease regarding the effects of changing social, political and economic arrangements in Costa Rica routinely surface. Yet the way this commonly manifests demonstrates the success in redirecting attention towards the influx of migrants and away from other aspects of the changing scene. For example, the expansion of call centers, high technology and information technology companies in the late 1990’s, was solely attributed to Costa Ricans’ high education levels. In turn, it inspired confidence in the idea that prosperity and positive economic indicators throughout the 1980s were the result of Costa Rican difference from the rest of the isthmus, which was mired in civil wars. Costa Rican government officials pronounced the country to be exceptional by claiming Costa Rica was “poised to be Latin America’s high tech capital” (Robinson 2003: 301-2). This brushes aside the fact that economic and political stability maintained high educational levels and attracted foreign firms. In turn, stability resulted, in no small part, from U.S. economic aid in the 1980’s and ongoing Nicaraguan migration to bolster economic growth (Robinson 2003: 301-2). Moreover, they also were part of expanding Free Trade Zones that accompanied the structural adjustment loans. Still, these changes have themselves been accompanied by discord. It was epitomized in a sticker my usually apolitical Costa Rican housemates had taped to the refrigerator around 2005. It was an exact replica of the “intel inside” sticker that is pasted to most PC computers. Instead, however, it stated “tico inside” The nationalist statement spoke to the prestige of hosting tech work in Costa Rica and the discomfort that Costa Rican’s intelligence and training be usurped for international consumption. Tellingly, the resentment of seeing Costa Ricans’ intelligence usurped to bolster international technology production does not translate into a concern for all workers being exploited. Namely, it does not provoke concern for Nicaraguan workers who bolster Costa Ricas economic success. The contradictory ways of understanding nationality, citizenship, belonging, history and
geography of Costa Rica produce unease surrounding Costa Rica’s position in a global market. They also reinforce a dominant sense of Nicaraguans as invasive, which is expressed through ways Costa Ricans see and respond to Nicaraguan migrants.

Migration has been key in generating consent towards neoliberal reforms in two indirect ways. Hiring low-wage domestic labor essentially reduces the costs of household or small business management, allowing families to maintain the same quality of life and consumption patterns to which they may feel class associations entitle them. However, the widespread use of low wage labor masks a downturn in relative income. The presence of migrants is employed by state officials to conceal the erosion of the modern foundation for the discourse of exceptionalism. The successes of the health and educational systems in Costa Rica have been at the root of claims of development (Edelman 1999; Robinson 2003). To avoid acknowledgement that these systems are being dismantled through privatization, state officials began to claim that Nicaraguan migrants overused these services and were responsible for their erosion since the early 1980s. Costa Rican sociologist Carlos Sandoval has provided significant insight into the ease with which this discourse circulates and the length of time it has circulated. He argues for the discourse be understood by returning to the structure of feeling generated by the discourse of exceptionalism. This discourse originates in official discourses and news sources while gaining a life of its own circulating principally through jokes, but also stories, positioning those who do not appear to genuinely know how to participate in the culture as others (Sandoval 2002: 153). To take hold, any discourse must connect with “common sense meanings” through understandable signifiers (Sandoval 2002: 12). Media in Costa Rica, particularly the Costa Rican newspapers *La Nación* and *La República*, have been voices favoring “neoliberal perspectives and political conservatism” (Sandoval 2002: 27). These frames of reference associate Nicaraguans
with increased urban insecurity, violence, poverty and overuse of the social welfare system (Sandoval 2002). In other words, they are positioned as posing direct threats to those aspects of Costa Rican life perceived to mark it as exceptional. As Costa Ricans began to criticize this turn, state officials subsequently began deflecting criticism by using the Nicaraguan migrant as a scapegoat (Robinson 2003: 280). This assertion is further reinforced by broad public participation in the discussion of a new restrictive immigration law in 2006, an important topic in presidential candidate debates in the 2005 presidential elections (Sandoval 2007: 378).

Anthropologist Bridget Hayden argues that the increasing visibility of poverty and inequality in Costa Rica, since the 1980’s, unnerved Costa Ricans eroding their sense of “classlessness” (2007: 29-30). This unease was redirected towards refugees and used to reinforce the dominant framework. In the early 1980’s, dominant views collapsed all categories of Latin American migrants, including Salvadoran refugees, under the rubric of illegality. Furthermore, this category conflated illegality with Nicaraguan nationality, effectively racializing national difference (Hayden 2007). At the time, the only significant migratory influx Costa Ricans had been exposed to was that of Nicaraguans. The concept of refugee was new and meaningless to Costa Ricans (Hayden 2007: 28; 128; 130). Rather than attempt to educate the population about refugees, Costa Rican government officials blamed them for the decline in available social welfare resources, as Haden says, “to deflect criticism against the state for worsening social conditions” towards an outside cause (Hayden 2007: 28). They argued that all migrants, as well as the political realities of nearby states, were “contaminating [the] peaceful country” (Hayden 2007: 29). Thus, the new sense of unease ultimately permitted the institutionalization of a new political-economic model while obscuring the actual causes of declining wealth and resources.
The experience of Nicaraguans is changing. Until Central American migration to San Jose began in the 1980’s, Nicaraguans were the imagined opposite of the Costa Rican in the discourse of exceptionalism given the distance of the Central Valley from Nicaragua and even from regions of Costa Rica receiving migrants. The recent entrance of a “backwards” population into the Central Valley of Costa Rica, and the metropolitan area in particular, constitutes what residents regard as a lived threat. Costa Ricans feel that Nicaraguans put the security of Costa Rica and the middle class life “at risk” (Bonilla-Carrion 2007: 146; Sandoval 2002; Hayden 2003). Discourses about them refer specifically to their activity within the nation that “there are too many of them, they threaten the Costa Rican national identity, they have exhausted the welfare state, and they commit most of the crimes” (Sandoval 2002: 146). Each of these principal representations reflects the sense that Nicaraguans are, as Sandoval argues, “contaminating the peaceful country[,] undermining the social order” of middle class life (2002: 7) and as other scholars assert, usurping finite state social welfare resources (Bonilla 2007; Hayden 2003; Robinson 2003).

The obvious question that emerges is: what inhibits Costa Ricans from seeing past this discourse? At the level of the formation of structure of feeling, direct experience can mediate discourse. In marginal neighborhoods of San Jose, where both Nicaraguans and Costa Ricans live together, residents do not distinguish between each other by nationality (Sandoval 2008: 378). On the outskirts of the city, where its poorest members live, xenophobic perceptions are significantly reduced and Nicaraguans feel significantly less discriminated against (Sandoval 2003: 117-18). The Costa Rican view of Nicaraguans as the other is not challenged by lived experience, even as Nicaraguans enter the Central Valley. Nicaraguans principally reside in squatter settlements, due to the high cost of rent in city neighborhoods and the unwillingness of
Costa Ricans to rent to them. They enter into and socialize in public spaces minimally, but even then, only Nicaraguan public spaces, such as Braulio Carillo Park, which is considered a meeting space for Nicaraguans and a space that Costa Ricans avoid (Sandoval 2002: 81; 129-30).

However for most Costa Ricans, their lived experience of Nicaraguans is minimal, dominated by racialized images of the segregated areas they inhabit and negative portrayals of Nicaraguans in the media (Campos Zamora and Tristan Jimenez 2009). In the absence of interpersonal contact with Nicaraguans, Costa Ricans are exposed to a largely one-sided view of Nicaraguans through negative media representations and jokes circulating through text messages, emails and other electronic communication. These reproduce criminal images of Nicaraguans and reinforce official state discourse about them (Masis Fernandez and Paniagua 2007; Campos Zamora et al 2009). One particular incident highlighted widespread perceptions. In 2005, news channels broadcast the 30-minute attack and killing of a Nicaraguan migrant by a pair of Rottweiler guard dogs in front of police and local news film crews. The man, Natividad Candida, had trespassed on private property (Sandoval 2007; Masis Fernandez and Paniagua 2007). 81 Through texts and emails, jokes about Nicaraguans immediately began circulating. Among them was a depiction of a Rottweiler posed between two flags stating “Forget Juan Santamaria, welcome our new national hero” (my translation; Masis Fernandez et al 2007: 348). Jokes about Nicaraguans are considered natural. Even after the attack, a survey of 800 University of Costa Rica students revealed that only four voiced objections to jokes about Nicaraguans (Ramirez Caro 2007: 315). Nicaraguans ultimately receive little sympathy in their daily lives. When they

81The owner of the dogs had begged the police not to shoot the dogs. Otherwise lack in training in dog attacks, the police resorted to spraying the dogs with water to little effect. Subsequent news programs touted new training programs for police in preventing dog attacks. Little public discussion focused on xenophobia towards Nicaraguans.
do enter public spaces, they endure abuse. Nicaraguans report that when they are recognized as Nicaraguans in public spaces such as buses:

we hear people criticizing us, calling us: bastards, sons of bitches, people dying of starvation[^82] and rascals. They express themselves in a vulgar and hostile way…it affects us because although we come here with no visa, we are helping to build up this country, doing those jobs that Costa Ricans don’t like to do. [Sandoval 2002: 129][^83]

Thus, official discourse and media representations shape popular discourse about Nicaraguans and shape the practices and forms of expression directed at them.

This treatment of Nicaraguans generates self-segregation.[^84] Various migrants, residing in smaller Nicaraguan neighborhoods, expressed the desire to live in even larger segregated settlements to be surrounded by fellow Nicaraguans. Further, as I will discuss in greater detail in chapter 6, contact routinely occurs in spaces where the practice of marking distinction along gendered, racialized and nationalized hierarchies of belonging preclude egalitarian interactions.[^85]

It seems unlikely official discourse will change in the near future nor any step be taken towards restructuring practices in these spaces. More frequent, egalitarian interaction between Costa Ricans and Nicaraguans would threaten to reveal the contributions Nicaraguans make to the country and might unmask the state role in dismantling the public sector. Thus, the residential and occupational segregation of Nicaraguans is a key component in the reproduction of discourse that blames Nicaraguans, masks the erosion of the public sector and generates consent for restructuring.

[^82]: The translators of this book chose to use “people dying of starvation” as the translation of *muertos de hambre*, used in the original quote. This is the literal translation, however. *Muerto de hambre* is usually used to say people who have an unending appetite, in other words, who, like someone dying of starvation, pounce on anything they can get their hands on at any time, often implying usurping resources that may be destined for others.

[^83]: Quote from an interview with a Nicaraguan migrant.

[^84]: I am somewhat amazed to find that no one has reported asking this question.

[^85]: Such as relationships between employer and domestic employees or in state agencies (e.g. schools, clinics, service providers, police stations and courts) between public officials and Nicaraguan service-seekers.
The discourse of exceptionalism remained at the center of nation-building efforts through which elites framed the practices by government and the Costa Rican citizenry as distinct from, and morally superior to, the practices of governments and citizens from surrounding countries. The current period in which neoliberal restructuring is taking place signals a new phase of nation-building. The social welfare system is viewed as a key among modern state practices marking Costa Rica as exceptional. To maintain legitimacy as they dismantle the social welfare system, state officials reference another shared understanding among Costa Ricans: that migrants, particularly Nicaraguan migrants, pose a threat to national identity and practice. The presence of Nicaraguans participating in low-wage labor upholding economic expansion also serves as a population onto which criticism can be deflected. The image of “illegal” Nicaraguans usurping the social welfare system is readily accepted. The same view of Nicaraguans as dangerous discourages interaction with them as much as any attempt to incorporate them. Thus, Costa Ricans have little experience with Nicaraguans through which they can mediate the images of Nicaraguans portrayed by media sources and state officials.

Until recently, the restructuring of the state and reduction of state enterprise has been met with relatively little resistance, while programs, which have expanded employment opportunities, generally generate support. While originally the discourse of exceptionalism was utilized to defend the sovereignty of Costa Rica, more recently discourses warning of the presence of internal threats to exceptionalism have been utilized to cultivate consent if not ambivalence towards the newest phase of state formation. The labor of Nicaraguans is key to the ability to continue the project of expansion and in generating approval for structural adjustment.

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86 Living in Costa Rica from 2000-2008, public protest was relatively uncommon. The signing of CAFTA-DR provoked large manifestations in 2006, as did corruption charges for 3 past presidents. Yet, in 2012 when I conducted fieldwork, large protests became a monthly activity. Ch 7 includes discussion of nationalism in these protests.
programs, while their presence also distracts from aspects of restructuring with the potential to create significant resistance.

F. “It’s all Pura Vida”: Exclusion in Life Abroad
In this section, I explore the shifts in migrant women’s and sending families’ lives that galvanize them. On the one hand, my research points directly to ways the discourse of exceptionalism manifests in complex manners between employers, state officials’ perceptions of themselves as “good” people and the assumption that their adherence to protocol is sufficient. Most women I speak with tell me Costa Ricans generally treat them well, although over the course of hours-long interviews, they elaborate the different forms of exclusion they experience. Within each woman’s story, incidents of explicit discrimination are disperse. Xenophobic diatribes are rare, confined to employers’ occasional moments of rage or unfold in newspaper editorials, radio show discussions, public outbursts and personal conversations beyond the ears of migrants.

I suggest that migrant women’s interactions with inequality and discrimination are more direct and more intense than men’s. Why do they experience discrimination more acutely? Many women, particularly mothers, frequently enter the domain of the state. That is to say, public schools, clinics, welfare centers, police stations, even courts. Additionally, their places of work bring them into greater proximity. Nicaraguan men who reside in the Central Valley principally work on construction sites. There, interaction with Costa Ricans is minimal. Nicaraguan women who reside in the Central Valley as domestic workers cross an additional border, entering into neighborhoods and homes of Costa Ricans. Thus it is women are routinely in contact with Costa Ricans. Still, research shows that in general, proximity fosters understanding. So, why would women be at the forefront of social movements protesting the lack of guarantees for and violence
directed against Nicaraguans? Below, I explore the circumstances in which proximity fosters greater tension.

Karen Kampwirth discusses how contact with the state in urban areas is more intensely negative, as is discrimination for women, because of the tasks assigned to their gender roles (2000). In a forum I attended in Costa Rica, a teacher and member of a semi-urban municipality noted that in parent-teacher meetings, 90% of the people present were women. Meanwhile, Nicaraguan men are employed principally as construction, agricultural workers or guards. The employer-employee relationship is more dilute in these group contexts and certainly, less confined and more temporal than home work: fewer “national/racial” boundaries are crossed. They experience violence from a different position within the social hierarchy of Costa Rica.

Their social reproductive responsibilities do not generally bring them to such intimately guarded national spaces such as schools, clinics and police (Bonilla 2007). Their complaints may focus more on workplace accidents or collective suits over labor violations. However, in these cases it is the absence of the state intervention that galvanizes women and forms the basis for alliances, overall a condition endemic to rural areas that experience dispossession differently in the era of the shrinking state.

Network women chose to migrate as a potential solution. However, as indicated by their organizing in Costa Rica, women’s efforts to resolve structural violence by accessing services and protections are routinely frustrated. Discrimination intensifies in San Jose, the heart of exceptionalism, highlighting what are deemed to be colorlines within the state (Stocker 2005:27; 87 In rural areas, it is these same types of roles that create alliances between migrant and non-migrant populations.

88 One occupation commonly occupied by Nicaraguan men is as street guards, CPFs as they are formally known and watchman: a term that in Costa Rica, conflates a job as a neighborhood guard with being Nicaraguan. The status of a security job still incurs as sense of mistrust. While Nicaraguan men are subject to discriminatory remarks and patterns of behavior, especially in labor practices, there are qualitative differences. First, they experience violence from a different position within the social hierarchy of Costa Rica; secondly, their responsibilities do not recur into such intimately guarded national spaces.
Appelbaum, Macpherson and Roseblatt 2003: 11; 27; Alvarenga 2008: 6, 17-18; Harpelle 2001: 129), which constitute “transborder crossing” (Stephen 2008: 246; 430, 435; Khosravi 2010: 98). Nicaraguans’ increasing employment in homes and service sectors has drawn them into San Jose. Women cross additional borders: as domestic workers, they enter into neighborhoods and homes of Costa Ricans and are charged with the work of social reproduction, bringing them into direct contact, and sometimes, explicit conflict with state representatives. For example, whether single or raising children with a partner, women are typically responsible for enrolling their children in schools, seeking medical attention for their children and themselves at public clinics, particularly when they are pregnant or sick, and appealing to the police when facing domestic violence or neighborhood crime. Women engage in multiple transborder crossings. Nicaraguan women migrants confront the active practices of employers and public employees “protecting” Costa Rica from the threat of “outsiders” by erecting social barrier in intimate spaces (Cortes Ramos 2006; Hayden 2003; Sandoval 2002; Palmer 1993; Cruz 2005; Wiley 2005). But further, they confront institutions whose purposes, policies, and services are structured by many of the same norms and hierarchies (Sagot 2010; Carcedo 2003). The practices emerge in relation to the social construction of migrant unworthiness and the national framing of social and universal rights. Such practices routinely frustrate their attempts to access services, rights and democratic participation (Stephen 2007; DeGenova 2005; Kearney 1995).

When public employees and employers deny Network women access to rights and services, they readily explain away the refusal with an objective justification. In other words, they attribute the denial to a particular situation, rather than their own personal will. School directors refuse immigrant children a place in their school citing the absence of space in their classrooms. Government employees argue migrants do not meet the prerequisites for enrollment
in government programs, prerequisites that officials cannot bypass. Medical staff claim to provide the best diagnosis, one that does not resolve a curable condition. Employers refuse to raise migrants’ below-minimum-wage-salary, claiming they also treat employees as friends or family members. Migrants often demonstrate that the pretense for refusal is unfounded. But more to the point, the intention and sentiment behind the refusal remains ambiguous. Though reproducing exclusion, it can be difficult to surmise aggressors’ awareness of their motivation much less the origin of their motivation to engage in tacitly exclusionary practices. Women experience these exclusions at two levels, as practices recurring in the space of state institutions and spaces ostensibly regulated by the state, but also, as pervasive ways in which Costa Ricans and fellow Nicaraguans interact with them, while they are abroad.

In some cases, these activities are largely isolating. Cleaning services, particularly domestic work is largely devoid of social interaction much less labor solidarity. Seeking services for self and children are also largely individual affairs, based on appointments, and individual needs such as medical appointments, parent-teacher-administrator meetings, welfare assessment, abuse assessment. Finally, intimate partner and family violence largely takes place in the home. Successfully responding to such situations requires information about rights and laws, contacts and procedures in the case of violations. Such information is noticeably and systematically

89 Moreover, exclusion and competition affects interactions between migrants. At the same time, Nicaraguan women struggling to make a life in Costa Rica, often mention being “stepped on” by other Nicaraguans in relationships they expect to be characterized by solidarity based on their shared nationality and exclusion abroad. The sense of betrayal is expressed in the outrage in the oft-heard exclamation “me lo hizo un paisano! (A countryman did it to me)!” Migrants report being cheated out of jobs, tricked into migrating, fired from work or kicked out of housing, lured into credit and loan schemes—all in moments of vulnerability—and all by “paisanos”. While the treatment of Nicaraguans by Costa Ricans is routinely, explicitly hateful, migrants consistently cite incidents in which a fellow Nicaraguan has done them wrong. In the midst of jostling for a place in Costa Rica, jostling for higher pay, lower rent, mitigating unforeseen challenges, that migrants find themselves facing off with each other. Cecilia Menjivar writes about a similar situation that Salvadoran migrants confront in San Francisco, California. In a saturated low-wage employment and low-income housing market, similar tensions emerge within Salvadoran migrant networks (2000; see also Julca 2001; Mahler 1995). Often, Menjivar notes, migrants refuse to interact with recently friends and family from El Salvador, to avoid the future tension of fighting over scarce space and resources—or to avoid future conflict when new arrivals are unable to reciprocate the material support family provides when they arrive. Though space and jobs are abundant in Costa Rica, it is clear that in diverse areas, that social and economic insecurity can also render tenuous the bond of shared nationality.
absent from the marginal areas and sites immigrant women typically inhabit and occupy. Increasing social interaction among women assists in the flow of information. Organizing also provides important, if informal, leverage in confronting institutional violations of rights.

This gender differential is not limited to Nicaraguan women’s experience. Costa Rican scholar Monserrat Sagot argues democratic openings have allowed new ideas to proliferate in Costa Rica. The feminist movement, forged at the end of the Latin American “decade of women” (1972-1985), was able to take advantage of the Central American Peace Accords, attributed to then-president Oscar Arias (1986-1990; 2006-2010), as a moment when concerns for violence against women could be inserted into a regionalized and localized argument for efforts towards achieving peace (2010). Yet as she shows over the following 25 years, the efficacy of the achievements made was effectively neutralized. There was a failure to recognize the structural imbalance of power between genders. The effect was compounded by the defunding of state institutions that served women (Sagot 2010). Particularly, a renewed conservative turn moving into the first decade of the millennium limited any of feminists’ proposed measures. She argues that each of the many forms of violence limit democratic participation and together they amount to second-class citizenship. Interestingly, she prefaces her argument on the premise that Costa Rica had the strongest formal democracy but also the least social turmoil of any of the Central American states at the outset of the 1980s while surrounded by countries experiencing “war and systemic violations of human rights” (2010: 225). It is in this context and given the notion of Costa Rica as an example of democratic order in the midst of chaos, which may easily produce the view that its laws towards women and children are progressive. Though the Sandinista Revolution may have proposed a more radical feminist agenda, these priorities were lost, as the government confronted the specter of counterrevolutionary forces. Moreover, as Sagot argues,
given that a state is a “differentiated set of social institutions” the response of different institutions to issues of feminism and violence can vary widely (2010: 224). While the legal right of men to exercise violence against women is no longer explicitly recognized in most Western societies, the heritage of ancient law and openly sanctioned social practices continue to generate the conditions that allow the pervasive existence of this type of violence, particularly the notion that home life “should not fall within the control of the state” (Sagot 2010: 221).

In Costa Rica, Nicaraguan women’s activities are treated as liminal and conditionally permissible transgressions into spaces circumscribed for those “belonging” to the nation. There is an inherent contradiction in the view that women’s place is the home because their social reproductive roles routinely remove them from the home and set them in the midst of the public sphere. There they are routinely treated as out of place and inferior: as women and migrants as much as other facets of their subject position. I suggest we can similarly frame the interactions in Costa Rican service institutions, where public employees effectively, if unintentionally, demarcate social boundaries of who is deserving of the benefits of state institutions that undergird Costa Ricans sense of democratic distinctiveness. Ethnographies discussing domestic workers worldwide show how employers actively and self-consciously construct markers of distinction to maintain social barriers between employer and employee within the household. While pointing out employees’ obligations to the household, employers also point out their subordinate and tenuous position there. Any relationship of domination and subordination must be actively reasserted (Gamburd 2000; Chin 1997; Yeoh et al 1998; Gogna 1989; Ray and Quyum 2009).
In this final section, I describe a meeting held in October of 2012, where members of the Network participated in the attempt to establish a national public policy towards immigrants. I find the event interesting in two ways. It became one among many instances in which the Center led women to share their experiences in Costa Rica and imagine other ways of being. I conclude with this vignette because it provides not only an example of the ways the Center brings Network members together but also the many facets of daily life abroad from which Nicaraguan find themselves excluded. This episode segues into the next chapter, describing how exclusion operates in their daily lives.

The hotel ballroom where we met was half-full with large round tables covered in forest green tablecloths. We were greeted by Leticia, the Center’s director, and Alberto, a politics professor from the University of Costa Rica (UCR). The first to introduce himself, he elicited cheers upon announcing that he himself was born in Nicaragua to a Nicaraguan mother and that these issues were indeed close to his heart. In simple accessible language, he would later make the idea of public policy accessible to immigrants with all levels formal education.

Each meeting of the Center is an exercise in popular education. On that day, the meeting was organized around four objectives. The first was to create a window on actual migrant lives, the second, to identify obstacles to migrants’ full exercise of social rights, the third to promulgate a participatory vision of citizenship through the allocation of non-profit funding towards

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90The meeting started off with a sense of urgency. Earlier that morning, while waiting for a pair of buses to pick members of the Network up from San Jose’s central park, a group of police had arrived and had begun checking people’s documents. On more than one occasion, women had observed other immigrants hauled off to police vans, ostensibly for deportation. So Lila had ushered everyone across the street away from the park; once the first bus arrived, members leapt in, some remained standing awkwardly in the aisle once the seats had filled. While we waited, flustered, for the other bus to arrive, we observed through the window as two policemen strolled up to different groups who held their hands out, showing their documents to them. Finally, we took off easily navigating the empty downtown streets on Sunday morning, to a more exclusive neighborhood where the hotel was located.

91His short articles on the shifting socio-economic scene in Nicaragua, its relation to migration and the new immigration law I had found illuminating and unique a few years back and continued to be a reference for my work.
broadening migrants’ participation in a national policy-making exercise, and the fourth to strengthen the exercise of citizenship through education about the formulation and governing purpose of laws and policies. As was typical of Center meetings and in line with the production of a known community, the day began with the introductions of everyone in attendance. The academics and professionals present stressed their ties to the immigrant community. Members of the Network from all over the country emphasized the length of their association with the organization, while members of an associated youth immigrant network, organized by the Center, enumerated their accomplishments with pride.

Leticia presented an analogy of how public policy worked. This was intended to provide women with some inkling of when and how they would intervene. She explained that the 2009 immigration law⁹² created a national advisory board on migration to construct public policies. To help them understand the purpose of public policy, she invited women to picture a pyramid, envisioning a policy as the wide base, the laws as a slightly narrowed middle level and a code of conduct as the apex of the pyramid. She reiterated that codes of conduct dictate how laws are implemented and that laws respond to policies. Alberto interjected using the analogy of a soccer game. “The law defines the playing field but not who plays, not the positions, not the color of the uniform. The policy defines the emphasis, the priorities, the actors [and] the distribution of resources. More importantly,” Leticia noted, “a policy transcends any single administration.” Alberto reminded that the law was not the last word. Any “government could give a hardline or dilute interpretation of the law.”

Next, she discussed the law itself. In Costa Rica, Leticia explained, the immigration law uncharacteristically preceded any public policy. The Center, she continued, had been invited to

⁹² General Law of Migration and Alien Affairs (No. 8,764), which went into effect in March 2010 (Asamblea Legislativa de la República 2009). (Sandoval Garcia 2015: 8)
participate in an advisory board that would formulate the policy, representing “civil society” entities. The advisory board would be relaying its recommendations by January 2013, just a few months after the meeting took place, in order to ensure the policy would be in place before the following electoral year, 2014. Then Alberto expanded on what they meant when they spoke about policy, laws, state institutions and government. He utilized simple language and many examples, moving along slowly and providing examples according to the participants’ indications of their understanding. This preamble informed participants about the ways the migration advisory council would use the suggestions they made that day.

Alberto explained that the idea of consulting Network members was advocated by academics and organization representatives participating on the board. They had insisted that the policy be formulated based on a “broad consultation with all sectors” affected by the policy. It would reflect migrants’ opinions, as they developed through conversation with academics, migrants and social organizations. He went on to argue the basis for this manner of working, stating “A [true] state policy should develop out of a broad consensus and receive equally broad support. This would make it resilient against partisan politics and difficult to dismantle.” He explained that before, without a public policy in place, President Abel Pacheco’s administration (2002-2006) implemented a more restrictive law in 2005. His administration’s immigration policy was influenced by the U.S.’ post 9-11 policy when pressure from international organizations conditioned the political economy. The danger was that in the absence of public policy the government had wielded its own priorities. Alberto continued:

the purpose of the day is for us to put forth our priorities [because] the citizenry interacts with policies. [Furthermore] belonging and participation in decision-making should be the rights of all those residing in the country, rather than those with citizenship status. Access

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93 As the events of September 11, 2001, at the World Trade Center are commonly known in Costa Rica.
to the state shouldn’t be about your nationality but about your contribution, your participation in the place [you reside in].

With these last comments, he encouraged everyone present to engage in the day’s discussion. In this manner, he addressed any participants’ reservations about the potential for their voices to be included. Further, he demonstrated to them the possibility that their policies could guide the current law towards a more “welcoming” interpretation for migrants.

Leticia explained the model they would use to generate priorities for the policy. We would work in groups identifying problems, causes, consequences and solutions. Divided into groups of women, youth, and finally, men and women workers. Center workers would compile and present the priorities to academic members of the council the following week. They would then be utilized to draft recommendations. I remained with the women, a mix of representatives from Grupo Cartaguito, Grupo Merced and Grupo San Felipe. We totaled approximately 25 people. Lila asked me to record the conclusions, in order to write an evaluation of the proceedings for the funders. Leticia led the women’s group, creating a chart on two newsprint pads propped up on stands. She prompted the women to generate a list, beginning by identifying problems they faced, then going through the problems identifying their causes, consequences and proposing a solution.

Women from the Merced Group answered most rapidly. They were well-versed in explaining their own exclusion. They spoke as if they had repeated these issues, their origins and their consequences in one forum after another. They spoke in between to each other loudly, at times, laughing and tuning in and out of the conversation. They seemed to know that if one of them didn’t answer, the others would. The first issue they named was access to healthcare without discrimination. More specifically, they addressed inadequate sexual and reproductive healthcare. They cited lack of residency and work permits as the cause. They explained that
women did not have social security because it could not be secured without having residency papers. The consequences, they determined, would be unwanted pregnancies, fatal diseases such as cancer and the inability to detect preventable diseases in time. Leticia rapidly chimed in that practice should meet international agreements, the women named sexual and reproductive health as a human right that should not be subordinated to legal status or other facets of the human condition.

A dynamic developed. Women drew ideas from the issues they or their friends had faced. They identified exclusion in all aspects of women’s lives. It presented a concentrated grim picture of life and exclusion from rights. Typically, a woman would propose an idea, often in a lengthier explanation. Leticia would record the situation, the abbreviated language of policy, social service representatives and academic analysis. The examples reinforced what I heard in life history interviews: that direct and sometimes totalizing exclusions present themselves in more subtle, disperse and ambiguous ways. Women from the Cartaguito and San Felipe Groups pointed to issues facing families as a whole, for example, the impediments to education for women and children. They attributed the obstacles to meeting the criteria for extending scholarships to women in poverty, the inadequate class schedules that didn’t consider the timing of work and family obligations, women’s lack of documentation, their poverty, and the way communities discourage women’s continuing education, labeling them selfish and self-important. The result was the inability to access education, to better themselves, and to develop tools to navigate Costa Rican’s reading-heavy terrain of rights, papers and labor.

Time was short, as the consultation was taking place on many participants’ one day off. To move things along, Leticia began suggesting problems they might be having whenever there was a lull in the conversation. Although this seemed like her particular technique for
encouraging speech, she clearly anticipated many women’s answers. In this sense, time limitations occasionally precluded the ability to elicit new issues thoroughly and creatively. Leticia’s ideas still corresponded to migrant concerns, deriving from more than twenty years of community organizing and advocacy work with Nicaraguan immigrants.

Access to work permits, many of the women chimed in, was impeded by gender norms but also institutional deficiencies and costly prerequisites. Men often prioritized their own documentation while leaving their wives and children to remain without papers. Women were unfamiliar with the places where they could solicit accurate instructions. Other impediments included the Ministry of the Exterior’s failure to acknowledge that a high percentage of women did not even have Nicaraguan birth certificates, much less state identification. A final impediment was the requirement that women insure themselves directly rather than through a spouse, implying a cost of 27,000 colones or close to US$60. Moreover, under-informed state employees occasionally inflated the number. They proposed that the government eliminate the requirement of direct insurance enrollment. They also concluded that these impediments to accessing services violated migrants’ human rights.

Proceeding in this fashion, women identified a long list of problems such as the lack of access to justice, difficulty, if not impossibility of obtaining documents, lack of information about rights, access to credit, access to dignified housing, sexual harassment from state service providers and employers, lack of access to childcare, frequent denouncement of child neglect, inadequate salaries and the requirement of transferring remittances in dollars. Many of the obstacles worked in conjunction with each other: inadequate housing, childcare and salaries lead women to leave children behind at “all” hours in such housing. In addition, women recounted inadequate service from employees of state institutions charged with attending the public. They
recognized that their under-inscription in services stemmed from a deficient circulation of information about immigrants’ rights to services. This was augmented by public employee’s benign neglect or malicious intent that effectively blocked migrants from obtaining state documentation and, in turn, services such as housing and credit. They gave further examples of clinic guards requesting state identification when women seek to enter a clinic or when medical staff required proof of social security inscription as a prerequisite for medical attention. Further, blocking immigrants from self-insuring can also raise the cost of medical care.

We generated a list and then broke for lunch. When we returned, Leticia had already pre-selected a condensed set of issues from the list that the groups would scrutinize. She had largely eliminated, what she saw as redundancies. The women scanned the papers and concluded that the consequences clustered around the increasing exclusion and segregation of immigrant communities, the separation of families within Costa Rica, and low human education, health and quality of life indexes within immigrant communities. Providing solutions required familiarity with law and codes of conduct beyond many women’s knowledge. This, combined with the need to wrap up the activity, produced a shift in the dynamic as Leticia began to fill in solutions on the newsprint while calling them out to the group. Still, all remained engaged with the process. Solutions included heeding signed international conventions or joining unsigned conventions, reforms to laws, and increasing investment in the training of all state employees towards adherence to gender-sensitive norms and human rights prerogatives. We concluded by having participants in the various groups read off their lists of obstacles, causes and suggestions. The excitement grew among participants and leaders. Everyone in the room cheered as each section read off its list. As the last group spoke, the giddiness and restlessness had become palpable. Still it was mediated by a clear sense of pride and purpose in what had been accomplished. They had
clearly articulated migrants’ and more specifically women migrants’ priorities. They spoke to the critical need for policy informed by those it affects. As the last items were read, everyone rose from their seats, laughing and chanting. Leaders began to snap photographs of the group together. As they stood as a group, one woman grabbed the Center’s banner that had hung from the wall and as she brought it over, others grabbed the corners of the banner to wave it. A chant rose above the din. Those with nothing in their hands, raised their fists. A wide smile grew across Leticia’s face as she made out the words, clenching her fist and pumping her arm high in the air “¡Vaginas al poder, vaginas al poder! (Vaginas empowered, vaginas empowered!).”

H. Conclusion
The arrival of Nicaraguan migrants, particularly women, to the heart of exceptionalism played an important role in generating consent over neoliberal restructuring. This misrecognition of Nicaraguans as the culprit in the decline of the social welfare system sustains confidence in the resilient structure of the Costa Rican state and its persistent conflation with a social welfare model. The emergence of a sense of decline and disorder is directed towards the visible presence of Nicaraguan immigrants, propagating xenophobic reactions as well as the subtle deployment of exclusionary attitudes and practices towards them. In turn, xenophobia towards Nicaraguans constitutes a prominent emergent element of culture. It resurrects, in new ways, residual tensions over territorial incursion that had been fostered since the post-colonial period. Rather than resulting in diplomatic conflicts, this tension influences the ways of seeing and acting towards migrants that propagates their exclusion. Nicaraguan workers sustain Costa Rican economic growth through their labor in new industries and their low salaries. Simultaneously invisible, excluded and exploitable, Nicaraguan women permit the ongoing ability to redirect the wealth they produce to the top.
This blatant dynamic causes new forms of stress for Nicaraguan women migrants. In the country of *pura vida*, Nicaraguan women traversed intimately guarded national spaces while remaining at the bottom of the social hierarchy. The gap between the expectation of sharing in the social milieu of *pura vida* and Nicaraguan women’s actual experiences serves as the contradictory experience that causes women to question their marginality, begin to articulate their collective exclusion and organize around their structural exclusion.
VII AMBIGUOUS REFUSALS

In spite of the entrenched sense that Nicaraguans epitomize otherness in Costa Rica, only a handful of the members of the Network complained of any regular egregious displays of prejudice towards them. Xenophobic diatribes were largely confined to media discussions, public outbursts and private conversations between Costa Ricans. Although well aware of xenophobic attitudes towards Nicaraguans, the exclusion Network members experienced was meted out through casual tacitly exclusionary acts that rarely overtly alluded to their status as immigrants. Anthropologists explore ambiguity to understand how acts of intimidation are carried out, largely unseen to those who are not targeted. In her ethnography of violence in wartime Guatemala, Linda Green asserts that the exact reason for or target of violence remained ambiguous. Without knowing whether they were the target, people were at a loss to ascertain which activities might provoke an attack and became more fearful, lending greater efficacy to these acts of intimidation (Greene 2006: 6). In Costa Rica, migrants face a different type of ambiguity, the ambiguity of refusal. Certainly, they occasionally confront attempts to exclude and intimidate them as Nicaraguans. But most prominently, Nicaraguan women are treated in ways that re-emphasize exclusion in the most subtle manner. Their stories highlight the ways Costa Rican citizens respond, if unwittingly, to the idea that Nicaraguan women have committed implicitly transgressive transborder crossings. What became obvious was their persistent marginality. But being relegated to segregated areas of the city also enabled women to find each other and articulate a collective marginal experience, together.

Nonetheless xenophobic attitudes persist. This trend has been well-documented by researchers collaborating with the Institute for Social Studies at the University of Costa Rica, principally under the direction of Sociologist Carlos Sandoval (2002; ibid 2007; Sandoval,
Montoya and Paniagua 2012; Campos and Tristan 2007). Much of this work focuses on demystifying the contributions to and demands that Nicaraguans make of Costa Rica. Moreover, they reveal social interactions that overtly reinforce status differences, particularly in the workplace. This focus on exposing misinformed and overtly racist attitudes laid the groundwork for national dialogues about racism. At the same time, it directed the main focus of investigation on explicit expressions of xenophobia and attempts to exclude, based on nationality. For example, a 2012 census in Costa Rica asked those surveyed to report their attitudes towards foreigners and foreign nationals of different origins. While an important first step in recognizing the issue, it overlooked how exceptionalism, as a structure of feeling, narrows Costa Ricans’ perception of who deserves rights according to class, race, gender and nationality. Through subtle everyday acts of gatekeeping, they consistently interfere in Nicaraguans access to democratic participation.

Critical race theory suggests that subtle as well as overtly racist practices are a significant way of maintaining racial hierarchies because they are built into underlying social and political systems. Anthropologist Jane Hill draws on critical race theory to understand White racism in the United States. Hill (2009) attributes misperceptions regarding persistent racism as stemming from widely-held folk theories of racism. According to Hill, these ways of thinking about racism equate individual overtly prejudiced attitudes with the totality of racism and also its marker. Meanwhile structural racism persists, often unperceived, in institutional structures, forms of interaction and ways of seeing. Hill locates manners ordinary people “talk and behave in ways that advance the projects of white racism” although they “do not share White supremacist beliefs[,] deny that they are racist and…claim to abhor racism in word and deed” (2009: 4, 7).

94 Hill notes the problem with such ways of thinking are not that they are unreflective, but they handle any contradictory evidence with erasure (2009:5).
Such racism is rendered visible through critical race theories while folk theories only perpetuate White racism. For example, she notes that folk theory leads people to perceive the preference of White students in a cafeteria to sit together “on the same moral plane” as the choice of African American students to sit together, “distorting… [the] magnitude of white power” (2009:7) and how racism works. Hill’s work sheds light on the Nicaraguan women’s experiences in Costa Rica, where exclusion is often overlooked in the search for explicitly xenophobic and racist forms of expression.

Costa Rican’s sense of distinction was evident in the consistent multiple incidents of exclusion each Network member described. Costa Ricans extended services and participation to those who fit the definition of belonging to the nation. This proved to be a circular definition. Belonging was congruent with holding middle class status, living in urban areas, demonstrating affinity for conspicuous consumption, holding citizenship and whiteness. They refused or were consistently reluctant to extend services to Nicaraguans. The idea that participation was being universally extended ignored that these were principally inherited conditions, yet those who held this status were identified as the self-sufficient citizens worthy of state support. But they rarely made direct reference to their status as migrants. Instead, they pointed to issues of paperwork, or implied Nicaraguan women’s requests for assistance exceeded the time and resources allocated to them. Rather than blatant statements of antipathy, their exclusion was captured in the consistency and multitude of ambiguous refusals, that is, refusals whose justification did not explicitly respond to a sense of threat. This produced a sector of the population conceded minimal rights converting them into a vulnerable gender and ethnically-segregated labor force. Moreover, they discouraged women from seeking access out of the fear of refusal and humiliation. The power of the fear of being refused heavily influenced women’s decisions. This
is similarly overlooked in understanding the experiences of blackness in the U.S. (Young 2015).

It is important, however, to make note of the spaces in which women overwhelmingly encountered these refusals: in their attempts to settle in neighborhoods, in workplaces and in accessing state services such as education, healthcare and police. These were themselves spaces in which dominant frames of belonging heavily influence interactions within the spaces. In state services, premised upon serving Costa Ricans, service providers at best appeared to see Nicaraguans as recipients of their benevolence.

This tendency rings true in Hill’s assessment of structural racism. She suggests that in the U.S. a variety of indicators contribute to the sense that people of color warrant substandard treatment. In marginal neighborhoods, the specter of decaying buildings or bulletproof glass in businesses “become a material sign of the vices of Color” attributed to their propensity “to take poor care of property.” Likewise, the use of “non-standard grammar” is perceived to reveal the speaker to be “speaking illogically, revealing the poverty and disorder of their thought” (Hill 2009: 27; 31, 36). She points out that there is a high propensity to identify non-conforming behavior even when it does not occur.95 For example, when someone perceived to be foreign is speaking, listeners will hear an accent. In turn, each of these is conflated with deficient performance in other areas. She emphasizes the failure of these attitudes or “uninformed gazes” to acknowledge that each of these are signs of the structural inequality people of color face (Hill 2009: 27) that white people themselves are complicit in reproducing.

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95 Hill points out, accent and speech can be imposed and inferred. She cites a study in which the same voice of a native English speaker was superimposed on a video of people of distinct racial appearance. However, those viewing the video perceived different accents and grammatical accuracy depending on which speaker was portrayed. For example, an Asian individual was perceived to make more errors and speak with an accent.
Exceptionalism produced understandings of any non-conforming appearance or activity as foreign and intrusive. It produced the commonsense notion that Nicaraguans took advantage of rights and belonging. Exceptionalism, as a structure of feeling that encompassed Costa Rican institutions at all scales, produced exclusionary actions in the realm in public services. In turn, the persistent obstruction of their attempts to access social rights augmented Network women’s sense of discord with Costa Rican claims of democracy and universalism. Raymond William wrote that there were “specific relationships… [a]..dominant social order neglects, excludes, represses or simply fails to recognize” (1977:125). In this case, it neglected Nicaraguan women’s humanity. Public employees and employers, among others, operationally defined rights as those extended by the state, based on nationalist and legal definitions of citizenship. It created the criteria for belonging or not-belonging from a series of attributes associated with racialized nationalism: white, middle-class, humble, amenable, urban, modern, restrained. These actors, principally Costa Ricans, might have responded to the way “[Nicaraguans’] distinction is mapped on the body in diverse markers” (Sandoval 2002: 81). Their operational definition of belonging and deservedness may also be inflected by ascribed national identity. They might unconsciously assess Nicaraguan women’s accents, appearance and mannerisms and associate them with antagonistic behavior. Moreover, they responded to these markers as much as they responded to knowledge of the woman’s nationality. Without realizing, Costa Ricans associated these markers with someone who would be undeserving of concession. Network women realized that in the eyes of Costa Rican providers, Nicaraguans represented one child too many for a

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96 Exceptionalism, more problematically, indexes a belief that Latin American countries are indeed, inferior, that their inequality, their internecine conflicts are somehow inherent. In this sense, exceptionalism points to the sense that the country has somehow broken with the mold, but does not, per se, point to the sense that other countries may also do so. In fact, by posing themselves as racially distinct, of white, European descent, they inadvertently link their ways of being to racial distinction in addition to national distinction. In turn, the other qualities that mark exceptionalism become racialized- or attached to particular phenotypes. Furthermore, nationality itself is treated as biology, a set of inherent features that changes in legal status and citizenship cannot erase.
classroom or one patient too many for a clinic. They understood that they were seen as too demanding to be employed and too unreliable to receive a house-rental contract. They were treated as unworthy of minimum labor conditions, excessive in their demand for police protection and rapacious in their requests for more than one educational scholarship per family. Importantly, for the individual reproducing this logic, as they refuse service they do not intentionally engage in a racist act. The ambivalence expressed by Costa Ricans towards ensuring Nicaraguan’s rights was the unacknowledged perception that Nicaraguans were undeserving. They responded to indicated ways of interpreting the markers Nicaraguan women bore. When Costa Ricans did extend services, they saw their actions as demonstrations of benevolence to migrants who did not deserve the services received. As they reacted to Nicaraguans’ apparent inconformity with markers of belonging and, in turn labeled migrants “usurpers,” negating migrant women’s humanity.

Women’s stories rarely assisted in ascertaining exactly which markers of identity provoked employers, social service providers and others’ negative responses. However, through casual conversations about life in Costa Rica, returned migrants often recalled other instances in which it had become clear their racial and class appearance were being used to assess their belonging. In one conversation, a fifty-year old male migrant who had returned to Nicaragua, recounted how Costa Rican neighbors would insist he was not really Nicaraguan. The man was fair-skinned, bald and had lived in a lower-middle class neighborhood of San Jose among Costa Ricans. He was bothered by their insistence. He remained clear that they refused to see him as Nicaraguan because of the differences in his racial and class appearance from the stereotypical Nicaraguan. I witnessed similar reactions on several occasions when hanging out with my husband’s group of Costa Rican friends, largely comprised of skaters, tattoo artists and graphic
designers from a mix of class backgrounds. Occasionally, someone new would join the group and make a cruel joke about Nicaraguans. Inevitably, Carlos’ friends would point out that he, fair skinned and dressing in the same skater styles, was Nicaraguan. Embarrassed, the person’s first reaction was inevitably “but you don’t look Nicaraguan!” It is clear from Costa Ricans’ commentary that they perceived racial and class difference distinguishes them from Nicaraguans. Although this is not always evident in migrants’ stories about their interactions with Costa Ricans, it is clear from their interactions that race and class affiliation are constants in more or less self-aware assessments of belonging and deservedness. Moreover, as critical race theory suggests, it is rarely direct racial judgements that justify exclusionary actions.

In this chapter, I explore how emergent Nicaraguan and Costa Rican tensions converge and conflict during the interactions of Network women with public employees, neighbors and employers. Claims Nicaraguans have usurped and collapsed Costa Rica’s democracy are accepted. Through these claims, Costa Ricans articulate their unrecognized collective unease with their noticeably declining quality of life. Nicaraguan women, responding to an unrecognized collective unease with their perpetual exclusion and abuse, migrate. During these interactions, these emergent ideas clash. Costa Ricans’ sense that Nicaraguans are undeserving with Nicaraguans’ sense that their exclusion is undeserved. Costa Ricans act to protect the country’s resources while Nicaraguan women act as they become aware of their shared experience of being treated without humanity.

Systemic violence, or the way exclusion is embedded in laws, protocols and expectations, perpetuated many of the forms of violence women experienced abroad. Public interactions reinforced the sense that Nicaraguans were socially inferior. On this basis many systematically interfered in Nicaraguan’s ability to access social rights. Although this violence in a new place
and at a new scale nested with the violence they had encountered throughout their lives, women began to react to violence differently. When women narrated their lives in Nicaragua to me, they highlighted the ways they were made to feel alone and different, repeatedly asking, “why me?”

When narrating their lives in Costa Rica, they told stories reflecting the growing realization that their experience of exclusion was collective. In Chapter 3, I argued that Nicaraguan women migrated to Costa Rica seeking recourse from violence. In this chapter, I describe how violence persisted throughout their lives, albeit in new ways. Women point to a shift in their sense of community and rights. Key here is that they come to share the space of the neighborhood.

Initially, they felt isolated in a new country and distrusted those they encountered. Each told how she began to resolve her dilemmas in collaboration with other Nicaraguan women whom she had encountered in her neighborhood or other places she frequented. Their stories demonstrated an increasing discomfort with their conditions and an increasing disposition to respond. Eventually, through the Center, they began to articulate their shared exclusion through the Network. Because they occupied a segregated space, they became visible to each other. Along with their recognition of each other, they articulated their economic, political and social position on the margins.

Their growing collaboration was not just a form of resistance to the individualizing effects of neoliberalism. While the final examples described ongoing abuse in the home, which Costa Rican public officials fail to resolve, most examples depicted the violence of refusal that flies in the face of *pura vida* as an apt descriptor of everyday life in Costa Rica. The formation of the Network, responded to the overlapping structures of feeling of *mando* and *pura vida*. Nicaraguan women expose the normative practices that isolated and excluded Nicaraguan women from democratic participation in Costa Rica and Nicaragua, in spaces ranging from the
home to government policy-making, from community forums to public marches. They addressed the practices that placed women outside of the sphere of rights-bearing citizens.

A. Establishing A Place To Call Home

It is clear when considering the settlement patterns of Nicaraguans, that the city of San Jose is segregated along the lines of nationality. Nicaraguans tended to live in neighborhoods on the edge of the city. When they described their search for housing, women depicted being treated as simultaneously threatening and vulnerable. First, they were turned away from housing developments as a result of the sense that they would be unruly, uncivil, violent and therefore, bad neighbors. But at the same time, the same individuals would act on their vulnerabilities as migrants, treating them as if they lacked humanity. For example, women were drawn into schemes that solicited immigrants’ money for housing bonds that never materialized. The way of seeing Nicaraguans as threatening usurpers enabled behavior that effectively preyed on their lack of information and legal marginality. Significantly, although this treatment would unite members of the Network, it often seemed to create divisions between Nicaraguan women. They would seek to distinguish themselves from each other when attempting to access limited resources. When they first arrive to Costa Rica, many women relate having problems with housing. Perhaps most notable is that the issue of housing generates tension among Nicaraguans as well as with Costa Ricans. Those who had experience in the Revolution began organizing in their neighborhoods against exploitative schemes.

Many women began life in the city by settling into a shared home where rents were low and often payable in weekly installments. They were typically managed by one of the residents, often Nicaraguan, who resided there for free in exchange for collecting rent, screening renters and interfacing with Costa Rican landlords. The interaction between renters and managers was
often fraught with tension. Landlords shifted burden of risk onto the shoulders of these house managers. In addition, immigrants on both sides of the relationship often felt slighted and taken advantage of by “paisanos” or fellow Nicaraguans. Julia, who took care of one such home in addition to her job as a domestic worker, worried routinely about how to deal with tenants, striking what she felt would be a pragmatic stance. Having unstable jobs, new immigrants often paid her by the week. If they got behind on rent by more than a few days, she was forced to order them to move. She empathized with their precarious positions but could not shoulder the burden of paying for them.

In Alicia’s case, renting in this style produced intrafamilial conflict. After various experiences living with and feeling exploited by employers, Alicia met her husband. When their 7 month old son was born they moved into a shared home with her sister and others. In exchange for residing there she would serve food to everyone, including guests. The arrangement upset her. She said, “I couldn’t fit in the space, I didn’t have a sink with water and I was crossing over other people, the apartment owner, to wash dishes and do all I needed to do…[it was] too hard and too tiring.” Water leaked into her room when it rained. Alicia felt she had suffered. Her relationship with her sister became strained. Her sister told the manager she was going to see what she could do to get Alicia “out of there.” Eventually her sister left. But Alicia found out her sister kept calling the owner “to tell her things about me that were complete lies.” Though aware Alicia’s sister was the one making trouble, the owner asked Alicia to leave. Alicia was upset by what had occurred more than the need to relocate. “My own sister betrayed me!” she exclaimed.

Neither Alicia nor Julia’s experiences were anomalies. Most women pinpointed jealousy or envy at the root of these conflicts. Housing support is often a source of tension for immigrants worldwide. For example, Cecilia Menjivar (2000) describes how San Francisco’s tight housing
market and a high cost of living led immigrants to refuse to assist family members if they knew they would not be able to reciprocate. In Costa Rica, women faced a similar challenge. They struggled to find homes they could afford given their low salaries, their concern for sending remittances to families and rapidly rising rents. Structural conditions, therefore, play a role in generating tension among Nicaraguans.

The sense that Nicaraguans threatened Costa Rican security also played a role in their limited residential options. Once they felt more firmly established in Costa Rica, some women sought single-family housing units. Women’s stories reflected Nicaraguans’ tendency to seek housing in areas where other Nicaraguans resided. While the commonality of this practice was certainly related to their shared economic positions, it was also related to the sense that Nicaraguans shared culture in spite of any distrust. It also related to the unwillingness of Costa Rican landlords to rent to Nicaraguans in other neighborhoods. In the absence of a formal process for housing applications, landlords informally questioned potential renters about work, nationality, gender, marital status and age. They listened to accents, met renters and assessed appearance and behavior. Landlords shied away from complicity in what is widely seen as encouraging Nicaraguan encroachment. There was widespread perception that Nicaraguans overcrowded their residences. In fact, few immigrants told stories of attempting to rent homes in formal settlements. The tension between Costa Rican landlords and Nicaraguan immigrants did not emerge in stories of renting individual houses. It certainly emerged in migrants’ discussions of the difficulty of joining _proyectos_ (projects), migrant’s manner of referring to low-income housing initiatives.

Most commonly, women sought to claim a housing lot and establish a makeshift home in a squatter settlement. They indicated that they avoided renting and would seek settlements where
they had heard the government would be establishing a housing project, subsidizing the purchase of the land and building costs for those squatters present in the area. Following the advice of an acquaintance, Alicia next rented an available lot in an informal settlement in Cartaguito, where she and her husband built a shack. In Costa Rica, the government policy of subsidizing the conversion of established squatter settlements into permanent, zoned neighborhoods has been a common tool of the working classes since the 1950’s. In the 1980’s, immigrant residents began to wield this resource. Squatter neighborhoods, or to use a local term precarios (precarious housing), were often located near riparian zones on the edge of the city. They appear on the landscape in sharp contrast to the impression of “a first world country” most of the country’s visitors describe as they ride through the center of San Jose. Far outside of the public eye, immigrants equated the living situation to “being outside.” They had little money to improve the infrastructure. Moreover, they felt insecure residing in lots that could easily be taken away. Immigrant women told me their sense of security accompanied ownership of the lots where they previously squatted. Alicia had lived this way for 10 years before the government subsidized the housing project. Until then, the conditions were difficult.

Sarita, who lived just two houses down from Alicia, described the block as it had been:

All of these homes were built of zinc laminates and small, just the size of a room. It was just three of us, my first daughter was one year old. But it was pure mud all around! Only the area around the bed was clean. My poor daughter could only really be there [on the bed] because otherwise, she just lived covered in mud. There wasn’t any water source. To wash you had to bring water over from the other side of those hills...It was sad... I would get up at four in the morning to cook breakfast for my husband on a makeshift wood stove in the middle of the street. There was no electricity; you had to use a candle.

Many stuck with this rudimentary living style for years until the housing project finally succeeded. The difficulty of the living conditions was compounded by a sense of insecurity.

When I spoke with them, Alicia and Sarita had been living there with their families for six years
in small, cinderblock houses, on cement-laid streets, fabricated with government subsidies. There was a notable change in the narrative towards collective experience.

Although the government approved the housing project, the women still faced obstacles to secure small land parcels. Discrimination towards immigrants was expressed in Costa Ricans’ attempts to push them out of housing projects, ostensibly, to avoid sharing space with them or, out of a sense they should protect services they felt should prioritize Costa Ricans’ needs. Immigrants also found they were particularly vulnerable to scams cheating them out of money or forcing them to move to a different site. Women in Cartaguito described one particularly large scam as part of the founding history of the settlement.

Sarita and Alicia were originally offered lots in a nearby area by a man they describe as ambitious. He requested a premium of sixty thousand colones, (around $200) per family, to receive the subsidies along with thirty other families. The Costa Rican participants received their houses. Sarita and others realized quickly he had scammed them. She describes his actions as constituting a “dirty play,” explaining, “he made us [Nicaraguans] pay. But when the moment arrived that we were going [to receive our titles, after] tons of us had paid and had even seen the lots, he told us that we wouldn’t be getting anything and that the people living there didn’t want Nicaraguans there.” The scam did more than extract wealth from Nicaraguans’ vulnerability. The scam itself was a taunt. After Nicaraguan community members went through that experience, Costa Rican women in the neighborhood would openly make fun of them. Alicia recalled:

many of them laughed and said [the scammers] had made a joke out of us, that we should continue dreaming, and just return to our country and to stop being here de muertos de hambre (rapacious). They said that we are shameless because we only come to take food from the Ticos. What didn’t they say to me?!

Although the scam took their money, the most significant aspect of the memory was their Costa Rican neighbors’ reactions to it. These interactions demonstrated the perception that Nicaraguans
took advantage of Costa Rican services. At the same time, the Costa Ricans who made fun of them also acknowledged their awareness that Nicaraguan families had paid into the project. In other words, Costa Rican women’s assertion that Nicaraguans were undeserving of housing had little to do with Nicaraguan’s actual contribution. Nicaraguans were treated as if their greed was innate, rendering them undeserving of empathy and undesirable neighbors. Furthermore, the Costa Rican women who spoke against them had also been neighbors, indicating the negative discourses about Nicaraguans were more powerful in shaping perceptions than the years they had shared the same community and conditions.

Women’s shared experience of inhumane treatment made them visible to each other. It demonstrated how Nicaraguans are stripped of their humanity as a result of Costa Ricans anti-immigrant discourse. They ignore their neighbor’s daily treks to work, struggle and organize, instead turning against them. Such blatant exclusion became a basis for consolidating Nicaraguans’ frustration. Sarita, “even when she was shy” pointed out her deservedness through her contribution. She responded, “I am here because I have paid weekly, all of the installments.” She then summarized “this home wasn’t a gift. I overwork myself outside and inside the home. If I eat, it is only because I work. I don’t take anything from anyone.” Meanwhile, the scam artist kept asking them for additional installments to secure the new homes. The women reacted sharply. Alicia contrasted migrants’ deteriorating situation with the scam artist’s luxury. He demanded weekly payments that were three times greater than what migrants spent on food. She described how they contrasted their situations, stating
At Christmas, he was out enjoying the beaches and here we were enclosed in our homes eating rice and beans because we had given them all the money we had. Sometimes we went without eating [to pay the installments]. [He] was earning seven thousand colones weekly.\textsuperscript{97}

The women contrasted this man’s self-indulgence with their conscious accounting of every cent paid. They recalled the sensation of every strained meal, rice and beans, the quintessential dish women perceived to be the baseline of nutrition. Their assertion of limitations stood in contrast to the accusation of being \textit{muertos de hambre} (rapacious), if not literally, at least figuratively. Although the term refers to a more generalized usurpation, women asserted that they couldn’t afford to find alternative housing nor the luxuries of meat, vegetables or Christmas gifts.

It was this shared experience that galvanized residents. Alicia says “That’s when people began to get mad and we began to look for ways to take him to trial. We thought: how could it be possible that social welfare was giving us the homes and we would have to pay him, when they said we wouldn’t have to pay anything?” Sarita recounts that afterward the community began to “wake up to what was going on.” A neighbor who had already joined the Network, Gina, accompanied them to all the state institutions.\textsuperscript{98} “We began to protest because they had left us out and then made us pay. We had stayed quiet before, because we just wanted to have our own home.” Because they took action as a group, Sarita and Alicia describe, officials from the state institutions provided a bond without making them pay more. The scammer, in turn, was jailed. The circumstances for women in one section of the neighborhood improved. Women had a

\textsuperscript{97} Alicia appears to be estimating costs relative to the value of the colon in 2012, at \$0.0019 dollars. In 1994, it was valued at 3.71 dollars, making 7,000 colones equal to USD\$25,000.

\textsuperscript{98} INA, BAMBI, CONAP, INVU
greater sense of housing security. Sarita concluded her description of the struggle by stating, “we have our homes, donated by social welfare. We can leave something to our children. Rent is so high now for just small bit of space.” Thank god we had this opportunity not have to pay.” In this case, exclusionary actions by Costa Rican neighbors and outsiders brought them together. Because they were located in the same space, they recognized their suffering was shared.

Still in other areas, problems persisted. Anita’s home was located in a section of the neighborhood called el bosque (the forest), just beyond the section of the neighborhood that had legally and physically been converted into formal housing. Residents of el bosque, eligible for housing bonds, had been approached by another scam artist who took the installments and reallocated building materials to other housing projects. According to Anita’s assessment, the government institutions were unwilling to reconsider a second project, in part, because the materials had already been spent, but also, because residents had permitted themselves to be tricked. Consensus in the area was that it would remain a squatter settlement and, during my research, they faced the constant threat of relocation.

Anita picked me up at Elena’s one afternoon, walking along with a long umbrella in hand. She guided me up the cracked cement street, between the painted cinder-block walls and wrought-iron gates of housing-project homes, past the informal trash dumping ground. We stepped onto the sidewalk to pass between two homes and then began to climb up a dirt path, past the edge of the housing project, into el bosque. Wrought iron fences had given way to zinc walls and doors, cement sidewalks to dirt path, as we continued, avoiding slipping on short, slick, steep sections of the path, and tripping over webs of tree roots. At the top, we made a sharp left turn where a short row of homes jutted out. In front of the homes, women sat on a shared

99 She notes that landlords charge around eighty thousand colones ($160).
covered porch cooking, the smoke from the fire wafted around, spiraling away from a large cast iron pot, and the sunlight reflected off the smoke in sheaths as it filtered through the thick pines. After the short row of homes, a recreational space opened on the right, most of the time serving as the uneven root-covered field for *mejengas* (pick-up soccer games). The setting and scene immediately evoked my childhood imaginings of a so-called “gypsy camp.” We walked no more than a block’s distance between houses to a home constructed out of zinc laminates and wood planks. Inside was dark, divided into various rooms with plywood. Parts of the floor were poured cement and others dirt. A small space at the back contained a sink and dining area, a slice of tree trunk, sanded-down and varnished as a countertop. Stools stood on either side. A high chair handmade from sanded and varnished pieces of scrapwood nailed together, stood in the corner. It was clearly constructed with skill, though not prime materials. The efforts put towards making a dignified home attested to residents’ struggles for dignified housing. Though no longer the mud-filled shacks of the neighborhood’s early years, residents of *el bosque* found their housing situation to be precarious in many ways.

Content with their homes, the women felt the neighborhood had changed. Elena and Ileana told me that people have become less trustworthy. Sarita commented “I have to stay home at all times because they’ll [break in and] take the things you worked so hard to get.” The first time I visit Sarita’s home, her daughter had been mugged on the way home from middle school, on a solitary section of the street behind the home. “No more nice *Totto* backpacks,” she pronounced. Another night, dropping me off at the bus, Anita wove through the streets according to her relationships with the residents of the homes we passed. She was anxious because a sense of insecurity pervaded the communities they live in. This limited the times residents, particularly

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100 A brand of backpacks considered high quality, though expensive, by Costa Ricans and Nicaraguans alike.
women, would be willing to come and go from the neighborhood. They addressed crime alone, sensing police ignored it.

The dominant ways of seeing Nicaraguans leaves them vulnerable. Already segregated to the edges of the city, Nicaraguans contended with minimal protection in securing dignified housing as they worked to establish themselves in the communities. Residing in shared homes, domestic workers contended with the difficulties of co-residence among people living and working without security. Settling in squatter communities and housing projects across the country, women with families contended with the xenophobia of Costa Rican neighbors, the reluctance of officials to include them and their vulnerability to schemes as migrants without networks, leverage nor support. The segregation of Nicaraguan neighborhoods was often treated as social fact in Costa Rican social science literature, rather than a process. Yet women’s stories about housing pointed to the many ways in which Costa Ricans treat them as if they were threatening and encroaching on national space. Their practices demonstrate that the national, economic, racial and ethnic segregation of space in San Jose is socially produced.

B. Hoping For Aguas Mansas (Calm Waters) In The Workplace

In Costa Rica’s changing ethnic and gendered division of labor, Nicaraguan women found themselves simultaneously in demand, yet unable to control the conditions of their labor. Labor in Costa Rica reflected Ellen Moodie’s assertion that “the market thrives on flexibility, insecurity, and anxiety, on unevenness of knowledge…exploiting the disjunction” (Moodie 2010: 48). In this labor market, their bodies became visible, necessary, and manageable. They could be called up for employment but employers also invoked their powerlessness as they fired them without paying salaries, without the severance requirements upheld by law. Using their knowledge of their rights as workers and migrants as leverage, women were able to negotiate
labor conditions. Still, they were often forced to yield to employers’ conditions in light of the need to pay rent, food, children’s school supplies or medical bills. In part, employers assumed workers would have only minimal access to lawyers much less legitimacy in courts and courtrooms. They shifted the burden to workers who often avoided court, albeit for different reasons. Although they could access a lawyer and win a case, many avoided this step because of all the time required in court, the cost of hiring a lawyer and the potential for humiliating taunts from lawyers and judges. They would move to the next job. Knowing their rights changed little about their situation. It was this vulnerability that was tied up with their desirability as workers.

In Costa Rica, a wave of new efforts had implicitly formalized sectors dominated by immigrants, by offering regularization proceedings for immigrant workers in certain sectors (domestic employment, construction and agriculture) and placing new sanctions on undocumented residence in Costa Rica. These measure were often less effective in securing worker protections, leading to a tacit persistent informality. The Network women I interviewed had worked cleaning homes and offices as well as working as servers, cooks and salespeople in restaurants, bars and bakeries. A few collected coffee or raised vegetables for sale. They expressed the sentiment that their employment options were increasingly limited. Few described employment in which employers met all the minimum labor laws. Despite employment contracts, immigrants’ actual labor relations reflected economist Amit Basole’s depiction of informal occupations that are “not regular, secure or governed by formal or written contracts, and usually no benefits (health, retirement, other social security) are paid” (Basole and Basu 2011). Moreover, he describes how periods of formality may be punctuated by informality. In the wake of new laws regulating domestic employment, domestic workers found themselves summarily fired without benefits. Similar to Moodie’s assertion, Basole argued that the combination of
formal and informal work is key, not an anomaly to how markets work. Given this and in light of the effective informality of women’s work, formalization efforts seemed a new way to obscure the perpetual marginalization women of Nicaraguan women in the workplace and the economy. Yet, as argued in the previous chapters, their labor and remittances upheld Costa Rican and Nicaraguan economies.

Jobs were scarce and women exhibited great relief once they secured a position. In addition, they would make the best of available employment. Shortly after obtaining her residency, Elena found her first formal employment in two years in a bakery, working six days a week. Taking the rare opportunity to visit Network women’s worksites, I wandered into the bakery. I found Elena by the register, her neighbor Ileana nearby. The space was bustling, customers rapidly shuffled in and out as they walked from their nearby bus stops to their destinations in the city center. A week into her employment she expressed excitement about the work, though she held some reservations. She had won over her reluctant workmates. The first, she had felt, was fairly easy, with a smile and chatter. Another, she felt, “refused to let her in.” Charge with brewing coffee, Elena took advantage of her time in the kitchen at the start of the day, to prepare a little breakfast for this workmate. “Susa, come here, I’ve made a little breakfast for you” she recalled saying. Elena imitated how she had motioned to her, laying her hand on the counter, firmly, but invitingly. And she handed her a plate of eggs and cheese and a freshly brewed cup of coffee. “For you” she said, “Sit.” From then on, she elicited smiles from workmates throughout the day. She linked the need to cultivate the goodwill of workmates in

101 Similarly, Carlos Sandoval argues that “The erasure of migrants’ economic contributions might be due to their absence from the media and everyday conversations. Lack of recognition of the Nicaraguan community renders migrants invisible and erases their economic contributions from the public imagination” (2015: 7).
order to execute her job. Here, it was personal relationships rather than formalities of employment that improved working conditions.

Though relieved to have a job, it fell short of ideal for a single mother living in an insecure neighborhood. Elena struggled with balancing work and home life. The workdays were long, requiring she arrive downtown by 4 am. She would rise early, fix lunch for her sons, arrange the house and leave for work. She often lamented having to make the kilometer walk to the bus station alone at that hour. She noticed “at normal hours everyone is walking together, so you’re safe.” She also worried that she couldn’t be around to send her sons off to school. However, she noted they had become more self-reliant and the schedule afforded her the ability to be present when they arrived home, for their safety, to prepare meals for them and also, to assist with homework and other tasks.

Moreover, the employment opportunity turned out to be tenuous. When health inspection shut down the bakery just three months later, the owner’s expanding network of bakeries and cafes was reduced to a single site. Both Elena and Ileana had difficulty obtaining the pay they were owed. In the months following, they routinely contacted the owner and would often be forced to show up at the bakery to force the owner to give it to them. They considered speaking with the Center’s lawyer. Three months after they had lost their jobs, the owner had begun calling them, offering them work hours and prompt payment. Each considered the offer with trepidation. Ileana had returned once but found herself waiting, once again, to be paid. They contemplated whether to take up the work of bringing a case against him. Their experience demonstrated that even more formal jobs are amply precarious. Migrant women occupy the most vulnerable work even when it is not employers’ explicit intent to exploit them.
Most women in the Network sought employment as domestic workers. There is ample evidence that the relationship between Costa Rican employer and Nicaraguan domestic worker, which unfolds in the home, may produce one of the most acute experiences of discrimination in the realm of labor. The explanation hinges on the particular relationship between employer and employee in domestic workplaces, namely distinction. Ethnographic research with domestic workers demonstrates that employers actively and self-consciously construct markers of “distinction” to maintain social barriers between employer and employee within the household (Gamburd 2000; Chin 1997; Yeoh et al 1998; Gogna 1989; Ray et al 2009) while expecting workers to infuse “households with positive affective energies” (Gutierrez-Rodriguez 2010: 7-8). Whether unconsciously or consciously, Costa Rican employers establish dominance in the household, responding to the perceived threat of Nicaraguan transborder and transnational encroachment. On a daily basis, they level disparaging remarks about Nicaraguans at a single Nicaraguan woman. They make the remarks personal, as though the single individual were the antithesis of exceptionalism. Though Nicaraguans endure disparaging remarks throughout Costa Rica and sites of employment, they are often directed at Nicaraguans more generally. In the household, the individual is treated as untrustworthy, backwards, without value and contaminating. This relationship of domination and subordination must be actively reasserted as domestic employees do not view their oppressed position as just. There were many ways this could be carried out. One manner was to surveille women’s work, assuming their criminality. Many women described the discomfort of being followed throughout the home by their employers. Josefina, for example, complained her employer was constantly checking her jewelry box and even counting the number of candies in the candy jar. Nicaraguan women’s outsider status in the home was marked by the marginal spaces they lived in and uniforms they were
required to wear. To paraphrase Natividad Gutierrez, a sociologist who studies domestic labor, employers created a “new regime of inequalities” along the lines of race, gender and class in these “transcultural contact zone[s]” (Gutierrez 2010: 2).

The arrangement of the space of the home also emphasized this marginal status. More than a decade ago, while living in San Jose, I visited an acquaintance’s large apartment. As her Nicaraguan maid guided me through the opulent, light filled apartment, I noticed a marked barrier within the home. The Nicaraguan women lived at the back, separated from the rest of the household by the laundry area. Their room was cramped and dark, with a bunk bed filling the room, clothing hanging from its rungs, and light came in through a small window to the outside. Over the years, I had come to expect to see women in checked pastel-colored dresses sweeping the driveways of larger homes, shopping in stores and leading children around. During my brief tenure as an English teacher, I had heard wealthy workmates make disparaging remarks about la muchacha (the girl) a nameless domestic employee, who became the subject of discussion when they felt she made costly decisions, usurped families resources, or when her overall perceived uselessness warranted commentary. Here, in the house, I began to sense the pervasiveness of these efforts to establish a hierarchy among the spaces of the home. For the Nicaraguan women, the only spaces they could claim were those that occupied the lowest rungs of this hierarchy.

Working in the home immersed employees in domestic relationships and disputes. Unlike a workplace, where employees can be sanctioned for missteps, the affective ties in a home often adversely affected women’s abilities to negotiate treatment by family members other than the direct employer. Furthermore, employers might differ from other family members in their expectations regarding the extent of the employee’s duties. Felicia recounted that one employer’s adult children, who lived outside of the home, began to bring over their clothing, requiring her to
washed it during the day when her employer was not home. They justified their request by telling her she was the family’s employee. When informed, the employer expressed reluctance to intervene. Felicia was able to negotiate the situation by explaining this was not part of the original employment agreement. It would require renegotiation. The informality of the home setting contributed to the assumption that women’s labor was flexible. However, the assumption of flexibility reflected the power dynamics of the relationship. Their labor was exclusively subject to the interpretation of occupants of the home, not the employee.

Relationships might become acrimonious if employers expressed affection for domestic employees, a common occurrence in shared space. Expressions of affection exacerbated discord between family, when love was expressed towards an unrelated household member and further, Nicaraguan. Alicia described experiencing problems with the employer’s daughter, a drug addict.

The mother, my employer, treated me, ‘a mere employee,’ better than her own daughter. The daughter saw this. She began fighting with me every day. It escalated until she became physically aggressive. One time I answered back and she replied “You’d have to be Nica to answer back like that.” “Yes, Nicaraguan,” I said, “and proud of it. I came here to work, not to find a mother. What’s more, my arrangement isn’t with you. Do you think that because I’m not from here, I’ll just remain quiet?” Why did I say that? She just became angrier. I approached my employer, saying that I couldn’t continue working for them. She cried and asked me not to leave. I said, “No, Doña Carmen, you’ll never prefer me over your child. She’s looking to hit me, I’m not going to allow myself to be hit and you’re not going to like the outcome. So, it’s better. I’m grateful, you’ve been very good to me but this isn’t working.”

Although in this instance Alicia successfully negotiated the situation, her experience still pointed to the similarity of challenges in the workplace that have little to do with formality. Although formal, conditions were subject to the whim of employers and family surrounding them. Employers often attempted to intimidate employees when they sought to rectify exploitative conditions. Feeling insecure when she suspected another employer was involved in illicit activities, Alicia asked to leave. The employer agreed to Alicia’s departure on the condition she
work in her mother’s home. After some months, the family reduced her salary without warning. Later, they ceased to pay vacations and bonus. When Alicia responded, the mother threatened her. “No one is paying you anything. If you have a problem with that, go to the ministry [of labor]; you’ll see that they just throw you in jail because you don’t even have papers.” Alicia was unmoved, responding “who says I don’t have papers? I entered here legally and I have my papers.” The mother persisted in her efforts: “This may well be, but you don’t have rights to anything.” Alicia continued, saying, “pay me the days I’ve worked and I’ll leave.” Having received her payment, she left and never returned to work for the family.

Confident they worked hard, Nicaraguan women easily recognized such actions as an unwarranted manner of devaluing their labor, acting as if they were servants and not discreetly employed workers. They labeled it as abusive. Rather than demoralize them, the effort to establish hierarchies in the home seemed to galvanize migrant women. Lila noted attempts at exploitation were so blatant that even police recognized it was common for employers to try to fire employees without paying severance nor the last wages. Instead, they would call the police and report the woman had stolen from them. The tension between Nicaraguan women’s views of themselves as hard workers, even over-qualified workers, contradicted the negative images their employers projected. One domestic worker proclaimed “they treat us like animals, but we uphold the country” (Sandoval 2002). Each of these situations burdened the employee with the additional labor of struggling for her rights on uneven power terrains.

Many Nicaraguan women prided themselves on being proactive when dealing with employers. Magda’s experience was typical. Three years earlier, she returned to a former employer, Doña Rosa. Describing their relationship, she explained she had worked for her family for a total of fifteen years. First she worked for her mother, then her sister and finally, for Doña
Rosa. Magda commented, “she trusts me completely, we are like an old married couple. We fight, and then, nomasito (right after), we’re speaking again.” Magda was entrusted with tasks such as picking up rent from Rosa’s tenants. But tension remained about the issue of payment. First, Rosa wanted to leave Magda’s vacations and bonus pending. Then, she began to pay Magda’s bonus in small increments. For three years, Magda was supposed to be getting 170,000 colones monthly, but was only paid 160,000 colones. Magda explained her response to such situations. “I’m not well-behaved, I claim my rights. It doesn’t matter who it’s in front of, I don’t stay quiet.” They fought in front of Rosa’s daughter, husband and grandchildren. Magda approached Doña Rosa saying, “that’s not what I make.” Rosa responded “well, this is what I pay.” Magda recurred to her knowledge of domestic worker laws saying:

No ma’am, in the first place, you are reducing my piece salary, because I don’t eat breakfast, lunch, nor dinner here. At your house, I go without eating lunch, because you don’t have any food for me. And when I go to your other building, you can’t have any lunch for me. You provide the faucet for water and the bus passes.

Rosa countered she had never paid this way before and refused to change. Magda was careful in her response, aware of the audience. She asserted, “Ok, it’s fine, but know that I am in my full right to claim it, because I work [full-time] for you, not on an hourly basis.” Everyone went quiet. They said nothing to Magda. A few days later, Rosa called to say her daughter would bring Magda 90,000 colones “to make it even.” For Magda, the importance of negotiating was that it demonstrated to employers what she is capable of, encouraging them to censor their own tendency to engage in exploitative acts. Scholars have described the relationship as “being like a daughter” (Chaney 1989; Young 1987). The affective ties of domestic labor, in some cases, complicated women’s ability to negotiate their rights as workers.

102 Costa Rican law obligates employers to pay a 13th month, or the aguinaldo, at the end of the year.
103 A lo polaco, as a phrase
Felicia filled her weekends with courses, she educated herself about labor rights, social reproductive rights, learning computer skills, and supporting other women around her. Though she had negotiated multiple exploitative situations, her contemporary employer respected all the minimum labor laws. Still, she related, he did not understand why she felt it was necessary to be so involved in pushing for domestic labor laws if her situation was in order. Her activism, in this area, bothered him.

The ways domestic employers constantly reasserted the boundaries of social life within the home were ubiquitous in the service sector throughout restaurants, bakeries and hotels. Network members’ recollections of their interactions with employers revealed the normativity of their persistent precariousness in the labor system. They did not resolve employer’s sense that immigrants’ rights trump the needs of their homes and businesses. Despite the widespread acknowledgement that employers should heed labor laws for domestic work, restaurant, manufacturing and agriculture industries, women confronted feigned ignorance as employers asked them to “work a few more hours,” complete additional tasks or exchange legally-mandated bonuses and vacations for other benefits. Shouts and insults might alternate with assertions that workers were “like one of the family,” as if to wield affective ties to preempt additional work. Furthermore, the offer of additional paid work was often presented as a favor to women who could use additional income. Moreover, they continued to assert their sense that their superior structural position also granted them certain entitlements. For example, when women took employers to court for workplace violations, employers, or former employers, harassed them through subtle questions: “do you really think you can win the case? Who ever heard of a maid having a lawyer anyhow?” The laws did provide workers with new avenues for seeking justice but the burden of asserting rights and even deservedness remained on them. In this way, the
legally-mandated formalization of hiring immigrant labor created new ambiguities. Finally, given their position in a racialized-, gendered- and nationally-segmented labor system, it was assumed Nicaraguan women were vulnerable as tenuously-documented immigrant laborers, physically and culturally more disposed to hard labor and suffering, and ultimately socially and politically subordinate. On the other hand, employers assumed they adhered rather than examining whether they did so, failing to remedy their role in reproducing migrants’ vulnerability. The dominant perception of Nicaraguans as workers subject to business needs rather than humans subject to rights, left the decision to extend benevolence or malice to employers, service providers or neighbors. Either way, Nicaraguans were not constituted as rights-bearing citizens, they were further individualized through these actions. Still, recognition of this tendency was apparent in women’s articulation of their position outside of rights.

C. Accessing Education

Women consistently faced difficulties accessing education and health care services, yet the refusals were most ambiguous in these two areas. Migrants were often told services they should have been able to access were unavailable, whether purchasing insurance through the national social security administration, accessing and paying for healthcare in a clinic, or seeking protection from police. Significantly, Costa Rica’s public education and healthcare systems were some of the most internationally lauded, a source of pride for Costa Ricans. They became sources of nationalist pride because they were the product of Costa Rica’s social welfare state and therefore, as argued in the previous chapter, a nationalism rooted in distinction. The perceived ties between the erosion of these systems and the influx of Nicaraguan immigrants was reflected in the treatment Network members reported experiencing when they enter these state spaces. But interestingly, while most women confronted roadblocks to accessing these services
in some form, few faced direct racist epithets. Instead, many were refused services or received substandard treatment amidst claims that resources were scarce or that women had not provided the correct requisites. These occurrences were only brought into the public eye when cases of neglect reached extremes and women pushed for improvement. In effect, service providers often responded to a sense that Nicaraguans encroached on public programs. They would refuse to extend services to them, claiming insufficient space or resources. Women’s stories about these interactions pointed to more ambiguous displays of their sense that Nicaraguans ultimately threatened to dismantle the social welfare system through overuse. In turn, Nicaraguans viewed service providers’ excuses as ways of preventing them from obtaining rudimentary and rightful access to the services. As a result, they failed to fulfill migrants’ right to dignity.

Unlike their stories about the labor arena, Nicaraguan women faced forms of discrimination so subtle they were rarely a subject that came to light in my initial interviews with women. Once I realized access was frequently denied to these women without appearing to be the result of racially discriminatory actions, I began to ask new questions. Rather than ask whether they had faced discrimination getting their children into schools, I would ask, “Were you able to get your children into schools nearby?” Numerous women in the communities recounted the difficulty of getting their children into nearby schools. “We don’t have space” was the common reply. Such questions led them to think about more localized challenges of accessing education. There was inconsistency among the forms these challenges took. At times, women faced difficulty obtaining scholarships. At others, the costs of school—uniforms, books, exams and travel—was absorbed by the family. “In Nicaragua,” various commented, “it is all free…” Daniel, Alicia’s teenage son and a participant in the Network’s youth group, listened to our conversation, nodding thoughtfully. When I asked his mother about travel to school, he
interjected: “you know, some youth, they don’t want to go to school nearby. They don’t want their parents to know what they are up to.” Most importantly, women were less concerned with the rejection itself but instead the ability to send children to school within their neighborhoods, where mothers felt they could ensure their children’s safety. Some children were forced to take two city buses, rather than school buses. If they missed a year, they were required to attend night school, a tenuous prospect for children from neighborhoods where most residents avoided walking around at night.

At meetings and interviews Costa Rican scholars and activists noted the discrepancy between policies offering services to migrants and enforcement. For example, Raquel, a Costa Rican woman working at an NGO offering refugee services, explained that administrators often took advantage of their power to determine when a school had reached full capacity and refuse entrance to migrants by claiming they did not have sufficient space. Raquel argued their response resulted from insufficient preparation, namely their unfamiliarity with laws regulating access to public education for immigrants, the circumstances causing migration and differences in citizenship status. Largely, their actions put in practice the grand narrative of Nicaraguans as threat. The Ministry of Education (MEP) had little ability to intervene. Raquel readily acknowledged xenophobia played a role in school directors’ decision-making. “In their heads,” she said, “letting Nicaraguans in is allowing illegals to usurp our system. Letting Colombians into your school is inviting drugs. Letting Salvadorans in is letting gangs into your school.”

Circulating discourses about Nicaraguan migrants, as well as Colombian and Salvadoran refugees, mediated reactions towards them. Outside of the education system, when migrants were refused service, the supervising ministries could intervene. However, employees forced to
provide services often did so inadequately and would likely make things difficult for the child or woman. Thus, ministry personnel often thought it better to send them elsewhere.

The reluctance to provide services to migrants extended to other areas of education, most commonly, in obtaining scholarships that subsidized the costs of bus fares, books and uniforms. Because Alicia gave birth to all three of her children in Costa Rica they had been able to get scholarships. However, her status as a migrant regularly complicated the process. Her experience requesting each child’s scholarship demonstrated the power of public employee’s will to help or impede access. Instead of her son, the oldest child, receiving the first scholarship it was her daughter. She had been reluctant to request scholarships because her overall experience was that “They never wanted to help him. Everyone makes fun of you because you’re Nicaraguan, saying you’re muerto de hambre (rapacious), just for being here. It was embarrassing and I never wanted to ask for help.” Her second oldest, a daughter, received the first scholarship in elementary school after her teacher had spontaneously offered to help. She instructed Alicia to bring in their papers, birth certificates and Alicia’s cedula (state identification card). Shortly thereafter, her daughter received the scholarship. Alicia chose not make further requests. But once her son finished 6th grade, the school social worker asked Alicia why he had never received a scholarship. She expressed her surprise, noting that he was an honors student and had earned awards. Perceiving Alicia’s reluctance, the social worker encouraged her by explaining “you’re not asking [school workers] for the scholarship. It’s the obligation of MEP to help them, because they are Costa Rican children, born here. All three have the right to receive a scholarship.” In this case, the social worker acted for the child’s welfare, drawing on universalist logic.

Others did not see things in this manner. Contrary to that particular social worker’s universalist rhetoric, Alicia encountered resistance when she attempted to obtain a scholarship
for her third child. She turned in the papers but her request was rejected. Alicia approached her child’s teacher to understand why, saying “Profe (Teacher), is it true that you have already received the papers?” The teacher instated the two scholarships received were sufficient. In this case, the teacher insinuated that Alicia was usurping the system, implying Alicia had already received more state support than appropriate. By then, aware of her rights, Alicia persisted. “Yes, two have. But they’ve told me that all have the right to receive a scholarship.” Noting she would “take that into account,” the teacher processed the papers and extended the scholarship for the youngest. The interaction pointed to perceptions that Nicaraguans having too many children and therefore place extraordinary weight on the system. But the interaction also pointed to ways that even minimal foot dragging on the part of public employees can interfere with immigrants’ abilities to access services that reduce the strain on their limited financial situations. While service providers are lawfully bound to extend services to children born in Costa Rica, these cases suggested parents’ background influenced the way providers interpreted this obligation. Though nominally an issue of nationality, it might have also related to other markers of belonging in Costa Rica, such as economic status, racial affiliations and location. Thus, the dominant meanings attached to being Nicaraguan, among other markings of “otherness,” produced varying practices.

Though providers’ individual actions frequently impeded educational support, women also faced structural impediments. For example, when Alicia’s cedula expired, she was no longer able to renew her youngest child’s scholarship when she graduated from middle to high school.104 When we spoke, she was in the midst of reinstating her residency, hopeful her application would be processed quickly. Structural impediments did not exclusively impede

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104 The parent has to have a valid identification for the children to receive scholarships.
children’s access to education, but also women’s access. Immigrant women frequently sought to take courses with the National Institute of Learning (INA), which provided free technical training for anyone holding a Costa Rican identification. However, courses required status as a temporary or permanent resident or citizenship. INA also administered the country’s required certification courses for operating businesses, for example, food handling courses. For Nicaraguan women, opening small business seemed optimal, among them baking cooperatives, urban and rural farming cooperatives, artisan cooperatives and herbal beauty product cooperatives. The requirement of documentation to take courses and become certified had severe effects. The purpose of the INA was to ensure that Costa Rica’s workforce would be trained in the areas prioritized in national economic initiatives, but also, to ensure those unable to work outside of homes and immediate communities would have local, if self-generated, sources of income. Those unable to participate in such courses were therefore unable to participate in community initiatives. The participation of someone without certification was not considered nor discussed by the groups. Unable to join these initiatives, women who lacked documents were also marginalized in community cooperatives.

Likewise, a mix of individual interpretation and structural arrangements colluded to marginalize Anita’s daughter and threaten her life. Anita brought her daughter to Costa Rica when she was 14. By then Anita had obtained citizenship, but her daughter had not. As a minor, however, her daughter wielded the right to access education. Beginning with the nearby high school, Anita “went around and around” searching for one that would accept her daughter. “There wasn’t a single high school with room for one more student.” Representatives from the Ministry of Education (MEP) responded to her appeal, shrugging and saying: “if there’s no room, there’s no room.” She recalled “so that’s when I joined up with the Network.” Lila wrote a
letter to MEP. They gave Anita’s daughter a space at a high school further away. Anita described the high school as “one problematic high school.” Still, Anita’s highest priority was that her daughter study. As mentioned earlier, parents frequently worried that placement in schools in other neighborhoods inhibited their ability to ensure their children’s safety, without school-specific transportation. Schools like Brenes, where Anita’s daughter was placed, were located in areas that made migrants uncomfortable. To reach them, their children would be required to take multiple public buses and walk long distances. For women who chose their walking routes to traverse their neighborhoods according to the streets where they knew neighbors, sending children to walk alone through unfamiliar neighborhoods invited excessive risk. The danger they might face, whether harassment, muggings and physical violence, pointed to deep structural inequality. But the lack of acceptable options forced them to choose between education and their family’s safety. Anita’s experience exemplified the limited potential to effect change within state institutions due to their bureaucratic structures. As education NGO-worker Raquel’s commentary demonstrated, the structural underpinnings enabled discrimination, while the oversight of MEP officials was limited. Individual and structural racism compounded to produce acute exclusion.

For Anita and her daughter, the scenario unfolded in the worst possible manner. The requirement of traversing an unfamiliar neighborhood alone to reach school left her daughter vulnerable. Three months after her daughter was accepted, a group of men grabbed her daughter off the street as she walked between her school and the bus station. They beat and raped her and then dumped her across town on a remote road. She was left alive but in effect, Anita’s fears were confirmed. Anita then followed protocols to seek justice, having a forensic doctor check her daughter and then bringing the case to the police. Still, nothing had been resolved five years later. Anita was made to feel the case was low-priority because she and her daughter were
migrants. She wrung her hands in frustration while telling me. I became aware that Anita continued to pressure police detectives to follow throughout my year of fieldwork. As a migrant, Anita had been repeatedly denied access to the tools to advance her family, the ability to watch over their safety, and justice when her safety was violated. Systemic inequality, therefore, failed to ensure the basic dignity and well-being of the country’s most vulnerable inhabitants, female immigrant minors. Moreover, systemic inequality made the ability to pinpoint where corrections must be made nearly impossible.

As Anita’s and others’ stories demonstrate, minor acts of negligence were dispersed among the diverse offices that were implicated in excluding immigrant children and women from education and access to justice. Blame was placed on bureaucracy, overcrowded schools, or evasive criminals. By faulting protocols and objective conditions rather than individual agency, state representatives evaded culpability and, thus, their refusal to effectively help women remained ambiguous in their intent. Ultimately, these actions buttressed migrants’ sense of impotency. They reinforced the system of belonging but also, offered a semblance of material evidence of the shared exclusion around which migrants coalesced.

D. Unworthy of Care

At every turn, women are reminded of their exclusion. When seeking medical care, women recount that clinic guards, whose duty consists of ensuring the clinic’s safety, would unlawfully prevent them from entering the building. Symptoms were ignored, conditions misdiagnosed and waiting periods for treatments prolonged. Occasionally, medical providers resisted taking migrants’ concerns seriously. Others were unwittingly negligent. Most often, there was retrenchment on the part of medical staff to consider the structural impediments preventing migrants from complying with treatment regimes. Elena and Anita’s experiences with
the medical system highlighted the deadly potential of neglectful medical care. In Elena’s case, seemingly involuntary inattentiveness was apparent in pre- and post-operative care. As if by chance, last-minute measures saved her. Meanwhile in Anita’s case, apparently willful inattentiveness delayed diagnoses of appendicitis and cancer. It ultimately came too late. For Elena, medical errors proved near-fatal while inattention to Anita’s condition ultimately lead to her death. Neglect, which had led to death in several cases, was routine but typically, did not otherwise warrant mention. Women’s stories did not explicitly point to racism in the medical system, yet the consistency in medical negligence indicated shared systemic inattention to migrants’ health. The effects of ambivalence were pernicious, maligning necessary medical care.

Elena’s experience began when she requested doctors perform a hysterectomy after her third son was born. She stayed in the hospital waiting for the operation. She had been fasting in anticipation, determined to have it before returning home. She felt it was the only effective measure. Her third child had been conceived when she was taking depo-provera in anticipation of receiving a hysterectomy after her second child was born. After three days of fasting following the birth of her third child, Elena recalled:

I was nursing my son and I felt the life flowing out of me. And on the third day, the nurse came in and gently asked ‘all done, my love?’ and I said ‘no, they haven’t operated yet.’ ‘What? How is it possible that they haven’t operated yet? How many days?’ ‘Three days’ ‘Such injustice!’ she replied, ‘And you haven’t drunk any water?’ ‘None.’

Without further evaluation, Elena was sent into the operating room. In her weak state, her heart stopped beating on the operating table. They were able to resuscitate her. Still, the lack of forethought regarding her status reflected a clear structural failure for those using public health clinics. Moreover, it extended disregard for Nicaraguan welfare overall to the medical space.

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105 A form of birth control by injection, taken every 3 months.
Despite the near fatal results of earlier negligence, Elena continued to be neglected. After the operation, Elena woke up still groggy from the anesthesia, feeling cold and frightened. She wondered out loud why she felt so bad when they were “just going to do a little operation.” Medical staff informed her of what had happened in the operating room. Then she noticed she was in a brace and felt a bar along her spine. They told her she wouldn’t be able to move for three days. She felt her hands tied and asked “please, free up my hands, I feel horrible, everything is dark.” Returning to sleep, she woke up later “dying of cold.” She remembered finding a nun sitting and reading the bible, holding the rosary. Later, the nun covered her with blankets, changed her out of her cold wet clothing and brought her chamomile tea. She felt the nun saved her life. The next morning, the nurses questioned where she had obtained the covers. Elena recounted noticing the clothes were musty and caused her to sneeze. She then described the nun to the medical staff. They insisted that no nuns worked there and that she was describing a deceased nun, Sister Maria Romero, who took care of those who did not have anyone to take care of them. It is unclear how Elena received the care she needed. At the same time, the nurses’ reaction indicates that those charged with her care were not the ones to dispense the care. Instead, Elena’s recovery seems to have been left to chance, her body treated as expendable.

Augmenting the ambiguous origins of inattention women experience was the difference in the attention Anita received within different tiers of Costa Rica’s healthcare system. Anita struggled to obtain the attention she required at an EBAIS, Costa Rica’s neighborhood primary attention clinics. Despite holding Costa Rican citizenship, she routinely experienced as much discrimination as any undocumented immigrant. Anita made her recent medical struggles the focus of half of our first interview. She frequently visited the EBAIS, suffering from heart disease, colon disease and diabetes. She had often found herself at odds with doctors when they
pushed her to seek outside attention that her health condition, economic situation and household obligations would not permit her to pursue. The acrimonious interaction culminated in a “brush with death,” which Anita attributed to poor attention at the EBAIS where they “didn’t want to attend [her] well.” She described how she requested a check-up because she felt sick. As though she were undeserving, the doctor “threw her on the floor” to take her blood pressure, rather than sit her on an open bed. Afterwards, she was sent home, told there was nothing wrong. The next day her husband brought her back to the clinic. She described her status as grave and recounted she had begun vomiting. The doctors scolded her for not tolerating the vomiting, dismissing her symptoms and discomfort. They sent her to the clinic’s outdoor sinks, dedicated to cleaning and maintenance tasks, to drink water and clean herself off. When she vomited there, they scolded her further, treating her with animosity. Though EBAIS doctors never explicitly mentioned her status, their manner was hostile. They demonstrated reticence to provide care at each juncture.

The consequences of this lack of care were nearly fatal. After the final vomiting incident, the EBAIS doctors reported her pressure was high. They realized her appendix was bursting and took her in an ambulance to the San Juan de Dios Hospital. After conducting exams, hospital doctors decided to delay surgery because her pressure was dangerously elevated. Once they had brought it down they “moved like roadrunners in their rush to get to the operating room.” She described the scene in the surgery room as a desperate scramble that was nearly fatal.

I had two heart attacks on the operating table and my appendix ruptured. They made an incision from my upper abdomen to my pelvis. Because it infected all of my organs when it ruptured, they had to take all my organs out, clean them and put them back. Why all this? Because of the negligence of the doctors and nurses in the EBAIS.

Though she finally received the necessary care, evidence of negligence surfaced afterwards.

“Two months later, I became gravely ill again. They had left bacteria in one of my kidneys. They

\[106\] Large, critical care hospital in San Jose.
made a large cut and they left two holes to drain the puss.” The doctors were not encouraging about Anita’s immediate chances to live. She spent two more months in the hospital. In retrospect she commented with irony, “so, well, I’m a miracle! I escaped death.”

Anita clearly attributed her brush with death to negligent care by EBAIS staff. She pointed out that the treatment must have derived from racist sentiments, considering her legal status in the country. She told me:

Laurita, they can’t say it’s because I don’t have documents. I have my ID up to date. I am covered by my husband’s insurance. I take the documents with me. And he accompanies me! Eh? Please! They treat me badly, just the same. They’re conniving, more so if we’re foreigners, even more so if we’re paísanas, nicas (Nicaraguans).

In Anita’s view, the anti-immigrant sentiment was implicated in the discrimination she experienced. According to Anita, these ambiguous refusals were still transparent forms of discrimination directed against immigrants.

She survived these episodes, but they left her vulnerable. When I met her, she was strong, emboldened by the episodes. But almost a year later, when I last saw Anita, she had lost significant girth apart from her stomach which uneasily protruded from the rest of her body. Her physical condition was matched by a defeated demeanor. I’d barely seen a smile from her in the preceding months. We spoke over the phone a few days after we last met. Her voice sounded strained and her breathing labored. I asked if I could visit her in the coming days. “Ay, Laurita, estoy mal (I’m doing badly),” she told me. “I’m on my way to the hospital. I’m not sure when I’ll be back…” A few days later, Elena and Lila filled me in on the latest sequence of events and her grim prognosis. Once again she had gone to the EBAIS where they diagnosed her condition as stomach ulcers. Lila intervened when her symptoms worsened, bypassing the EBAIS and presenting her case to hospital doctors who assured Lila they would take responsibility for

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107 Another pejorative form of referring to Nicaraguans.
making a precise diagnosis and ensuring Anita’s care. They discovered she had stomach cancer and this time the prognosis was fatal. I learned of her death at 50, just a few weeks later. Lila speculated it was related to the mistakes of the previous surgeries. For Elena, Lila, Ileana and Monica, whom I spoke with following her death, the treatment was characteristic of clinic doctors who interface with immigrants.

Anita’s experiences, among others, indicated that perceptions were racialized. Anita emphasized that she held legal status and yet her treatment was not equal to that extended to other citizens. Nor did she equate to her economic status, considering that she had documented her up-to-date insurance payments. She felt the only difference was her country of origin. The treatment she received, instead, pointed to an essentialist view of Nicaraguans as undeserving. Doctors, she commented, might rationalize negligence with the patient’s failure to follow instructions. Considered together, Anita’s situation illustrated ways that “a wide range of motives and behaviors, many of them perfectly rational, and many kinds of silences and inattentions that are at first glance entirely inoffensive, work together to create racist institutions and outcomes” (Hill 2009: 29). In this instance, Anita was not consistently meeting the demands made of her. In the eyes of medical staff, she had failed to participate in ensuring her own health. But those making demands of her routinely failed to consider the structural impediments she faced towards completing these tasks.

To understand the treatment of Nicaraguan patients, I turn to the work of medical anthropologist Charles Briggs, who uses the treatment of Warao Cholera patients in Venezuela to show how indigenous patients were excluded from Venezuela’s body politic (2004). 

108 Criollo doctors perceived that Warao who were unable to meet sanitary exigence were trapped within

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108 In Venezuela, “Criollos” were equated with “non-indigenous” and “Venezuelan.” In common use, Criollo was contrasted with “indigena (indigenous)” a category, which included members of the Warao ethnic group (Briggs 2004: 184 italics in original).
rigid, localized and premodern cultural practices. Warao community members were presumed to be infected or at high risk for infection. Doctors then located them outside the parameters of “sanitary citizenship” in which non-indigenous Venezuelans, including the doctors, were included. These relationships were naturalized as politicians, doctors and public health officials distinguished themselves from indigenous members. They equated non-indigenous practices with sanitary practices and global access to knowledge. In this way, they perceived the distinction between themselves and the Warao to flow “naturally from the location of their attached bodies in terms of race, class, symbolic capital (such as medical degree), and institutional nexus” (2004: 175). While non-indigenous, if infected, would be seen as an anomaly and rapidly provided with medication, doctors treated Warao Cholera patients as inherently responsible for their own sickness. They prescribed vitamins rather than medication for dying patients, demonstrated ambivalence to their deaths and blamed their culture for their exposure to Cholera. Briggs points out, instead, that the inequality between who could access care was not a reflection of differences between Warao and other cholera patients’ adherence to sanitary practices, but a question of who was allowed access to global flows of information, health and medical technology.

Brigg’s work sheds light on the ways medical treatment was extended to Nicaraguan patients. In this case, universalism extended to those who adhered to the prescriptions of the total medical system. The expectations that access to these services was unlimited, without considering other mediating factors such as schedule of services, rendered anyone who did not adhere “undeserving” of services. While migrants were not excluded from medical attention outright, the attention they received was contingent on adherence to terms of treatment with which they could not consistently comply. Mainstream portrayals of Nicaraguans’ circumstances distorted the reality, blaming women for their incapacity to exercise self-reliance when utilizing
the medical system. This produced the notion that they were unworthy of the services provided to them. It discouraged women’s pursuit of knowledge about the structural impediments to participation. The practices derived from dominant views of Nicaraguans and continually reinforced their “otherness.” The medical system became one more site in which the emergent unease with Nicaraguan presence reinforced the dominant hierarchy of belonging. As they shared their experiences, Network women recognized further evidence of the systemic origins of Nicaraguan’s marginality abroad. Once more, as Nicaraguans shared their concerns about this treatment with others, their individual unease was articulated as a collective concern.

E. The Same Abuse: Police and Enforcers of Patriarchal Norms

The refusals women encountered, including the public “spectacle” of exclusion in Costa Rican spaces, certainly bothered women but the root of their organizing revolved around their inability to remove themselves from violence by crossing the border. The experience of Nicaraguan emigrants is distinct from cases within the wealth of literature exploring migration from Latin America to the U.S. In the U.S. context, scholars have identified the many ways that migrants settled abroad and departing migrants communicate to ease the transition. Moreover, they demonstrate that relying on a network of similarly situated emigrants permits them to access employment opportunities, seek housing, form social networks and enact rights that are commensurate with their legal and financial circumstances. Anthropologist Alex Julca, for example, speaks to the tendency of migrants to associate based on shared legal status, rather than nationality (2001). Various ethnographers have demonstrated how undocumented migrants have created niches for themselves that grant them greater flexibility in the workplace, gaining leverage with their employers by encouraging the emigration of family and friends who they guarantee as “willing” and efficient workers as Gomberg-Muñoz describes for Mexican
immigrants in Chicago restaurants (2010), Hagan describes for Guatemalan Maya men in Houston Texas, (1994), Mahler describes for Salvadoran migrants in New Jersey (1995), and Juca for Peruvians in New York City (2001). In turn, Menjivar and Mahler discuss immigrants’ tendency to settle in areas where family and friends are present, to help them navigate unfamiliar places. Hosting newly arrived family, friends or community members establishes a relationship of economic responsibility between them (Pribilsky 2007: 173; Menjivar 2000; Mahler 1995). Ethnographers have shown, in some situations, established and arriving migrants often prefer to break ties with family and friends, rather than risk entering in relationships in which they cannot reciprocate favors, or, where they will be asked for favors which threaten their own livelihoods and carry a risk of not being reciprocated (Menjivar 2000; Pribilsky 2007: 173). Finally, Gomberg-Munoz and I (2014), Stuesse and Coleman (2014), and Kovic (2014) have written about ways undocumented workers become advocates for their rights abroad. Network migration is so ubiquitous ethnographers often assume it. Yet, it is clearly not always the case.

Unlike “network” forms of migration and settlement (Menjivar 2000; Mahler 1995; Gomberg-Munoz 2011; Hagan 1994; Julca 2001), Nicaraguan stories typically reflected only minimal guidance from other immigrants. Instead, emigration was seen as a way to break with oppressive social networks. They were guided by job opportunities, word-of-mouth about projects and some sense of where migrant communities were located. But largely, stories of finding places to reside, based on the location of extended family or members of communities in the place of origin, were relatively few. It was common to hear Nicaraguan migrants complain of wrongdoing committed by other migrants. Their indignation was clear in their repetition of the phrase “me lo hizo un paisano! (a countryman did it to me!)” Likewise, Network women described harboring a deep sense of mistrust of fellow Nicaraguans before joining the Network.
And even once organized, life abroad did not lose its complexity. A step forward, with one foot, was not necessarily followed by a step forward with the other.

In the absence of a broader social network, including parents and neighbors, a contradiction emerged. On the one hand, women were able to break with entrenched localized networks in which power was exerted between family members and neighbors. Still the break was not complete, as expressed in the frequent claims that women were taken advantage of “by their own countrymen.” Women’s stories of intimate and intrafamilial forms of violence focused more narrowly on stories of persistent violence between spouses. This persistent form of abuse pointed to the contradictory result of non-network migration. By avoiding former networks, women entered local and national spaces abroad where they faced greater difficulty in inserting themselves. Within their neighborhoods, they lacked the cultivated trust that developed through long-term residence in a particular place, and moreover, the comfort of relying on neighbors and family members for advice and guidance in seeking necessary forms of assistance. They also lacked knowledge of the institutions they could turn to for support. Furthermore, as women’s stories throughout this chapter demonstrate, they faced hostility in state spaces as foreigners. Without basic services and support networks, women struggled to separate from abusive partners and to support themselves and their children. In effect, their ability to remove themselves from the violence they experienced was curtailed by the explicit inequalities they encountered abroad.

In the space of the home and immediate community, inequality galvanized organizing and, in turn, organizing produced new experiences. After summarizing her transformation, Alicia related, “I enjoy learning because that’s how you learn to defend yourself.” Being organized with the Network allowed her to cushion herself from her husband’s words. She felt other members provided sound advice about what to do. For example, when he told her she would die without
him, she remained unintimidated. She reflected “I learned to think ‘As if I didn’t have hands that allow me to work;’ so this perspective helped me a lot in refusing to allow him to get to me.” She felt that because of her organizing, she inhabited a different mental and social space. She learned a new way of being in a relationship: “that one doesn’t have to permit the man to control, or anyone really, to show aggression, because they teach you that we all are valuable.”

In one sense, the persistence of violence of the home was foreseeable. By migrating, women broke the cycle of violence with a single man, a single family. But it did not itself transform the structure of feeling of family, as an institution organized by unequal gender relations, dictating domination and suffering. In fact, other men who migrated found themselves subject to greater subordination than in Nicaragua, adding nationality to marginal class and racial attachments. Suffering from diminished status in the public realm, they might enact greater aggression in the private realm, retaining a sense of power. This interaction may remain unrecognized, persisting as an emergent sense of insecurity and violence. Alicia recounted overhearing her husband’s friends comment to him “you’re stupid, you’re an idiot, and you let yourself be controlled by this woman. Leave her!” In turn, he would insult her in front of them, “saying ugly things to pick himself up, telling me I was good for nothing [because] he felt small, like a chicken next to them.” Verbal aggression often diminished women’s self-esteem, their will to make excursions beyond the home, engage socially within or outside the home and control appearance and self-care.

Alicia found her husband exerting economic violence over her, reinforcing her dependence on him. When she first began living with him, he prohibited her from working. Once children came along, he required her to stay home with them. Alicia often worried. Although he insisted she not work, she struggled to put food on the table. Sometimes, when her partner was
not around, his mother or sister would provide a bag of rice, sometimes send bread or beans. But mostly, Alicia said, she “would go to sleep thinking, ‘dear god, bless us, even if with just a little rice and beans to get by.’” Economic violence left women without the means to venture out into the community, lacking the resources to do so, and only when the spouse or dominating family member permitted them to do so.

Beyond the brute reality of continuing aggression in the home, Nicaraguan women found they were routinely discouraged, even “re-victimized” by employees of the justice system, in spite of laws that should protect them. For example, when called police would comment “if you’re just going to rescind your declaration tomorrow when you make up with your husband, why make it?” Others would hint that women without papers should exercise caution when denouncing violence. The difficulty of gaining complicity of police in protecting and upholding women’s rights fit feminist arguments that police forces serve as safe-keepers of the patriarchal order (Carcedo 2003 in Sagot 2010: 225). Furthermore, public programs intended to help women leave domestic violence would provide legal counseling, but did little to bridge the information and structural gap for women who lacked alternative housing, the presence of extensive social networks and income, much less papers.

Elena’s comments about police echoed a widely-held view among immigrant women. She told me, “the problem of reporting violence is that the police will say ‘we can’t take you together. We can take you in to make the report, or we can take him to the station. If you don’t make the report there, we can’t hold him, but we can’t make another trip to get him.’” She met up with this lackadaisical attitude repeatedly when attempting to resolve her own situation of domestic violence. Despite initial foot-dragging police, Elena was able to get them to put a restraining order on her husband. For two years, he shouldn’t have been within 300 feet of her.
He shouldn’t have been able to live in the same canton, but remained in his home, just a few blocks over. Though women regularly manage to access some protective measures, the burden of enforcement is often left to them. In Elena’s case, her dilemma persisted as the blows continued:

my friends encouraged me to keep denouncing him. Once we went to the police in the Goicochea canton and they just let him go free. The next time, he broke my arm, hitting me with a wrench after he tried to take the house and I responded by saying I held the title. He left me purple with bruises; he kicked me, dragged me by the hair out into the street and punched me. That time we went to the Hatillo canton police. Again they told him that he couldn’t get close to me. Even his lawyer insisted, “don’t go near there, the judge has now found you guilty.” He still came by, 15 days later, with vegetables and fruit. He said, “don’t go to the arraignment, I’m not going. Let’s just stay in peace.” I replied “what kind of peace? You mean me in the cemetery, my children in protective services?” And he fled the country.

While Elena had continued to move forward without her ex-husband, his abuse and subsequent departure left its marks. One of her sons attempted suicide, he missed his father so much. Elena may never be unable to lift her right arm up to the height of her shoulder, the result of their final physical encounter with a wrench. Together she and her sons were healing, but the process took time. The police responded to a dominant patriarchal norm that dismisses domestic violence and disregards marginal neighborhoods.

Hilda, a woman living in a rural area outside of San Jorge recounted:

when my husband became aggressive, I called the police. Their post is just 200 feet from my home. I called them when my husband threatened me. Forty minutes later they arrived, asserting that the delay was caused by a ‘need for back-up in these situations.’

Although rarely available nor willing to protect women in private spaces, the police routinely intervened in women’s right to enjoy public ones. Living with employers, or in distant rooms in shared homes, members of Grupo La Merced used to find the park the ideal place to socialize. While I worked with them, however, they found public spaces were no longer safe for them. As they visited parks and churches, ran errands and found something to eat, they often encountered

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109 A canton is an administrative subdivision, smaller than a municipality but larger than a neighborhood.
police walking around asking for their documents. The spaces women occupied, even in their free time, were structured by their employment and targeted by the police.

In her seminal essay on undocumented labor, Saskia Sassen argued that undocumented labor serves the interests of state elites by providing a vulnerable low-wage workforce (Sassen-Koob 1981). Similarly, violence and activities that marginalize migrants in Costa Rica serve the interests of elites. Domestic violence was an important element stymying forms of sociality that could lead to organizing. Insofar as women sensed their social activities provoked violent episodes, they retreated into the home as episodes of physical, economic and emotional abuse unfolded. Furthermore, they indicated that violent episodes made them feel ashamed, goading them to seek greater privacy to hide signs of abuse. Moreover, the threat of violence discouraged intervention in others’ experiences, eroding community solidarity. Such situations discouraged forms of organizing in which women’s public and private rights to a life without violence, among other rights, could be discussed and recognized. In turn, this discouraged interest in immigrant and migrant rights. In this sense, domestic violence was complicit in maintaining immigrant marginality. Inasmuch as this marginality supported the reproduction of capitalist and patriarchal structures, it reinforced the neoliberal economic order. Thus in practice, domestic violence could work against organizing, obfuscating the ability to work against the capitalist and patriarchal order.

F. Life And Abuse: “It’s Uglier When They Mistreat You With Words…”

The justice system was not alone in impeding women’s ability to become independent. Women struggled to meet the pre-requisites for welfare services that might otherwise provide alternative or additional recourse for resolving abusive intimate relationships. Instead, the difficulty of accessing them rendered women dependent on abusive partners and produced
ongoing marginality. Ana Lucia spoke at length of her attempts to free herself from her former partner’s control. Ana Lucia’s husband and sons kept her in a marginal position in the household while charging her with extensive social reproductive and economic responsibility. At forty-four, Ana Lucia was separated from her abusive ex-husband when he got sick and went blind. Her sons, all adult, insisted their father return to live with them, though they had been separated for years. They expected she would maintain him, paying the electricity, water, and other household expenses. Alone with the responsibility, she felt “like everything was going to fall apart.” At times, the electricity and water were cut off and the food ran out. She managed the situations but tired of the work. While she was able to “get over the hurdle” of making her sons responsible for their father, she struggled to garner their support in assisting her to leave what she described as a “violent arrangement.” She felt her sons neither loved nor valued her. She commented “they communicate much more with their father, they’ll sit, all together, and hang out with their father in the kitchen or in his room. But not with me. They isolate me in the home. Feeling unappreciated by all but my own daughter, I get deeply depressed.”

In the meantime, her ex-husband limited her ability to leave by controlling her access to both their shared holdings and any outside assistance she might garner. Among other forms of abuse, her ex-husband alternated between demanding Ana Lucia remain living with him and throwing her out of the home. He “punished” her by leaving her out of decisions about goods she had a legal right to make. “He sold the farm that we had, 3 acres. He took the money and spent it, I don’t know in what. Then he put the house up for sale. The same house we’re living in! He should at least be leaving something for [our children].” Ana Lucia had attempted to insert herself into the process, offering to fix up the house, attempting to ascertain whether he would share the earnings if she did. But she feared he would then sell it easily and leave her with
nothing. Furthermore, she inferred he would use the sale to drive a larger wedge between her and her sons. She recalled, “He said, ‘I will go and buy land for the kids, and you could buy some land for you, 2 hectares here in Costa Rica; but you shouldn’t be going to the same place as the kids.’ Qué bandido (what a rascal)! Because he doesn’t want to share our kids.” She felt that her relationship with her ex-husband “was [her] tragedy.” Her experience led her to the conclusion “it’s better that they mistreat you physically, it’s uglier when they mistreat you with words.” This struggle pushed Ana Lucia to search for alternative ways to create distance but retain control over where she traveled and with whom she interacted.

She emphasized that she had struggled to find alternatives. She considered sharing land with family, but suspected her brothers would be equally abusive. She had actively sought a housing bond to build a house. Still her ex-husband found a way to block her efforts. She applied to join a housing project and was told she qualified on the condition the homeowner where she was residing provide a signature. Her ex-husband declined, saying, “you can get yourself a house, but you’re going to have to see about getting on without my help.” The agency annulled her application. She tried to enter another project, but was refused. On her third try, a woman from the housing bond office listened to her situation and said she might qualify if someone could write her a letter stating that the homeowner wouldn’t provide the requisite papers. When we spoke, a friend was writing her a letter. The IMAS representative’s suggestions did little to assuage Ana Lucia’s fear she would remain ineligible. Her efforts made clear the ways the institutional requirements impede women’s ability to separate themselves from abusive situations. To obtain state support of her efforts, she was forced to rely on her abuser.

Such limitations led women to feel more isolated, sensing they could only remedy their situations through their own efforts. While she waited on the outcome of the IMAS decision and
development of a project, she would “focus on saving to put together the money to buy land if they are unable to give me the bond. I would move forward buying a lot and building a shack, even if it’s plastic.” She noted the challenge this effort presented. Ana Lucia maintained her own venta (house front store), where she sold bread she made. She cultivated corn and beans, raises hens for eggs, and breeds chickens and pigs to sell. She used the little she made from the bread, to buy clothing to sell. Though precarious, Ana Lucia felt somewhat more mobile than others in her position because she no longer had children relying on her. She commented: “it’s just me, and no one else. At least, I feel free, now the money I make is for me.”

G. Community, Interrupted
Ambiguous refusals are more pernicious because they permit the structure of feeling of exceptionalism to flourish through exclusionary practices that do not appear to be systematic in origin. Costa Rican’s contradictory dominant sense of being democratic, egalitarian, classless, participatory and universalist intermingled with emergent indignation over corruption, crime, policies favoring elites, growing inequality, declining services and rising costs. It compounded in a dominant notion that national benevolence was extended towards immigrants who were pitied for their marginality but blamed for the country’s decline. Many saw themselves as serving the public good as they acted on the sense that less-deserving migrants encroached on the state resources. They arrived at a selective understanding of what it meant to contribute. Nicaraguans contributed to the economy of the country, performing hard labor at low wages, demanding minimal services,\textsuperscript{110} paying into the caja,\textsuperscript{111} and raising children who would likely contribute to Costa Rica. Monica showed me numerous articles she had been saving since 2007, responding to the collapse of the caja and showing that while Nicaraguans had paid 88 million colones into the

\begin{footnotes}
\item[110] The average Nicaraguan adult seeks fewer clinic services than Costa Ricans of the same age range (Macias 2007).
\item[111] Rather than dismantle, it is Nicaraguan voluntary payments that hold up the last vestiges of social services.
\end{footnotes}
caja, they had only used 33 million. Though clearly reproducing exclusion, it was often difficult to surmise the refuser’s awareness of their motivation to engage in tacitly exclusionary practices. It was difficult to identify these acts of exclusion because of their ambiguity and therefore, the systematic nature of exclusion can be elusive to those charged with oversight.

The experiences of the Network women offered new insight to the ambiguous operation of racially motivated acts of exclusion. While I write, policy brutality towards African-Americans and Latinos in the United States has captured the public eye, after an extended period of dormancy in attention to racial inequality. The racially motivated origins of the treatment are often obscured in public discussion by the traction of police claims of fearing for their lives. Any activity can be deemed suspect. Walking down the street in segregated neighborhoods is conflated with gang-activity while walking through a library is suspect because black bodies are viewed as out of place. In either case, the unconscious racialization of threat or the overt conflation of racial association with threat, structural racism is at work. The case of Nicaraguans in Costa Rica provided a clear lens through which to understand the construction of race and its subtle operation. In Latin America, where nationality is racialized, Network women’s myriad struggles for social and reproductive rights highlighted how racialized structural inequality operated through the local codes of deservedness. The perception of who upheld and who usurped the widespread enjoyment of *pura vida* was racialized. White middle-class Costa Ricans epitomized contribution while others, most notably Nicaraguans, epitomized usurpation. As the democratic social-welfare state erodes, racism shows in the ambivalence expressed by Costa Ricans towards ensuring Nicaraguan’s rights.

Between the social construction of migrant “unworthiness” and the national framing of social and “universal” rights, Nicaraguan women’s activities were treated as liminal and
conditionally permissible transgressions into spaces circumscribed for those “belonging” to the nation, routinely frustrating their attempts to access services, rights and democratic participation. Nicaraguans also found themselves uprooted, taking part in newly founded communities in unfamiliar spaces, marked by the absence of family and community networks and the pressures of marginality. The negligible recognition of Nicaraguan women’s humanity relegated them to so-called “immigrant” spaces, segregated neighborhoods and parks. There they became visible to each other. Significantly, they began to voice their experiences to each other, identifying their shared grievances and articulating a shared emergent experience. As my many conversations indicate, the support of Network women made each step somewhat easier. In making these changes, women attempted to weave a new fabric of community life, laying the fibers next to each other in new ways.
VIII BUILDING A PRACTICE OF NETWORK

A. When A Birthday Party Is More Than A Birthday Party

In late January, Diana began planning a party for Marlene’s February birthday. “It will be a *piyamada!* (pajama party)” she excitedly told me. They would meet in the park Saturday afternoon, have a sleepover at Diana’s home, and then make a beloved Nicaraguan dish, *baho,* for the actual party on Sunday. Diana explained, “we’ll invite a few women from Grupo Merced and others from the office.” Marlene cautiously commented when I spoke with her later, “I’ve never had a birthday before.” Busy with interviews Saturday, I joined them on Sunday morning, taking a forty minute bus ride winding through the working class neighborhoods of San Jose. Down a short walkway from a zinc-laminate gate, a small fire-pit had been erected in front of her small, wooden house. Smoke billowed out from under a large pot. Marlene appeared in the doorway to invite me in. Everything was quiet in the adjoined living room and kitchen space at the entrance. Hearts cut out of a shiny-gold wrapping paper hung from the beam across the ceiling. On the white backside of the paper, Marlene had written: “I love you,” “friendship” and “thank you.” Diana was at the counter chopping vegetables for the cabbage salad. She opened the back door to show me her back yard, a small grassy area with trees sitting at the top of a steep ravine. Another large iron pot sat on top of a strong flame in the middle of the yard. Banana leaves stuck out from underneath the lid. As we returned to the kitchen, more women emerged from a bedroom where they had been chatting while resting on mattresses strewn around the floor.

They were dressed for a party and Monica immediately turned on the music and we began dancing. Diana called over her shoulder, “I dance around my home when I’m preparing food.” The others chimed in; “sometimes, when I’m cleaning, I turn the music up and dance all around my home.” “I get all my stress out,” Marlene said. “If they saw me,” she exclaimed,
“they’d think I was crazy!” Finished with salad preparations, Diana decided it was time I learned the Atlantic coast dances of Nicaragua. The others formed a circle around us. I was shown how to bend a little at the knees, step side-to-side, wiggle my hips a little and swing my arms just so in front and back. They nodded as I attempted the dance, giving me the feeling I had gotten the hang of the steps, the motion and the body position. However they laughed and declared that the “meat” around my waist didn’t shake freely enough to dance the way Diana had demonstrated. After a while, we fell back into a circle of chairs as Diana set the large pot of baho on the counter and removed the lid, peeling back layers of banana leaves. She took out large bowls and began to spoon into each large chunks of pork, soft yucca that had just reached the point of falling apart, and peeled sweet plantains, so well cooked they had caramelized, turning a reddish-pink hue. Then she heaped salad on top, finely sliced cabbage dripping with just the right amount of vinegar and salt. Each woman was handed a bowl and returned to her seat to eat this masterpiece in silence. Requiring hours of preparation, baho is a beloved Nicaraguan dish apropos for large gatherings.

After lunch, we continued chatting, waiting for Marlene’s partner Ervin to return with the cake. They had been having some problems. After losing his job, he had begun to disappear for days at a time on drinking binges. She was trying to figure out if the relationship would still work. In a previous conversation, she told me his self-esteem was dwindling. She found this troubling. She also recognized, matter-of-factly, how difficult this was making things for her. A few weeks earlier in the park, Marlene told us she was struggling and that she would prefer he make it clear whether he just was not up to the challenge, simplifying her decision to leave. At the party, her friends seemed unsure of what to say. Mostly, they wanted him to come through, bringing the cake so she could enjoy the birthday celebration that had been so carefully planned.
Sensing a few were preparing to leave, Diana initiated some party games and Marlene implored everyone to stay just an hour longer. We played a few small games and a small prize was produced for the winner. Finally, Ervin appeared and a look of relief crossed Marlene’s face. She gleefully took the cake, cut up slices for everyone and handed them out. We produced gifts and she opened them. Savoring the moment, she looked around, making eye contact with each of us. “I want to thank you,” she said. “I’ve never had a birthday party before.” Her gratitude was palpable. Everyone seemed to forget their urgency to return home. Still, after a short while, Marlene joined the rest of the group as we gathered our things and walked together towards the bus as the last rays of sunlight spread across the sky. The street was filled with people, children playing while some adults grilled on their sidewalks and others sat on their porches drinking a beer. We caught the bus in to the city and, once in the center, walked east along 4th avenue dropping people at their respective bus stops along the way.

The birthday party was not just a birthday party. For members of Grupo Merced, who remain in the country without family members, such activities among friends take on greater meaning. Moreover, this was the first birthday party held for this 50-year old woman. Most notable was the particular entrega (devotion) with which Diana, Marlene’s best friend, hosted and planned her birthday party. The party did not take place in a vacuum, but instead in the context of a series of other practices in which the women engage. The women expressed a special quality of care, having happily used their week’s allotment of time off for her birthday. They were cognizant of the importance of their friendship, as Malena struggled in her relationship. They had made a particular effort to ensure Malena’s party offered a space that would make her feel accompanied in her struggle by loved ones.
I begin the chapter with this story to emphasize the Network’s principle strategies were situated in the mundane. At times they carried out tasks, such as a birthday party, with a different mindset that demonstrated cognizance of each other and the goal of building community. At other times, they intentionally transgressed routine mundane practices. They posed challenges to the circumscribed places for women to socialize, ways in which they socialized, ideas of private and public, as well as rules and expectations. The sum of these layered, multi-scalar practices was a burgeoning cultural transformation.

When considering how to address inequalities, they demonstrated that dominant ways of seeing had restricted their appreciation of widespread participation. Furthermore, they indicated that hegemonic ways of seeing decoupled notions associating citizenship with social rights. Finally, Network women’s discussions showed that dominant ways of seeing exhibited disregard for the citizenship of those marginalized along the lines of gender, age, race, ethnicity, class and nationality. Concluding they had learned to share in the disregard for their own inclusion, women recognized their tendency to “put themselves last,” a practice which had augmented their undeserved marginality. They began to think of and engage in practices that would actively encourage the sense that each person is worthy of inclusion.

More specifically, they addressed the origins of violence in its myriad of forms by promoting women’s participation across scales in novel ways. They engaged in the politics of everyday household and community life, building a participatory democratic practice from the home outward as a means of realizing the widespread everyday practice of gender equality, which would prevent or improve the experience of emigration. First, women formulated practices that allowed them to interact with, exchange information with and teach their peers. They also engaged in collective, horizontal and vertical practices that provided them with
leverage when facing situations in which they anticipated power might be easily wielded over them, interfering with their access to social rights and participation. Beyond constituting concertedly transformative practices, I argue these can all be conflated with struggles over democratic participation across the “public” and “private” spheres from everyday sites of community organizing to spaces of state-policy formation and law-making. Ultimately, women were attempting to implement practices that would bring them social rights at home and abroad.

B. Beyond Emergence: Instigating Transformation By Inspiring Practice

Network women rooted their collective struggle in concerted everyday transgressions of normative gender practices to promulgate social change, in effect, engaging in the politics of the mundane. In light of their identification of exclusion across the different scales around which society is organized, Network women devised strategies responding to the different scales and spaces where exclusion took place. The practices central to “being organized with the Network” emphasized changes in everyday forms of interacting that they felt perpetuated gendered violence across scales. To do so, they examined routine interactions in the places they recurred to identify the values that informed their own and others’ actions therein. Based on this analysis, they discussed and enacted alternative practices that reflected value for gender, racial and national equality.

In this chapter, I draw on Raymond William’s theory of emergence--that the consolidation of new spheres of values, meanings and practices gradually transform the social order--to examine the Network. William’s theoretical work illuminates the effect of Network women’s engagement in conscious, concerted and collective acts towards transforming gender relations. Moreover, his concept of structures of feeling illuminates the differences among their efforts in places ranging from the home to the neighborhood to government offices and to
transnational family communication. Through this lens, the differences among Network women’s responses to each space clearly reflected the common roots of violence in each space: a gender, racial and national hierarchy that inspired normative notions delineating who participated in each of these spaces and how they did so, shaping interactions within these spaces. Moreover, they indicated that the violence enacted in one, compounded with or reinforced violence in other. Their disruptions to the gendered hierarchy also exhibited a temporal element. They addressed immediate acts of erasure and exclusion but would also speak in ways they felt would persuade others to see them differently. In this way, being organized with the Network pointed to cognitive and embodied practices of scale that responded to their grounded experiences of the violence of social hierarchy.

Raymond Williams’ theory of emergence (1977) was not an explicit reference to collective organizing. He believed dominant processes included the possibility of transformation through the simultaneous development of alternative or oppositional values, practices and relationships. Challenges might also emerge as a result of the persistence of residual markers of a previously dominant systems of values (Williams 1977: 123). He demonstrated that the social order changed over time as novel, diverse and localized practices consolidated (Inhorn and Wentzell 2011: 803). They might be absorbed into dominant culture or coexist as alternative or oppositional forms. More specifically, he felt that as ideas concretized into coherent sets of values, meanings and practices, a new culture would emerge. Given that Williams equated culture with power, both the amount of difference and degree of consolidation of alternative ideas would influence their relative degree of parity with the dominant culture. Adopting this analytical lens for the study of social movement draws attention to the ways unease and discord translate into dissenting values, meanings and practices. Moreover, it focuses on the production
and deployment of these values, meanings and practices in ways that sustain—or fail to sustain—alternative or oppositional cultures. In this way, Williams’ theoretical work is relevant to understanding how the Network builds their logic of organizing on the contradictions women identify.

During a period of scrutiny in 1990s,112 anthropologists recalibrated their lens on social movements drawing on Williams’ theories of culture and power. They refocused on ways people responded to contradictions they experienced in the structures organizing everyday life, particularly, related to political-economic transformation. In turn, these contradictions open the door for racial, gendered or ethnic counter-claims to be inserted into public and formal political venues, inspiring collective action during these “political openings” (Collier 1994; Postero 2007; Paley 2001; Mills 2003; Warren 2002; Coll 2011; Murdock 2008). A wealth of research has focused on the experience of and response to changing economic and social assemblages in the midst of globalization, neoliberal restructuring and democratization, among others (Collier 1994; Murdock 2008; Paley 2001). Anthropologists argued these areas of experience were being depoliticized when neoliberal agents re-classified them as private, aesthetic or natural. They drew on Williams’ work to show that this process was not uniform. The process of re-signification can produce areas of tension, or better contention, as people encounter contradictions between these shifting “spheres of practice and meaning” (Williams 1977: 125). In these encounters, it is possible to observe how hegemonic cultures are shaped from above and below despite the uneven potential of social actors to wield power, giving rise to new cultural assemblages (Williams 1977; Joseph et al 1994).

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112 The anthropology of social movements became immersed in a catharsis of sorts during the 1990s, as it redefined itself within a more anthropological line of inquiry. Anthropologists sought to overcome a structure of inquiry that searched for essentialisms and generalizations about social movements that had developed (and were also being critiqued) in sociological lines of inquiry (Edelman 2001; Escobar, Alvarez and Dagnino 1998). How could it research ever-broadening mobilizations without falling in the trap of reifying the public faces of social movements, civil society and state?
Moreover, they have focused on ways this shift reconstitutes the definition and experience of citizenship and participation. For example, Postero (2007) described Bolivian Aymara communities’ experience of gaining citizenship in the midst of privatization of ownership of natural resources, which revealed the limits of participatory decision-making in electoral democracy. The outside imposition of the terms of the debate over water privatization, excluding local values and customs, galvanized a movement. The contradictory values underlying neoliberal conversion of use into market value and democratic practice collided with indigenous forms of participation, resource management and ownership. In light of similar practices of governments in other countries, anthropologists have portrayed neoliberal democracy as elitist, a site of practice of dominant values, ways of being and ways of acting rather than a site of alternative participation (Postero 2007; Paley 2001). At the same time, Postero demonstrates how the political opening created by the extension of citizenship to indigenous Bolivians provided a space when the values encompassed by indigenous *usos and costumbres* (ways and traditions) could structure the cultural and economic organization of rights to water.

Similarly, the contradictions between discourse, expectations and reality produced tensions that galvanized women to organize the Network around their uneven access to social rights. Organizing with the Network and immigrating were two among numerous ways Nicaraguan women had attempted to prevent violence. The tension of finding themselves unable to resolve violence once abroad was reflected in the organizing practices of the Network. As they joined the Center, women recognized their collective experiences of violence. Through the Center, they identified and explored ideas about gender and migration that normalized violence against them. Grounded in their own transnational experiences of exclusion, they worked
towards embodying a cross-cultural feminist practice. The tension of finding themselves unable to resolve violence by migrating was reflected in their proclivity to organize once abroad. As they joined the Center, women recognized their collective experiences of violence. Through the Center they identified and explored ideas about gender and migration that normalized violence against them.

Dominant across structures of feeling, mando and exceptionalism produced “ways of seeing” Nicaraguan women’s bodies, or commonsense notions of where they should be, how they should be used, and what rights should be assigned to them. Such notions generate actions, insofar as they justify, even encourage, physical, emotional and economic violence against women. They also shape women’s actions, reactions and responses. This is particularly salient in periods of social, political and economic transition. Doreen Massey proposes that the “mobility of women does indeed seem to pose a threat to a settled patriarchal order” (1994:11). Women’s shifting roles through processes of Revolution, restructuring and feminization of labor opportunities and migration constitute such transition. The normativity of violent responses to these changes renders them invisible. In the neoliberal area, they articulate with the veneration of individualism to obscure Nicaraguan women’s suffering through violence and migration.

Women’s cognizance that government officials willfully ignored this reality was epitomized in Monica’s comment, “Ortega, [the president of Nicaragua] doesn’t even shift his eyes in our direction,” maintaining a virtual silence about emigration and ongoing violence. The idea of Costa Rican exceptionalism likewise fueled Costa Rican’s ambivalence with regard to Nicaraguans’ exclusion. “Eso te pasa por Nica (this happens because you are Nica)” was a common joking response to commentary about this condition. The commonsense notion that as undeserving inhabitants, their suffering was inevitable and therefore not a pressing concern,
rendered their suffering invisible. Furthermore, finding a resolution to their exclusion was often regarded as migrants’ responsibility. To describe life abroad in Costa Rica, Lila smirked as she mockingly repeated the adage “mmhmmm, it’s the pure life here” ironically appropriating the common idiom *pura vida*. In their quest to disrupt these ways of seeing Nicaraguan women, women organized with the Network asserted a set of conscious, deliberate practices to usher in a new ways of being, building a new way of seeing.

By fusing new gendered or, more specifically, feminist system of values with practices reflecting this transformation, Network women came to engage systematically with dominant processes illustrating William’s concept of emergence. Through their journeys and early experiences abroad, Nicaraguan women experienced the tensions and unease that produce emergent culture, if articulated. Through the spaces of the Center, women saw they shared a sense of inconformity with their experiences of exclusion. In response to this collective articulation of grievances, they formed the Network as a women’s collective concertedly working to create a horizontal structure of belonging by implementing new forms of relating. Their work towards introducing new values and practices can be related to Williams’ assertion, “emergence depends crucially on finding new forms or adaptations of form…active and pressing but not yet fully articulated” (Williams 1977: 126). However, Williams principally referred to evolving practices but not exclusively concerted collective action. Williams’ work, therefore, is limited in its ability to explain organizing practices and their effects. I turn to the literature of corporal feminisms in the following section to frame how women of the Network collectively and concertedly utilize their bodies and words as “leveling” mechanisms attempting to usher in new understandings of appropriate gender equality, interpersonal and community relations, as well as social rights, nationalism and citizenship. They signaled that their former practices
demonstrated inequality in the relationship. To usher in new perspectives and reinforce new practices that disrupt gender hierarchy, Network members rehearsed and trained themselves towards new dispositions.

C. Objects Of Transformation: Structure In The Everyday

Although Network women were directly involved in movements to recognize and improve migration, principally through the Center, their everyday work, training, strategizing and lens focused squarely on gender relations and their implication in migration and its outcomes in the neoliberal era. Though the Center channeled women’s energy and focus, it did not tamper with the multiplicity of strategies women adopted to make their mark on the shifting scene. Network women organized in order to issue challenges to situations that reflected the application of the values of *mando* and exceptionalism. Women were cognizant of a multiplicity of practices in different situations in Nicaragua and Costa Rica that compounded and enhanced their suffering. They responded to the way structures of feeling delineated the parameters and scales of different institutions and organized dominant values around the activities within them. They delineated a private sphere, which encompassed family and household, and a public sphere, which encompassed the neighborhood, civil society, government programs and formal political arenas. Moreover, they showed how the designations of private and public reflected the patriarchal system. Thus, they identified and responded to certain practices that reproduced gender, class, national and racial hierarchies within each. They looked, specifically, to everyday interactions that would seem irrelevant to the untrained eye.

Network women’s attention to these everyday practices highlights how power works through culture, not only in formal political practices, such as laws and the organization of government, but also in the mundane. They approached the task of transforming *mando* and
exceptionalism by analyzing and proposing alternatives for a myriad of mundane actions that reflected cultural norms. These included the decision of a woman in her home to refuse to “serve” food she had prepared to her son. They also included women’s choice to accompany each other when they would register their children for school, report spousal abuse to the police, or submit residency applications to immigrant services. This approach stemmed from the ways that community organizers encouraged women to reflect on the concepts they had been taught through their life histories and everyday experiences. Consciously or unconsciously, it also reflected the way “structure orchestrates social relations” (Wolf 2001 in Gardner 2010). Their strategies engaged in the politics of culture (Alvarez, Dagnino and Escobar 1999) by examining ways culture organized normative ideas of social interactions across scales.

Assessed individually, each of these mundane practices could have easily been mistaken for disconnected, ephemeral and tenuous attempts to disrupt the social order. But it became clear, through my observation of Network meetings and my conversations with Network members, that they regarded each practice they engaged in as disrupting a series of interconnected practices that reinforced gender inequality. What is more, they described observing the transformation of community members’ attitudes towards gender relationships through these practices. Women layered practices within and across scales to address different manifestations of a gendered social hierarchy. Network members did not see any single action as having transformative potential. Instead, they felt the social structure could only be changed by focusing collectively on enacting transformative practices in the places where it was being reproduced, throughout a myriad of overlapping spaces at different scales. These practices principally transgressed mundane everyday forms of reproducing the dominant structure. Women hoped that together they would
gradually replace those values and practices that reproduced an exclusionary dominant culture at each of its many nodes.

Recent scholarship addressing “intimate” or “embodied” activism developed alongside the aforementioned shift towards a Williams-inspired lens on social movements. This scholarly work moves beyond the origin of conflict and the forms of mobilization it inspires. Scholars have demonstrated how organizing and transformation become part of a way of life. Anthropologist Tarini Bedi writes about the Shiv Sena, low-level right-wing women politicians in India who enact their own agenda, shaping relationships with male colleagues and constituents by projecting a “dashing” personality and strength though their words and actions. She categorizes these transgressions as “affective strategies” (In press: 4-5). These women engage in a “politics of dashing and daring,” projecting the idea that they were distinct, one which also corresponds to their actual and concerted ways of seeing and being. Discussing their “performative politics of personality,” Bedi describes how they talk about the way others will “feel” their strength. They desire for others to sense they could use violence, but expect that the strength of their words will be sufficient to affect changes around them (Weinstein and Bedi 2012; Bedi in press: 6). Bedi’s conclusion that women embody transformation for the purpose of inspiring new ways of interaction provides a useful perspective on the embodied and performative aspects of the Network’s activities.

However, I argue Network women engage in a more intimate transformation by shifting everyday notions of gendered relations. The Shiv Sena strategize to provoke sensory emotional reactions in order to transmit new ideas about themselves as women. In turn, Network women sought to produce cognitive changes, providing themselves and others with novel criteria for reasoning about their place in the social order and their corresponding roles. They engaged
others in intellectual conversation, challenging them to reconsider the naturalized associations of women with places, space, relationships and participation. While transforming intimate relations, they also insisted on the equal participation of bodies across spaces and scales, whether public institutions, policy-making meetings, marches or other visible “spectacles” of protest. Their activities reciprocally nurtured inclusive ways of seeing and behaving, related to these bodies. They engaged in discussion with the goal of overriding ascribed and assumed subordinate gendered, racial, ethnic, national, spatial and class ties.

Network women frequently and explicitly related their transgression to their bodies. I contend that they engage in a body politics by drawing on the work of feminist scholars Liz Grosz and Wendy Harcourt. Grosz, a philosopher, coined the term “corporeal feminism” (1994) to describe and locate activism surrounding the normative constructions of gender, in the body itself rather than “spheres of subjective representations” (Lingis 1994). Building on Grosz’ work, anthropologist Wendy Harcourt explains the concept of body politics, or bodies as sites of cultural struggle. She portrays bodies as “sources of both oppression and power” and “sites of social experience and political resistance” (2009: 17). The Network, as well as the Shiv Shena, can be described as tacitly addressing how “social norms of being female are inscribed on the body” (Grosz 1994 in Harcourt 2009: 17). Though connected to broader political movements, the Network’s focus on everyday interpersonal interactions reflected Harcourt’s description of the ways we learn and develop understandings of the “lived gendered body [through] everyday life or micro-politics.” She argued that “constructions including the language and practices of caring, parenting, sexual relations, [and] health” play a significant role in shaping these understandings. Harcourt argues analysis of these constructions permits “challenge[s to] norms and oppressive practices, and understand how to exercise different forms of power that can transform and
change such conditions” (2009:17). The women of the Network engaged in precisely these types of analytical and transformative activities by constructing novel norms of social interaction within the household, community and institutional spaces. With gender inequality in mind, they established new ways of relating, reassigned responsibility for tasks and challenged the criteria for determining who held knowledge.

Grounded in women’s experiences, the strategies effected by Network women were distinct because they centered on disrupting the practices reproducing *mando* and the associated notions of appropriate activities and actions along the lines of gender, race, ethnicity, class and nationality. Further, insofar as they addressed these constructions concertedly and collectively, they also addressed the institutional-tactical arrangements (Wolf 1999) that accrue power. Migrant organizing responded to acts and erasure of violence in the broadest sense, including poverty, separation from family, and institutional, physical and emotional violence. The Network attempted to assert feminist practices in different spheres through individual and collective efforts. In effect, they were learning to embody a collective feminist practice and an emergent feminism.

Their feminism was explicitly transnational. It contrasted with other localized Costa Rican and Nicaraguan feminisms, which dealt with domestically manifestations of exclusion. Local feminisms focused on eradicating barriers to participation faced by legal citizens, rendering them second-class inhabitants. The practices women sought to reproduce challenged men’s behavior within the household and addressed their own role in the reproduction of machismo. They addressed exclusion that emerged at the confluence of patriarchal, neoliberal and nationalist value systems.
D. *De Puertas Para Dentro, Solo Uno Sabe* (Beyond Closed Doors, One Only Knows): Rethinking Household Relationships

Women found the household to be a particularly salient scale of interaction in producing gender inequality and violence. At this scale, patriarchal and neoliberal ideas converged to produce practices that directly interceded in women’s activities. In patriarchal logic, the activities that took place within the home were only the concern of its members. Male heads of household wielded authority within the space. Finally, neoliberal policies had withdrawn funding for campaigns and centers denouncing domestic abuse and offering women legal and economic recourse. Through the Network, women acted to bring awareness to the subject of domestic abuse and make it an issue of public concern and discussion. This objective required that women themselves learn to criticize and denaturalize gendered ways of interacting. They realized both men and women reproduced and were affected by household structures of feeling. Moreover, women found it particularly dire because violence often propelled them to retreat further into the home. In turn, this reproduced gender inequality and maintained women’s marginality. Women evaluated the extent to which all forms of interpersonal violence, including physical, emotional, and economic, damaged their bodies. Network women divided the work of disrupting gender inequality in the home into three categories, challenging ideas about what made a loving partner and relationship, ideas about roles in private spaces and ideas about raising children. They carried out the practices they developed in the home, deliberately forcing other household members to reconsider what occurred in the household and why it occurred. In other words, through their actions, they attempted to usher in novel forms of gendered interaction, division of labor and space.

Domestic violence is particularly insidious because it is common and, yet, has a long history of being denied by victims and perpetrators alike. Network women’s assertion that these
practices were widespread was echoed in ethnographic work. For example, Roger Lancaster noted that physical and emotional violence were expected, encouraged, and normative reactions to women’s transgressions in particular (1992). Network women were also aware of the commonality and expectedness of domestic abuse rendered it unworthy of public intervention. This too is detailed in ethnographic work, in the argument that although many may be aware of and concerned with gender inequality, activities that cause women to suffer are “normalized into invisibility” (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2004:1). Furthermore, most Network women indicated they had not previously wielded the conceptual tools nor the language to voice their discord with the treatment they received. Indeed, as Anthropologist Nia Parsons argues, “the ability to express pain requires language for talking about the pain, identification of the origins of the pain and the willingness and ability of individuals and institutions to hear that pain” (2013: 10). Network women who had overcome situations of violence often reflected how difficult it had been to recognize the cycle they were immersed in. In tacit recognition of this need, Network women began to engage in collective introspective exercises where they identified practices that reproduced their subservient position in the home. Then they devised strategies that were simultaneously inwardly and outwardly corrective, which would not only address their own role in reproducing patriarchal ways of thinking and acting, but also teach those around them to rethink their values and practices. The process was not an easy one for them. Many of their stories about life abroad chronicled their struggle to overcome household violence. At the same time, they drew enormous pride from their efforts and demonstrated great excitement about their work encouraging others in their community to address gender inequality in the household.

As the most obvious form of control over women’s activities, women frequently discussed their negotiations with men about home life in informal conversation. Women asserted
that emotional and physical violence in the home had an isolating effect. For example, men would tell them they were ugly, dictated what they wore or controlled with whom they interacted. They recounted that they would respond by retreating into the home, withdrawing from friends and family, and even ceasing to engage in activities such as continuing education. They felt they became objects rather than “people.” Friends, family and neighbors were often reluctant to intervene, viewing these as “private matters.” Their proclivity to retreat was spurred by men’s recurrent blame on women’s social activities for any perceived fault in carrying out their duties. Men often blamed women’s socializing activities if clothing was imperfectly ironed, food was late, women did not serve food or children’s behavior was errant. Women reported men would proclaim “I want you in the home” in response to any of these situations. Women’s social activities were labeled “transgressive” because they “gave women ideas,” which were perceived to cause them to “rebel” against their partners. Women of the Network said they “learned to live in violence as if it were normal” in the attempt to *estar bien* (be well), and to avoid provoking physical violence.

In the arena of the household, Network women’s effort to establish a dialogue between partners aimed to disrupt patterns of interaction that maintained a hierarchy between men and women. During meetings, they developed and discussed these strategies and their progress in carrying them out. At one Network meeting, we engaged in an activity entitled “constructing and building a home.” Sitting around the Center’s meeting table, Lila asked leaders of the Network to describe their beliefs about love that impeded the establishment of a happy and healthy relationship. The women discussed how their beliefs derived from myths about marriage that their families had passed down to them. They said these myths played a significant role in
perpetuating *mando* and denying women the right to have rights in the home. Together they composed the following statement:

We were taught that a relationship would not necessarily be happy but that it should be for life. We were taught that woman was responsible for maintaining it. Men did not face any expectations. Women had to be obedient, believe whatever her husband said, be attentive to his needs, be diligent workers and be faithful. Women had to refrain from friendships outside of the home and ask permission whenever they needed to leave it. We were taught that if the family intervened in household affairs that we should support our husbands. We were taught to show our love and respect by submitting to their will.

One woman recalled being taught it was “normal and common that he hit you and that he did it because he loves you. That his jealousy is his love.” The myths were powerful, in that women rarely questioned them. They felt these beliefs kept them “from expecting and seeking something better” and they expressed that they “must overcome this.” This was not a simple task for women who had spent their lives without envisioning any alternative to the norms of household life. Collectively, they re-imagined household life and proposed ways of breaking with practices that perpetuated their former values and beliefs.

Women began by creating a list of what would characterize a harmonious home and to create a template for how it could be accomplished. Their first point of agreement was that it was primordial that both partners make concerted efforts to cultivate a loving and happy relationship. They felt it was also necessary that both value reciprocity, equity and sensitivity in the relationship. If each partner was held to the expectation that they respect each other’s rights to dialogue and harmony, they would develop a greater sense of each other’s humanity. They felt both members of the relationship should trust each other. Trust could be demonstrated through honest communication about events around them and incidents between them. They also felt that shared expectations result from communication. This would, in turn, reinforce unity and partners’ commitments to enduring the good and the bad together. They also emphasized the
need for patience to comprehend each other’s struggles and to listen to each other without judgement. They felt both should take responsibility for maintaining the household and the relationship and that each should be sensitive to each other’s moods, energy levels and health. They expressed they would find happiness once the relationship could be characterized by equitable and respectful dialogue in which each partner recognized the other’s rights and responsibilities. Network women came to realize that in contrast “what we had practiced flew in the face of our human rights.”

They also acknowledged these tasks would not simply involve helping others to adopt new beliefs. They recognized they were themselves invested in and involved in reproducing them. During the meeting, when asked to reflect on the ideas expressed above, Angela looked up and down the lists. She commented, “I’m making every effort, but I’m learning and seeing that it’s hard to give what we weren’t given. It’s hard to change what we ourselves thought was normal.” Women related the practice of violence to the outcome on their bodies, namely the physical and emotional effects of physical, emotional, and economic violence. These multiple kinds of violence were all reproduced in a culture structured by neo-liberal and patriarchal philosophies. Men and women both reproduced and were affected by these structures. When women would propose holding discussions with men, they often found they shared goals for household life. In fact, they found that some men were also troubled by the expectation that they act towards women in the manner they did. Through careful and deliberate reconsideration of the impetus for the activities that took place in the household, women identified areas of discord in which they would begin to work.

Through conversations among themselves and with partners, women found various ways to negotiate established gender routines. While Lola from the Alliance in Nicaragua never
recounted an incident of physical violence, she told me her spouse wasn’t much help when she was raising their twelve children. Now, “it’s too late [for love]. We share the home and collaborate. We’re friends, but we’re not together.” While I stayed with her, she insisted on “serving” me meals. She would often call me to the table at the same time she would call her husband. There, she would already have set out placemats and tortillas. As we arrived she would then hand us plates filled with rice, beans and cheese. She often laughed and commented “I don’t usually serve him anymore, it’s just because you’re here.” He usually serves himself.” In the morning, I would wake up to find him making coffee while she pounded out tortillas. It was clear that over time or through conversation he had become amenable to the arrangement. Although Network organizers asserted that feminism was a source of fear in Nicaragua, members of the Alliance labeled themselves as proud feminists, seeing it as a philosophy of equality, diversity and collaboration. This engagement with feminism often isolated them within their communities.

Women in Costa Rica were focused on ways to initiate transformation and negotiate long-established gendered practices in their homes. For some, this seemed to be the culmination of watching their family members endure and respond to violence. At a meeting of women in San Jorge who had been recently invited to “organize with the Network” by promoters, one woman, Aracely described her story. She opened by stating she had learned “not to stay quiet” when she felt mistreated from observing her grandmother’s interactions with her grandfather. A hardened man, he had been abusive, no more so than when he sensed the grandmother’s household tasks were inadequately completed. Most often verbally abusive, he also inflicted pain whenever he felt it himself. One day, in a rush, her grandmother had served him coffee without leaving time for the coffee to cool. With his first sip, the grandfather burnt his tongue. Becoming

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113 I often attempted to convince women not to serve me either. This was a futile endeavor, as they often took to putting food on the plate while I was elsewhere and calling me over, so I couldn’t stop them.
enraged, he stood up and poured the hot coffee onto her grandmother’s lap. She looked at him after reacting to the burn, and quietly forcefully spoke. “Doesn’t it make you ashamed, to treat me in this way?” He left and they never saw him again. Aracely described one story after another of negotiating with household members, community members and police to prevent violence. Her frustration at attempting to confront barriers alone had drawn her to the Network’s activity seeking to address violence collectively from its cultural roots.

Ileana, in contrast, gained perspective and language to address violence through Center meetings. She began to reflect on the status of her own relationship through the activities.

They began to teach us in classes, how to defend ourselves, to stop domestic violence, psychological, in all its forms... I enjoyed it..., because I was living through, let’s say, psychological abuse, where, for example, they say, “I am better than you.” And you ask yourself, “Why are you saying this to me?”...I was unaware that it was happening to me. Sometimes you’re so dumb that you think this will pass. But now I realize that there’s no need to be mistreating a partner psychologically or verbally.

During meetings, she had realized that what they discussed was, in fact, happening to her. Her husband, who she said “used to treat her well” had changed. He had begun to verbally abuse her and her children. She came to feel she “shouldn’t allow it.” Emboldened by the support, she began to ask for change in their interactions. She confronted him about his behavior towards her. When he lost his job and she went to work, she began to come home, cook and then ask him to serve himself. She would tell him “if you CAN, then you should serve yourself. If I wasn’t working I would serve you, but if you’re just sitting around the house, then serve yourself.”

Ileana explained that the process had entailed losses for her. “My husband didn’t like that and he eventually left because he didn’t like that I wouldn’t allow him to get to us.” Although she was disappointed that he had elected not to change, she demonstrated little regret. Moreover, she continued to believe in the possibility that pointed conversations with family members could produce changes in household relations.
Lola told me that the Jehova’s Witnesses had become especially frustrated with her perspective on household life. She often questioned their interpretations of biblical texts. One day, they stopped by her home while I was sitting on the patio. “Lola,” they called out, “do you have some time?” “Certainly,” she replied and sat. Then they announced, inconspicuously, they wanted to read passages about family to Lola. “A woman, should obey her husband,” they summarized after reading. They asked her what she thought. She replied: “Well, I think we talk to each other. If he is correct, then I will agree. If his request is reasonable I will accede. He should do the same with me.” They appeared perplexed, unsure whether to challenge her further. They continued to speak for a few minutes, then left. Clearly, her actions attracted the attention of institutions vested in gender inequality. Still, she did not see their visits as a threat.

But at other times, the response to Lola’s organizing was more daunting. Clearly, her efforts challenged men’s power. But it was not clear that men were consciously reacting to the loss of power. Instead, they reacted to her practices that violated the parameters of what is considered to be moral behavior. Still, her experience legitimized other women’s fear of physical, emotional and economic retaliation from community members and husbands. Lola recounted:

Men, religious leaders, others, they point at me. They say I am a murderer because I believe a woman should be able to choose. They say I am ruining the community. What, by ensuring that women don’t die? They say I’m ruining families because I encourage women to ask for their rights, I encourage them to leave abusive situations. In turn, they killed many of my cows, they had my granddaughter kidnapped from my patio and almost trafficked. Men try to find ways to get back at me in this town. But I won’t stop.

In the logic of mando, her transgression warranted punishment. Her behavior had to be controlled, warranting threats of violence. Angered by her lack of fear for her own body, others exacted violence on her family and livelihood. These acts, moreover, pointed to the depth to which the order of social relations was ingrained. It was her recognition of how deeply
entrenched these sentiments ran that drove her to continue fighting, regardless. In this way, Lola’s story speaks to the depth and longevity of the struggle to transform these ways of seeing.

Other women were actively addressing violence within their homes throughout my fieldwork period. For example, Mirella arrived to one meeting towards the end of my fieldwork with her upper lip bulging. She told the group she wanted to share what had occurred. She and her husband had a conflict. He came home after a long day of work and punched her in the face. “I wanted to react immediately” she recalled, “but as I went over the techniques we had discussed, I realized I should wait.” Trusting that following the steps would lead to a better outcome, she waited until tempers had calmed. “I was angry and hurt, so was he.” A couple of days later, she felt it was time and sat down with him. She asked him why it had been necessary to hit her. She informed him of her rights and let him know she would not continue in the marriage in this form. He conceded he had been wrong to hit her. To us, she expressed, she was unsure what the future would bring. But she had started by opening a dialogue in the hope of transforming their interactions within the household. If this failed, she told me later, she was prepared to denounce and leave him. When I spoke to her a month later, she was still with him but did not refer to any other instances of violence. Her willingness to discuss the situation with the group marked a difference from women’s stories of past violence. Most had been reluctant to discuss the violence in a group setting until after it had occurred. While it was not clear whether Mirella would continue to experience abuse nor how she would respond, it was clear that through the meetings, women were beginning to treat violence as a public issue. Furthermore, by speaking Mirella had broken through the silence surrounding violence and had tacitly enlisted others in supporting her, even pushing her, to continue her efforts to undermine violence in the home.
Network women also sought ways to raise children using new techniques, attitudes, and manners. They rooted this struggle in concerted everyday transgressions of normative gender practices that promulgated everyday social change. Still, Nicaraguans’ common practice of joking in the face of hardship made practice a humorous endeavor as well. While sitting on the porch with Cecilia one afternoon, her youngest grandson, 8 years old, sidled up and leaned on her shoulder. “I’d like some coffee,” he whispered. “Well, go roast some,” she replied, joking. He missed the joke and looked at her, with a solemn expression and said “men don’t toast coffee.” Cecilia looked at him sternly and asked with a wry smile, “what? Men don’t have hands?” In this way, Cecilia challenged commonsense notions of the division of labor through simple and humorous references to the equal ability of gendered bodies to perform tasks. What had started off as friendly banter became a lesson when her grandson asserted traditional gendered notions of labor.

Beyond joking, adopting new forms of interaction with children was an equally challenging and prevalent endeavor among Network members. Most women’s children were already adolescents. The process of adopting new forms of parenting, of discipline, of assigning tasks and of expressing emotion that are new often produced struggle. Aurelia, having been rejected by her own mother and sold off to be a servant for another family by her father, felt she had few role models for child-rearing from her own family. She told me she had raised her children without displaying affection all the while loving them and providing them with a home. She described her challenge as being to “unlearn violence.” When I met her, she was learning techniques to express her love for them. This was something she had previously expected them to just know.
It’s something that I’ve never done, sat down and spoken with my seven children and hugged them. I feel that I love them, but you should see how hard it is for me. As hard as I work with the psychologists, once I’ve left their office, I continue thinking… how will I do it? And I don’t know, I just get anxious. In contrast, my daughter who is 15, she is freer, she is always saying ‘Mami, I love you’ and I think to myself, she has given me the strength to give my love to the others. Still it’s hard…. just when I’m about to break my habits, I look at them, I get nervous, and I can’t hug them. And I would like to. I love my children more than my life and they know it.

Aurelia’s story points to the difficulty of the process of adopting new interactions, something akin to wearing new grooves into wood.

Ileana had also dealt with implementing new forms of parenting with teenage children. This process consisted of significant negotiation, affecting children who did not see the benefits for themselves.

What we’ve learned is for the well-being of our families, for members to understand each other better. I get angry with my children sometimes. My older son will show up and say, “Mom, serve me some food” And I say, “how’s that? Why do I need to serve you? If you are coming home from work, tired, ready to sleep, ok. But if you’re just lazing around, serve yourself, because I’m not your employee, to be serving you. I’m your mother. I come home tired, too. Try serving me, you. I don’t have a husband so that no one is jodiendo (bothering me).” “Oh yes, yes, better not to say anything” he’ll reply.

Though the changes produced tension in the household, she remained committed to the transformations and was content with the gains.

Ximena reflected on the changes Network women had been making. She recounted how she had come to use methods of raising her children that would not teach violence. She said she was asked in a meeting, “how have you raised [your children]?” She had replied that she disciplined them by hitting them with a belt. She noted she had been gentler than her own parents’ methods for disciplining her. “How well does that work?” she recalled being asked. “Well, they continue to act rebellious” she had replied. Ximena felt implementing effective methods that would build gender equality was critical. She explained this feeling to me, “I’ve got every size of adolescent in my house, and I am learning to understand them, to calm myself
when one of them does something she or he shouldn’t have.” She noticed their changed
reactions. When she began prohibiting television or grounding them rather than getting out a
belt, they asked “why?” She would tell them they hadn’t been listening. She found they did begin
to listen. She said “I don’t grab anything anymore. Not a belt, nothing. And you know, I hug
them more too. I tell them, I love you. I care for you.” For her this was an important step in
providing her children with new ways to channel and resolve their conflicts.

During my time with the Network, those who had begun to implement changes in their
own homes and who demonstrated interest and commitment to disseminating ideas throughout
the community, were invited to begin leadership training. The initial training would last three
months and provide women with knowledge and training to counsel others in their communities
about violence and gender inequality in the home. They received literature about the different
public programs and legal services supporting families undergoing violence. The training also
reinforced their understanding of the concepts of gender and violence.

At the courses end, Ileana already had stories to tell about promoting new forms of
relating within the community. Ileana felt she truly began to realize her potential as a leader
when a neighbor, who was being abused psychologically, stopped by to speak with her one day.
The neighbor wondered “how could speaking with him work if he won’t listen to me?” Ileana
advised her to use a gradual firm, though non-confrontational, approach to creating a dialogue.
She advised the woman to arrange a time to sit down and speak with her partner:

Don’t just fight and say “let’s forget about this relationship.” No, you tell him what you
like and what you don’t like and how you would like to be treated. Because if you give
something good, you expect something nice in return also. So sit and ask for wisdom and
speak with him.
Ileana also guided her in how she might reconsider her expectations about how she be treated. Just learning herself, Ileana mentioned that she brought her workshop folder along to make sure she didn’t forget anything. She reflects on the process of explaining violence to her neighbor:

I was explaining…psychological mistreatment…I told her, that’s when I request 500 colones ($1), from my partner and he says, “well, if you pay me back.” But that’s mistreatment because if you take into account that I’m washing and ironing his clothes, cooking and basically I’m his employee. But all he gives me is rice and beans. He doesn’t know that he should provide basic things like clothing. Or if I saw someone selling a rice pudding that looks sooo delicious. If he refused to give me the money he is mistreating me.

They spoke for a few hours and Ileana emphasized that she should feel she had a right to certain basic needs. But she also legitimized her right to desire and receive care and rest. She was surprised to see the neighbor back at her door three days later. The woman said, “something very strange happened. My family had never sat down with me. Casually, I sat down with them. At the very least, I felt as if I’d been listened to.” Ileana was particularly excited because she had been able to teach although she herself was just learning to speak with other women.

Network members’ discussion of rethinking relationships in the home pointed to ways they struggle to transform their own and others’ ways of imagining and engaging with members of their households. Through this discussion, they validated Lancaster’s assertion that women and men unconsciously participate in reproducing the code of machismo as a system of organizing gendered relations (1992). As they began to question it, they encountered the difficulty of detangling the different values and practices that uphold this system. Gradually, they transform their understanding of these relationships and the practices that adhere to these understandings.
E. Negotiations Beyond The Home

They also recognized these structures mediated their relationships beyond the home. Similarly, they focused on finding new ways to interact with each other. They saw the violence within and outside of the home as interconnected, a relationship obscured by the bifurcated vision of public and private spaces. Through their focus on conflict resolution, they begin to bridge this divide, pushing for transformation of their ways of seeing their relationship to people outside of their household.

Ximena described how being organized entailed adopting new ways of relating to her neighbors. Instead of coming to blows like before, they would speak. “You know how it is, there in Nicaragua. You say ‘come here, I’m going to give it to you.’” She continued:

so we are learning, it’s better to have a dialogue, not to yell. To wait, calm ourselves. At the same time, we don’t stay quiet; we speak to address the problem. Explain why it’s a problem….So you hear me, and then, I listen to you. No yelling. Neither understands each other, that way. This is the important part. No more criticizing each other with the other compañeras (colleagues). My compañeras treat each other with more sincerity. Now, I even say to them “how wonderful you look, how gorgeous,” like friends do.

She experienced a qualitative change in the relationship. She felt invested in her compañeras well-being and indicated they had come to care for each other. This, in turn, created a new way of reacting to conflicts. Ximena offered an example of a recent incident in the San Felipe hydroponic cooperative. She described how a conflict arose when one woman began acting “as if she were the owner.” Ximena had remained quiet. But after an altercation in which the woman had yelled, Ximena said to her, “please don’t speak with me like that. We have to make decisions as a group, not just do things the way you say.” The woman realized Ximena “wasn’t going to remain quiet” and reflected on her comment. She felt that relationships in the cooperative improved afterwards.
Neighborhood communication was not the only challenge beyond the household. Women also considered how to engage distinctly in transnational communication, particularly those women who had left children behind. The Network encouraged migrants and family members to meet and resolve misperceptions of life at home and abroad. Through this activity, the Network showed itself to be particularly effective in breaking-up the power of spaces over relationships in the transnational sphere. They addressed this in different manners. Initially, they responded to the fact that migration from Nicaragua had led to the “disarticulation” of families because of the difficulties they faced in communication. Lacking time and money for expensive phone calls home, many had attempted to express affection and provide care through remittances. Others, fearful of upsetting family members with stories of hardship, painted a picture of an easy prosperous life abroad. This gave way to a popular idea that migrants were “living the big life” sending remittances that were meager in comparison with their total earnings. Meanwhile, their family members felt they had been left to face poverty and marginality alone. Mothers, daughters and other relatives of migrants were frequently known to assert that migrants had “abandoned” them in spite or in absence of remittances. In response, Network women worked to reestablish communication where it had been disrupted.

They often experienced this type of rupture viscerally. Various women noted that while these relationships remained acrimonious, they lost weight or felt ill. Though many had resolved the issue of “disarticulation” from their families, the memories of conflict remained painful. This was poignantly revealed to me when Lila experienced an emotional reaction to an activity intended to sensitize non-migrants to the concerns of migrants. Although she was present in the meeting to accompany those being sensitized through the workshop, she was affected most intensely. Melissa and Jorge, psychology residents finishing their bachelor’s licenses, were
charged with organizing a workshop to sensitize public employees at the municipality of San Jorge. The workshop proved difficult to run. Employees showed little motivation to participate in the sensitization activities. It became clear by midday that the target population, those who had never received sensitization training, were not present. Instead, the room was largely filled with workers who were already relatively knowledgeable about the situation and sensitive to migrant needs. For example, one municipal worker described how they had managed to re-direct some funds for installing flush toilets in the border region, to provide for areas across the dirt road that served as a border. He was unsure they would be able to do so again. Still, he determined, these were essentially Costa Rican inhabitants and was preoccupied by the bureaucratic impediments to providing future services. Still, most remained through the day. Towards the end of the day workers were asked to imagine a small suitcase and think of what they would bring with them, should they have to cross the border. Some took the suitcase as a metaphor. Lila began to speak and without warning, her voice began to wobble. She spoke in a voice barely above a whisper “I didn’t realize that this would hit a nerve, but completing this exercise brought me back to the choice to migrate, to leave my children behind. But,” she continued “if I had to make that choice, I would do the same. I would never put my children through all I had to endure.” The next to speak was a Costa Rican woman, who asserted she would bring her children without question. From her presentation, it did not seem to be a manner of reproaching Lila’s choice, but many in the room appeared unnerved. Everyone seemed to share the same thought. How was it possible that this woman, having never experienced the struggle of migration, could so brusquely pronounce that keeping her family together would be more important than anything? The next woman to speak actively reproached her, arguing she could never understand the reality that
most migrants faced when thinking of crossing the border. For a number of days, Lila continued to recall the resurging pain of her decision.

The Network, on the one hand, used meeting spaces to resolve misperceptions by migrants and family members of life at home and abroad. By migrating, women had removed themselves from their established family, community and even economic networks. They entered a social, economic and political space marked by the absence of networks and rapport. Thus, the forms of sociality of the Network provided spaces to build rapport and create a welcoming sociality among women who know the pain of exclusion and isolation. They transformed an imagined community (Anderson 2006), a perceived community not all of who are known but who are imagined to share the same values and meanings, into a known community. This served to circulate information and knowledge in areas where it had previously been absent. Thus, a practice of contact, of interrupting private life, of deliberate “sharing” not only built new bonds, but also allowed women to learn from each other in maintaining contact with family where migration had disrupted communication. Women felt that in this way they interrupted women’s tendency to “eat each other” or speak badly about others behind their backs.

The Network resolved isolation. The spaces where they enacted changes became particularly significant, as women put into practice the ideals they felt should undergird national policy in organizational and community spaces. They attempted to accomplish this through organizing in “collective women’s spaces” where they cultivated identities, practices and political demands, carving out “their right to difference” (Blackwell 2007: 203-4).

F. The Network Doesn’t Stop At The Door
When I first met Elena, she was pointedly welcoming, but occasionally expressed her discord with other Network members. In the course of immersing herself in Network leadership
activities, she had developed a greater sense of herself. She also came to value those around her, despite her existing disagreements with them. On my last visit to her home, the day before I returned to the U.S., we sat with Ileana on her nylon cord rocking chairs, eating the sweet cheese pastry I had purchased on my way over and sipping a bit of nescafe. She and Ileana conversed about their growing friendship with each other and their new relationships to members of their community. Elena teased Ileana, “before, you didn’t speak to anyone, only your husband and children. Beyond that it was just ‘hi, hello, good morning, goodbye. That’s what we do. We form this circle around ourselves. We become enclosed. Now you are open.” Elena continued,

you know, [I was this way too]. For me, it was because my husband would find me speaking with the neighbor and he would motion to me, to come back into the house, he would call me with a sound: “SHHHH!” I would turn to him and say “what’s going on?” “Come here!” he would whisper loudly. “Be right there,” I’d reply. He would persist: “SHHHHH! Here! Now!” So would I: “I’ll. Be. Right. There.” “When?!”

Ileana nodded knowingly and clucked in agreement. “Mine would tell me that it was because he didn’t want people around speaking paja (bullshit) about me, getting me in trouble. So, problems inside the house and problems outside the house. Diay! Entonces!? (Well! So [what can anyone do]?”) she exclaimed, recalling it all. A thoughtful look crossed Elena’s face.

You know, friendship is important. If you don’t have friendship, when you have problems, nadie saca la nariz (they won’t stick their nose out). No one will come around. So it’s important to get along with your community because at any moment, if something happens maybe they may not do it sincerely but they’ll be there.

She described an incident a few months back, while she was working at the bakery, when some neighborhood youth had come by and had begun to beat up her son. Neighbors on both sides of her home emerged from their houses and intervened. Others she knew had not even looked out their windows. She attributed the willingness to help to those who had become “organized women.” “Look,” she said, “I’m not anybody’s gold coin, but I greet everyone ‘hello, how are
you?” If they ask for a favor, I’m there.” She indicated that through incidents like these, they had come to appreciate the value in what they saw as novel forms of relating.

After seeing the results of this new practice, others began to participate. She commented, “so everyone here along our street speaks to each other. And on the other side, the same. Recently, when a neighbor saw me, she asked ‘when is the next meeting?’” Elena made a face, indicating that she looked at her quizzically “‘Since you’re the president!’ the woman added.”

Elena laughed as she narrated her response:

I say, ‘but el pueblo (the community) hasn’t picked me yet.’ ‘I feel it’ the woman said. ‘You’re a good worker, señora (ma’am). Diay (well).’ Before it was different. Someone might tell me ‘don’t go around with that person because she’s an enemy of that other señora.’ Well, what a problem! Now it doesn’t matter. If they have problems with each other, well, they need to see what they can do to work them out. I’m not going to sweat because of their fevers.”

Elena found that others often questioned her motives for going to meetings, crossing the lines of neighborhood allegiances and disputes. They would talk behind her back and watch her comings and goings. She recounted that one time she informed them:

what we’re doing is educating, learning, bit by bit, and we are getting along. Life will continue to knock us down, but every time it knocks us down, we’re going to get tougher. Truth prevails over lies. So don’t worry, soon you’ll learn. We are acting together.

Creating a new sociality was Network women’s way of pushing back against patriarchal norms that kept women in the home and discouraged them from engaging with neighbors. Men often explained the necessity of this arrangement by arguing that the home was a private space and only the business of those who lived there. Women, regarded as gossips, were seen as culpable for exposing the activities of the home to the public. According to patriarchal logic, this threatened the cohesion of the family. Through the Network, women found that what it threatened, in reality, was men’s role as the ultimate authority in the household or, more succinctly, the patriarchal authoritarian arrangement at the scale of the household. If carried out
widely, it would have threatened the underpinnings of the patriarchal structure of society by challenging the idea that the activities of the household were solely the concern of household members. In contrast, when Network women chose to be social, they felt they were investing in their friends’ and neighbors’ well-being. The walls defining the space of the household had ceased to delimit women’s investment in each other.

The first chapter depicted Network meetings as spaces of learning and communication. Through these activities Network women took initial steps to identify their and others’ roles in producing marginality. They had learned new dispositions and had also used those spaces to rehearse and train themselves to engage in activities productive of another reality. Network women depicted “being organized with the Network” as a meaningful commitment to engaging in concerted, coordinated and transformative actions that converted all spaces into community spaces. They also challenged practices in typically shared spaces, such as meetings or marches or “individual” spaces such as doctor’s visits, school meetings and police visits. They also reaped the benefits of these collective actions, gaining a new sense of living in a community, one imbued with feminist principles of collectivity, equality and reciprocity. The neighborhood became more than a geographical location. Elena’s description denoted a particular social contract of collaboration and concern for the welfare of others.

This shift was significant because Network members depicted their communities as having exhibited a torn social fabric before the Network formed. Ximena, a member of the Network, captured the sentiments of other Network members when she characterized the common former custom among migrant women as antagonistic. She referred to this custom with an idiom, declaring, “between each other, we ate each other.” Distrust among migrant community members was not solely the product of everyday patriarchal relations but also, of
wartime violence and betrayal. Civil strife during the guerilla insurrection (1964-1979) and in the contra war (1980-1990) sewed distrust among Nicaraguans, a phenomenon most extensively documented among migrants from El Salvador and Guatemala in the U.S. (Nygren 2003: 376; Moodie 2010; Manz 2004; Quesada 1998). For example, in her ethnography of Maya towns in Guatemala during la violencia\textsuperscript{114}, Beatrice Manz notes that the barriers between community members, erected by rumors and “grey zone” violence (Sheper-Hughes et al 2004), continued to foster mistrust between community members after the war’s end. Similarly, the political divide left scars, characterized by polarization between supporters of the Sandinistas and Contras. Nicaragua’s culture of mando lent a further distrust to communities, the assumption of Nicaraguans’ proclivity to “step on each other” made migrants persistently wary of their neighbors’ and friends’ intentions. Finally, because migrants were leaving with the intention of breaking with social networks, they rarely settled in places where they had established connections. For these reasons, prior to organizing, Network women indicated they rarely had friends or family members who might intervene when their isolation or exclusion became apparent.

It is in this context that the Network engaged in “community strategies,” emphasizing practices that strengthened relationships and worked towards breaking the limitations associated with particular spaces. In the squatter communities and housing projects where most women resided, houses were built of cinderblock and covered with zinc laminate sheets. Often, there was a space between the roof and the top of the wall. Houses in Costa Rica and Nicaragua were rarely completely enclosed. For this reason, the noise from the neighbors and the street would often drift in. Women could overhear the shouting and screaming of neighbors’ disagreements.

\textsuperscript{114} La violencia is the popular way in which Guatemalans refer to a period of the Guatemalan war distinguished by flagrant and constant acts of violence.
Sometimes the noise was indicative of momentary or ongoing abuse. If women moved to intervene, they noted, their husbands would ask, “why do you sweat, if it’s someone else’s fever?” or might tell them to mind their own business. Through the Network, women retrained their “automatic reaction to ask or interfere when others experienced violence.” Women demonstrated the changes in their practices, saying, “now we knock on the door.” In this way, they were breaking through the barrier of silence and isolation that violence and ideas of “private space” produced. Rather than mind their own business, they chose to interfere with an individual’s impunity in forcibly exert power over another in private spaces. They implemented a systemic form of support through everyday actions to construct a new, collective normal.

Through encuentros (symposia), events in other communities and cross-community leadership training, Network women began to construct these relationships across household walls, regions and national borders. Women living in San Jorge described how they began visiting members of their sister organization in Managua after meeting them at a bi-national encuentro in 2009. When the Center established a center for housing abused women in San Jorge, Elena, Isabel and Monica traveled from Cartaguito to celebrate alongside them. Through these activities, they enacted a specific definition of shared well-being. In a sense, they shrunk their perception of space by creating affective ties across it. This definition was expressed during the Network’s board of community leaders in October of that year in the declaration “every time a woman takes a step forward, all women advance.” Embedded in the idea behind organizing with the Network was the idea of building a social realm imbued with trust and security. Their goals can be described as enacting cultural citizenship (Rosaldo 1994): creating a sense of place and belonging as well as a culture of rights to overcome their internalized antagonistic relationships fostered by mando.
As the term cultural citizenship implies, Network members engaged in a new sociality, asserting their belonging in relation to community, society and state. They responded to the sense that migrants should “take responsibility for their own welfare,” which had been reinforced through their interactions with Costa Ricans whether employers, acquaintances, strangers, and state representatives who treated them as undeserving guests who should not ask for too much, if anything, of their beneficent host. Thus, their treatment as “others,” as *muertos de hambre*, heightened the sense of obligation to enact this neoliberal principle. Instead, Network women operationalized a view of themselves as bearers of rights and of the social world as replete with concern for each other’s happiness and well-being. This new sociality disrupted the limiting praxis, which derived from the distinction between private and public space. In its place, the Network facilitated the exchange of knowledge and concern about violence in all its forms. While Network members’ practices were concertedly embodied, verbalized, spatialized acts and positions, they were also performative, demonstrating solidarity and commitment. Women characterized one of the meanings of “participating in the Network” as taking part in collectively identifying social arrangements that enabled others to wield power over them and collectively disrupting them by embodying and performing layers of alternative practices.

G. “Accompanying”: Breaking Out Of Silence And Isolation That Violence Produces

One night in San Jose, after three young men held my friends and I up at gun and knife point, I dialed the police. I was embarrassed and shaken. I had lived and worked in Costa Rica for seven years. At my urging, my friends and I had decided against common sense to walk home from a concert. The police asked me a few questions about the incident. I described the car and the three men. Throughout the conversation, I tried my best to evade questions pertaining to the length of my residency in the country. I described myself as a volunteer at the school that
was, in fact, employing me. I gave a vague description of my address in typical fashion: 300 meters from the mall, south, 3rd building on the left, orange. Though safe within the terms of my tourist visa, I didn’t want to invite trouble. Report made, I hung up. Still shaking, alone in the apartment, I managed to fall asleep only to be jolted awake, perhaps an hour later, by the landline phone ringing. We never gave out that number. That night, however, I had given the number to the police, since my cell phone had been stolen. In an agitated state, yet half-asleep, I answered the phone. A man asked for my passport number without introduction. I balked, “who is this?” The voice replied “the police. I forgot to ask for your passport number when I took your description.” “My god, you scared me.” The voice went flat: “Why did I scare you?” “Why?!” Because I was just robbed and held at gunpoint! Because I’m home alone! Because my husband is away!” The voice dropped in tone with surprise “you’re married?” Far too interested, far too disappointed, I thought. At my silence, he prodded “where is your husband from?” It no longer sounded as if he had needed my passport number, he certainly didn’t need the next bit of information. He was just calling back. His voice sounded young. I figured he was acting like many police I had encountered, bored at his post and flirting with a woman, situation permitting. He chided me for my fear and waved my immigrant status in front of me to intimidate and coerce, saying “let me reconfirm your address.” I repeated it vaguely. Years later, it is not the hold-up itself that conjures anxiety, but recalling the phone call, the voice searching for ways to exhibit its power over me.

Throughout my time in Costa Rica, friends had recounted how police, doctors, social workers, school administrators, clinic staff, hospitals and social security agents had been dismissive and cool to their needs. Therefore, it was not surprising migrants had experienced similar, if not more intense and dire interactions, with service providers. Encounters with public
officials were structured by notions of legality and nationalism, juxtaposing the perception that migrants invaded Costa Rica. Furthermore, there was a perception expressed by state officials and lay people alike that these women’s ascribed and avowed class, gender, ethnic, and racial attachments rendered them undeserving of access. What I found interesting, however, was the general expectation about social interactions in these spaces. Specifically, the expectation that the only people present would be the service provider and the service recipient. It was constructed as another type of private space of interaction. Much like the household, this assumption lent power to the service provider to dismiss the recipient on a whim. And there, the view of Nicaraguans as rapacious, unruly, violent, untrustworthy, illiterate, less sophisticated and threatening was deployed. Any sense that they should not be receiving services was called upon to justify what amounted to inadequate service.

Well aware of these views, migrants sensed little recourse when they confronted these refusals. Women also understood that they alone were not their own best advocates. Recognizing the consistency of their exclusion and the benefits of collective action, they crafted a practice of accompanying to assist each other in securing their access to socio-legal rights. Beyond encouraging social interactions to build trust between each other, they found they could access services if they “accompained” each other to report incidents to police, register children for school or attend medical appointments. By making concerted efforts to accompany each other, they counteracted at least some efforts by service providers to ignore them, take advantage of them, or intimidate them into refraining from exercising legal and social rights. They also performed equitable notions of social rights, encouraging service providers to reconsider their propensity to refuse service to other human beings.
Ximena and I often sat and chatted on her back patio with its plastic-laminate roof as the washing machine whirred next to us and her youngest child and grandchild interrupted the conversation to show off some new trick. We would look out on the afternoon rain falling on banana plants growing in the small uncovered area beyond. She would occupy an old wooden chair. I would perch on a small stool. Ximena was not only my age, but also my height. She also had a young face, as did I. Her demeanor was much more reserved, although she was candid and forthcoming when speaking with me. She also depicted herself as willing to step forward and talk, whenever necessary. Further, she held a well-developed sense that immigrants were equally deserving citizens. Given her reserved manner, I was originally surprised when I first learned she was the president of the San Felipe group. At first impression, I assumed the more extroverted Alexa held this position, but as I came to know them better, my initial impression of Ximena’s quiet demeanor gave way to a view of her as holding a deep sense of justice that rendered a distinct and effective leadership style.

Though not one to rally a crowd, she gave little thought to other’s perceptions of her. She acted decisively, whenever necessary, without requesting others’ approval. I often encountered her in Network meetings taking place in San Jose. She attended meetings alone, in spite of her and others’ discomfort with setting out from squatter communities early in the morning when unaccompanied. During the *transitories* (legal status regularization initiative), I ran into Ximena at immigration offices. A few days later, at her home, she explained that she had spent the day assisting a neighbor going through the transactions. Yet, when I asked her whether she was comfortable moving around the city and between regions at all hours, she answered the question in her own way. She was more concerned with explaining the reason she found it important to accompany other women. “You learn things as you go through,” she explained. “The procedures
aren’t obvious. And if just once you get confused, they can deny you even an appointment.” For example, she described how many migrants had called to schedule an appointment at immigration services. Initially, migrants would wait until they had assembled their papers before scheduling an appointment, as official instructions dictated. However, they found they could only get appointments one month in advance. Worried they would not be able to complete the process within the three-month window allotted for migrants to regularize their status and realizing that those who made appointments did not ask if they had assembled their papers, they began to call before they had their documents assembled. This was fine at first, she explained. But then suddenly, migration resolved the bottlenecking of the appointment system and began offering immediate appointment times women found hard to meet, for example, early the following morning. Many resorted to hanging up the phone mid-call because they would be unable to get off of work or because they didn’t yet have all the papers together. They planned to call back once they were ready. Ximena explained, “they didn’t realize that their call had been recorded, their name had already been taken and that they wouldn’t be given another appointment.” Another problem was that they would arrive with their materials and sometimes the immigration agent would give them a sheet with incomprehensible instructions. “So I’ve been going with people because I have a better handle on things. This way, they don’t end up unable to apply.” She counseled them before and during phone calls and visits to immigration services. In this way, she resolved inconsistency in the flow of information around the community.

In the community she had accompanied various women to denounce intimate partner aggression to the police. She said,

at first, it was all the same, they didn’t listen to us, but afterwards they began to. Or at least, they did something about the situations I mentioned. Many people don’t go, out of
fear. Women worry that it would invite the rural police to come knocking on their doors at any time.

Ximena recalled one particular incident when a pregnant woman in the community was receiving frequent beatings by her husband. “No one went, no one supported her,” Ximena commented. Ximena explained that she initially thought, “if I go, I’ll feel guilty. But if I go home to bed, which would be the comfortable response, and then she turned up dead…you see? And this woman was like my sister…” Deciding she was more concerned for the woman’s safety than she was reluctant to deal with potential guilt, Ximena alerted the police, telling them the woman was suffering as a result of the abuse. She recounted that the police didn’t pay attention to her. She continued to insist. She told them “you will feel guilty later because I am telling you now. You are aware [of the abuse] and you aren’t carrying out your duty. You aren’t acting as you should.” She left. Later that day, they showed up and they entered the woman’s house, removed the husband and put him in jail for a night. She commented that her friend signed the husband’s release from jail the next day out of fear, on the condition that if the abuse continued she would put him in jail and would not return for him. At first, it seemed as though Ximena’s response had only protected her friend temporarily.

However, within a few weeks Ximena noticed her actions forced both the husband and the police to reconsider their practices. First, the husband knocked on her door a few days later. Ximena hid. “I was living in fear that he would take it badly and come and abuse me.” She had known he was looking for her and she didn’t know exactly why. To her surprise he told her, it’s good what you did. If you hadn’t, I would killed my wife that night. I’ve been looking for you to congratulate you for your actions, and say “thank you.” I would have killed her and what’s more, then I would have ended up in jail. So it was good for me, it was a great form of support.
It is not clear whether the husband learned the lesson. His reaction indicated that he had reflected on his actions to some extent, though not in a manner atypical of abusers. More importantly, she reported,

"Now the police respond to us better. They arrive if you just call. In fact,” she said chuckling, “one time, my sister was playing with the dog. And I guess the dog was making a lot of noise. The police arrived. I guess they thought that she was being abused because she was shrieking. So they were following the law.”

While she would not go so far as to assert the police had begun to see household violence differently, she felt they knew they should follow their legal obligations as police officers. She was satisfied they had been able to get this point across through meetings with the police department. Her initial efforts had been successful in bringing about changes, renewing her commitment to Network practices.

Similarly, when Lila supported Elena in bringing her abusive husband to trial, they ultimately remedied a symptom of gender inequality but not the cause. Shortly after what would be her husband’s final bout of physical abuse, Elena denounced him in front of a judge. It was her word against his and the judge was reluctant to issue a sentence if she would shortly retract it. Her sweater covered her fresh bright purple bruises. Lila, present to support Elena, insisted she remove her cardigan, revealing the deep bruising on her arms and neck. The judge sentenced Elena’s husband to five years of jail time. Lila’s advocacy revealed clear evidence of abuse leading to Elena’s husband’s conviction. By making concerted efforts to accompany each other, women were able to counteract some efforts by service providers to ignore them, take advantage of them, or intimidate them into refraining from exercising legal and social rights.

The practice of accompanying disrupted spatial, temporal and social norms related to the use of public services. Accompanying each other in situations where only service provider and recipient were expected to interact, constituted the most obvious of these transgressions. They
also transgressed the construction of temporal fields. In the neoliberal climate in which individuals were expected to ensure their own well-being in the absence of state services and programs, few women had time to spare. Accompanying a neighbor, family member, or even colleague disrupted the individualizing pressure of a declining social safety net. It called on the individual to create time and commit it to taking on the role as advocate. Migrants were regularly encouraged to “know their rights” to ensure proper service. This also proved individualistic, implying that if a single person knew his or her own rights, she or he could disrupt situations of exclusion and abuse. Instead, the practice of accompanying recognized the stress and difficulty of attending to the various requirements of any one of these services: finding transportation, preparing documents, filling out paperwork, waiting to be attended, explaining claims, receiving services and attending to any irregularities in service. For example, an advocate would assume responsibility for observing health provider-patient interactions, advocating when providers appeared to provide inadequate care and absorbing any resentment from providers for challenging their assessments. In contrast, protest by the individual might only further entrench negligent provision. By engaging in acts that were transgressive in thought but not in policy, providers could rarely refuse entrance to the companion. In turn, the companion not only bore witness to mistreatment, but also regularly ensured success of the visit by pressuring for adequate attention.

Throughout this dissertation, other examples of accompanying have been woven into stories of marginality. These include Gina’s support in Alicia’s and Sarita’s quests for housing and Leticia’s intervention in Anita’s struggle to get her daughter into a school. Accompanying represented a logical extension of women’s automatic reaction to interfere when others

115 Not how it is used by the various immigrant and workers rights associations with which I have collaborated.
experienced violence. It allowed women to break through the barrier of silence and isolation violence produced. Accompanying was a short term response, while migrants found other ways to intercede in Costa Rica’s social hierarchy. Still, access to services improved women’s welfare in the long term. It provided them with minimum health, education, safety and income security, among others, feminists describe as comprising full democratic participation. Exceptionalism stripped women of their humanity in the way it represented their activities as threatening and unworthy. The presence of an advocate challenged providers to rethink this view. In this way, they disrupted, albeit momentarily, the commonsense notions that derived from the dominant logic of exceptionalism.

H. Why Would You Leave, Having Everything Here?: The Cooperative As Preventative practice
If migrants were obliged to established new networks abroad, sending communities were left to close the gap in networks that emigration created. For Cecilia and Lola, members of the Alliance, similar transformative practices were at the heart of their efforts to stem emigration. There had been a decline in agricultural production in the Segovias, a region in northeastern Nicaraguan countryside. Subsistence farmers found it was often more difficult to sell and more expensive to produce than to purchase goods for consumption. Environmental disasters and war had been costly to production while domestic and sometimes social violence persisted around them. While many, in large part those with lower levels of education, sought work in Costa Rica others pursued employment or higher education in urban areas. Few returned. The Alliance sought to provide alternatives.

Lola and Cecilia’s lives reflected the transnational and transborder construction of the local. They walked me through their towns and at every house we passed, they told me who had migrated (Dezalay, speech 11/15/2012). Watching her nightly telenovela (soap opera) with the
grandchildren and great-grandchildren that lived with her, Lola, 68, would call one of her
daughters who lived in Managua. She would hold the phone up to the television while the show
played and they would chat during the commercials. All of her children had college degrees in
agronomy, education, nursing, social work or environmental engineering. Two sons lived in the
adjacent houses, two in nearby towns and one abroad. Her five daughters remained in Managua.
Despite holding degrees, all struggled to find work in their professions. When they returned
home during holy week, I observed as they rose early and calmly pounded out tortillas in city
clothes.

Stemming emigration was a founding premise of the Alliance’s struggle to reconstitute
the rural as a productive region, a site of inclusion and a violence-free place. Through their
efforts, they sought to build a collective consciousness of commitment to their communities. Yet
they realized economic well-being would have to accompany any social changes. They
envisioned a *campos* that was perceived as more than a site of agricultural production, but a site
of social and economic investment. When they described how it should look, they described a
mix of social and economic qualities. They were building a *campo* replete with equitable
interactions, alternative careers, knowledge production and exchange, teaching and technology.
They hoped to see their towns filled with younger generations who had completed higher
education and had begun to exercise their professions locally. Beyond agricultural production,
women envisioned community members occupying local positions that were normally filled by
those from the outside, in town schools and clinics. Cecilia was specific in her vision. She hoped
young women will study at the university, choosing alternative careers, looking for ways
to serve their community, help their people. If they study business administration, they
should administer their own business (in town), or their land, or even, their home, their
children. And those that study agricultural or environmental engineering, take what they
learn in the university and put it to use on their own farm, teach their own family
members… their career-choices should apply to life in our town because *es algo dura la migración* (migration is hard).

They gradually developed new means to enable their proposal and had begun to see results.

Moreover, all generations had a role. Cecilia, at 60, routinely emphasized that women old and young were capable of changing and learning new, non-traditional ideas and trades. She said:

I built this house…with my own hands. They gave us the materials and classes after [Hurricane Mitch]…They gave us theory in the morning and in the afternoon, we applied it. After a year.. almost everyone had their house… I don’t have to pay anyone; I use my knowledge to do it.

In fact, younger generations had begun to participate. Lola and older women around her received high school courses from a young woman who had been awarded an Alliance scholarship to obtain an undergraduate degree in education. They equated their self-worth with their activities as rugged, hard-working, creative and flexible rural women. This was evident in the way Lola referred to the promoters she had trained as *mujeres todo terreno* (all-terrain women), for their willingness to try anything, despite adversity. This description highlighted resilience, but the Alliance’s goals were not limited to bearing a difficult life.

They re-envisioned the *campo* as a site of intellectual production. They worked to transform the perception that rural areas were little more than a place to leave behind, devoid of intellectual activity and social life. They envisioned local economies of knowledge, labor and products. They envisioned rural labor within the realm of creative and collective activity. Each

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116 In 2012, when gold leaf rust wiped out coffee crops in Nicaragua, coffee production was crippled, but able to respond. One day, Lola and I visit her cousin’s barely recognizable coffee fields, thin pale brown branches with few leaves at the top, I was able to see right through them in a season when the bushes should resemble a dense forest of dark green, waxy leaves and, small white flowers. Of 4,000 *palos* (bushes), only 1000 produced coffee beans. It would take three years to resume production. The cooperative board of the Alliance immediately began alternative plans for honey production. Every three months, some women would receive 25 bees and once those bees reproduced, they would pass 25 onto another coop member. After passing on 75 bees to a total of 3 coop members would be able to keep any subsequent offspring. Sales from honey, a well remunerated product, would insulate from some economic loss while allowing women time to replant.
disseminated anything she had received to others, whether materials or training. They encouraged organic subsistence farming and small-scale agriculture, but envisioned it as a cooperative endeavor, sharing in the labor of sowing, harvesting and sale. They would distribute themselves among national and international workshops and then share the knowledge received. In casual conversation, they mentioned workshops addressing topics as varied as animal husbandry, agricultural techniques, production technologies, construction of brick ovens, simple building construction and legal procedures for seeking women’s, children’s and migrants rights. They shared their knowledge or used it to benefit others. In other cases, they expanded their resources collectively. For example, each woman received what they referred to as “the package” when they joined. The package consisted of 2 cows, 4 pigs and 30 chickens to breed. Each would pass on the first offspring to another member. Cecilia interpreted the proposal of the Alliance, with regard to the package, in the following way:

What is sold [in this town] should be homemade or homegrown by local women. The package can provide the basis for subsistence or a business... From the 30 chickens, eggs to bake...with hogs and chickens, there will always be hormone-free meat to eat...with the cow she’ll have milk and fresh cheese. She could sell [these products], too. What could migration offer, if we have lo nuestro (our own production)? Who wants to give their labor somewhere else, having their own parcel of land, coffee, bananas, baked goods, chickens and milk? What migrants seek elsewhere, they could find here.

They showed that it was their own pursuit of knowledge and skills, their engagement with their communities, and their work towards promulgating an emergent intellectual rural culture that were indeed transformative agentive practices. The underlying initiative to create these cooperatives was universal throughout the Network. Further, while cooperative principles were not a guarantor of gender equity, embedded within a broader project, they could provide important avenues for the initiatives promoting gender equity (Doane, forthcoming; Jaffee 2007). Cooperative production was a key element in women’s strategy in reconstituting the rural. They
also engendered the values they felt should undergirded political economy and demonstrated that they perceived political economy to be enmeshed in violent cycles.

I. Speaking for Themselves

Network women were also aware they had been excluded from different arenas in which decisions were being made about how to resolve problems faced by and attached to immigrant communities. The disregard for women migrants’ grounded knowledge of their communities was further compounded by the neoliberal focus on technocratic solutions to structural problems. Anthropologists write about how restructuring has entailed a renewed value for expertise born of “scientifically” generated knowledge. It is accompanied by the practice of convening only those employed as researchers and scholars to take part in policy-making activities. The paucity of their engagement with the communities they explicitly or tacitly represent is largely disregarded, although they are considered experts (Elyachar 2003; Paley 2001; Murdock 2008). Network women responded to this form of exclusion by adopting skills of research and dissemination. They developed ways of producing and disseminating knowledge about themselves to disrupt the norms of decision-making and knowledge production affecting their communities.

They challenged the ability of policy makers to resolve community issues without community perspective. They sought to contribute anecdotes as well as analysis rooted in the community and made by those who were the most cognizant of challenges faced in the community. They felt only those who “walked the streets” could truly understand how violence unfolded there in its myriad forms. “We were tired of watching others speak for us,” Lila told me, on my first visit to the Center. “Scholars and activists, Costa Ricans and Nicaraguans who weren’t migrants were all too willing to make pronouncements in our name. So we had to prepare to speak for ourselves; we have to maintain a door open to these spaces.” As the women of the Network gained notoriety among Costa Rican organizations, Nicaraguan organizations and
policy-makers, Lila found herself stretched thin with less time for “walking the streets” and more time spent moving from one meeting to the next. Women of the Network entrusted Lila with the task of representing them in these meetings, given her mix of shared background, extensive training and lack of fear of speaking. She had high school education, a humble upbringing and extensive experience in popular education and community organizing before, during and after the Revolution. Beyond her weekly work visits, she would often spend weekend days drinking coffee, eating and speaking with friends from immigrant neighborhoods. She could reenact any scenario faced by migrant women at the drop of a hat, after all this time, without anyone raising any suspicion that she had never faced the challenge herself. But Lila’s goal was not to represent the Network in all the meetings, but instead to train promoters. In all the meetings, women prepared to speak as migrants and in the name of migrants, regardless of the amount of formal training they had received. As I heard her discuss her dilemma with other workers at the Center, debating whom else they might invite to attend such events, it dawned on me that Giselle’s “public speaking” exercises were places to produce and identify new leadership. “Public speaking” would give them the skills and confidence to transmit information and build relationships locally and across communities.

On a Sunday in November, I was invited to join members of Grupo La Merced in La Merced Park as they conducted survey work. Each woman arrived sporting a badge, identifying her as a member of the survey team, and holding a clipboard. Amanda, a volunteer at the Center, distributed copies of the survey to each. They walked around the park alone or in pairs, approaching women sitting in the park. To identify participants, they asked if they worked as domestic employees, rarely asking after their nationality since their presence in the park likely signaled they were Nicaraguan. Then they asked after the woman’s background, including where
she hailed from in Nicaragua and how long she had lived in Costa Rica. They proceeded to ask about labor conditions in her workplace. Most women approached were willing collaborators. Often, the participants elaborated on other injustices they had experienced with landlords, service providers and family. If they mentioned any pressing legal concern, members of the survey team directed the women to Amanda, who was trained to provide advice on legal matters and could connect them with lawyers who volunteer for the Center. The women, coordinating with Leticia and Amanda, had designed the methods to carry out five hundred surveys over a year-long period. Volunteers, from the University of Costa Rica, transferred the data from the surveys to a spreadsheet. The results would be published and presented to public officials.

More importantly, members of Grupo La Merced used the information to generalize about the experiences of Nicaraguan women, building a “scientifically” accepted body of knowledge. I observed them drawing on this knowledge as they discussed the experience of life abroad in meetings. Having lunch with Valencia at a market near her home, I listened while she discussed common abuses and workers’ rights with the Nicaraguan servers who sat and chatted with us during their break. Marlene told me how she passed the information on in meetings she held with her neighbors. Similarly, Elena brought insights she gained from a Center activity in which women created a map of “problem-areas” in their community, to a public meeting. Using this knowledge and the public speaking skills she had developed, she intervened in normative ways women participated in public forums. Elena delighted in recounting the reactions of other women at a community development association meeting when she stood up and addressed the disrepair of community parks and public spaces. She proudly notes that afterwards “a neighbor came by and commented, ‘I didn’t know that you knew how to speak.’” “Knowing how to speak” was a valued skill. It highlighted women’s focus on resolving issues of representation.
They wanted to generate a widespread critique of the tendency to “speak for women migrants.” They emphasized the importance of inserting grounded analysis into policy-making spaces. By learning to speak, women challenged the ability of policy makers to resolve community issues without considering women community members’ perspectives. By speaking, they felt they demonstrated that knowledge was actively being produced in their communities by those who “walked the streets” or shared the community’s marginality, distinguishing themselves from NGO workers that “only spend time in meetings, or in the office”.

The legitimacy they had gradually gained from these practices furthered the Center’s “vertical” work. They had portrayed Network women as community leaders and established activities to assist them in finding spaces to build rapport with state officials, academics and NGO workers. While I explore their interactions in “policy-making” spaces in the next chapter, here I point out that they used the acquaintances they made to exert pressure on state representatives to fulfill their duties. On one occasion, I sat with Monica at an information booth in the atrium of the Costa Rican Offices of Public Justice. She pointed out the director of immigration to me, a tall white woman with brown hair, wearing a suit and high heels. She was walking around with an assistant. Monica indicated she might not readily acknowledge us, but none the less addressed the director once she arrived at our table. She was deferential but firm as she explained a problem she was having with the saturation of the phone lines to make appointments at immigration. The director instructed Monica to follow up with a phone call to remind her to investigate the matter. She seemed mildly troubled by the problem, though not entirely surprised. She then arranged for Monica to hand over the contact information of those people who required appointments. When doctors misdiagnosed Anita’s stomach cancer, Lila contacted the director of Public Health who then ensured Anita would be treated by senior
When local domestic abuse shelters were filled, Leticia placed a call to workers at the National Women’s Institute (INAMU) to arrange housing for abused women in critical situations. While these practices did not resolve systemic injustice, they provided temporary protections. They relied on the public image of the Network and the Center as authorities in immigrant experience. It was this image and the rapport of the Center with certain government officials that generated pressure for officials to respond. Women’s connections to the Network and the Center therefore provided limited leverage that was effective in pressuring officials to act in migrants’ interests to resolve individual acts of negligence.

Beyond enabling their participation in decision-making, their efforts aimed to and largely succeed in transforming their own views of themselves. As they engaged in the practice of speaking, they furthered their goal of re-envisioning their place in the social hierarchy. Marcela, at 60, delighted in recounting she used to see herself as a poor uneducated woman, but had come to see herself as a person with rights and a voice. “I have two hands,” she related, “I have two hands just like you, I have two feet, just like you and I have a mouth, like you, so I too can speak.” Before, women saw their lack of formal training as defining them. Through their endeavors with the Network, they disassociated it from their sense of self-worth and came to appreciate and value their own experience.

J. Conclusion
Women embodied and performed new manners of acting and reacting. They contemplated, adjusted and incorporated into their routines new ideas about how their bodies moved, the tasks they performed, the activities they carried out and their spaces of interaction. Through this performance, they intended to provoke thought and demonstrate different ways of viewing women, Nicaraguans, and other marginalized groups. In other words, they did not just
develop ideas about social rights, but enacted them to effect changes in shared ways of seeing. The Network’s transformation of these practices constituted politics of the body, its associated spaces, activities and sociality. We often speak of knee-jerk reactions, automatic responses our bodies “carry out” without thought. This process refers to the embodied practice of ideas. Women consciously trained their thought patterns and bodies to react automatically and collectively in ways that promulgated their vision of participatory gender equality. Insofar as Network women identified contradictions in democratic participation in discourse and practice, they focused on producing and enacting forms of interaction and participation in concert with these goals.

Network women signaled their ability to learn, to try and to build, possessing active bodies and minds. “We produce knowledge,” they say, “analyzing and speaking for ourselves.” In the face of the occasional young activists’ insistence that it was harder for older people to change their ways, women asserted their experience in life alerted them to the critical nature of the transformations they engage in. When they sensed they were ignored, they exclaimed, “we are not just pobrecitas (women to be pitied)” but instead women capable of knowledge production and, further, analyzing and speaking for themselves. The spaces they inhabit, though structurally marginal, are replete with reflective, collective intellectual activity. Lola summarized: “life is hard here, but we are ‘all terrain women.’” The Network roots this collective struggle in concerted everyday transgressions of normative gender practices to promulgate everyday social change. Network women engage in the politics of gender and migration, challenging notions of private and public, household division of labor, productive labor, sociality, rights and ways of speaking. They show the private and public to be political, as much as the mundane.
In depicting ‘Occupy’ activities, anthropologist Jeffrey Juris explores the meaning of network in this context as a “horizontal structure of organizing,” where a “logic of networking” gives rise to “practices of communication and coordination across diversity and difference on the part of collective actors” (2012: 260). Being organized with the Network denotes a demonstrated commitment to engaging in self-reflection and testimony in meeting spaces, promoting and reproducing Network teaching throughout neighborhoods, deliberately circulating relevant information and resources throughout neighborhoods, engaging intellectually in critical thought, attaching personal well-being to collective well-being in thought and action, valuing contact and collaboration, and in conscientiously transforming everyday forms of relating to family, friends, community and authority.

In her depiction of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina, a group of relatives of the disappeared, Marguerite Bouvard discusses the ways that women “revolution[ized] motherhood” as they transformed themselves and expanded their struggles, through their search for their relatives. As they came to see the shared concerns, each ceased to believe “she alone” must face the state (1994: 67), but instead that her struggles were shared. They came to present themselves “cohesively before the state,” transformations that forced them to abandon routines that provide “structure and comfort” (Bouvard 1994: 66-67). Similarly, Network women socialized gender work in putting into practice their view that violence is a community issue, one that concerns men and women. Importantly, as women reworked and reconstructed the gendered structure of space and sociality, their activities should not be “cordoned off into a ‘gendered field of action’” (Weinstein and Bedi 2012: 2). Instead, women saw themselves as leading their communities towards new ways of acting through simultaneous, concerted and strategic embodied transgressions of normative gender practices to promulgate everyday social change.
Their practices addressed the erasure that occurred across spaces and scales, which normalized and encouraged violence. They recognized that overlapping mundane acts produced some of the most profound exclusion. They showed that the ability to identify any single act as responsible was improbably. Instead, they gradually progressed in identifying practices that reproduced the dominant social order and slowly built a series of responses that address inequity as it manifests across scales. In this way, they demonstrated their predominant focus on the values, meanings and practices that produce systems of belonging and their social, political and economic systems that encompass them.
IX THE INDISPENSABLE WORK OF BEING PRESENT

“Costa Rica is once again demonstrating its great commitment and trajectory in human rights. It is a world model for peace and democracy.” From the stage, the voice of the coordinator of Spanish Aid in Costa Rica echoed across the large ballroom, out over the white-linen covered table. He indulged sharply dressed Costa Rican professionals, principally government officials and NGO workers, in a comforting message as they sat back in cushioned seats, sipping ice-cold water from glasses and listening to a panel of important speakers. The celebration had been called to commemorate the unveiling of the “Between Neighbors” program facilitation guide. The guide’s text stated community workers would use it to develop the “employability, employment and entrepreneurship among youth in working class communities.” Throughout the day, speakers lauded the guide as the pretense for building incorporation efforts in Costa Rica. Yet there was a noticeable absence of representatives from the communities and grassroots organizations the program aimed to incorporate. The meeting was one in a series of events demonstrating that the scope of Costa Rica’s policy-making discussions were limited by a widespread assumption that Costa Rica was exceptional and that by extension, the policies designed by its policy-makers promulgated human rights. In this chapter, I explore Network women’s approach to addressing their exclusion from or marginalization within spaces of public protest and policy-making. I analyze the ways they employed strategies challenging the limited discussions that accompanied the proposals for promulgating social change.

Anthropologists have used the concept of a code to describe approaches to garnering consent for state policies. Eric Wolf described a code as the practice of “naming things” in ways that provided a model for the public to understand reality (1982:6). Ellen Moodie (2007), for example, uses this idea to describe the ways violence and crime are interpreted in El Salvador
before and after the Peace Accords. Previously, amid revolutionary guerilla warfare, all violence was labeled as “critical.” This justified the government’s declaration of a state of exception and in turn indiscriminate state repression. After the accords, government officials labeled violence as “non-critical.” Although committed by military or paramilitary groups, officials referred to it as crime from unknown sources invoking a “state of un-exception.” Moodie argues they had effectively engaged in a form of “code-switching” that ultimately reoriented people away from their focus on the state’s role in ensuring safety towards engaging in everyday activities to ensure their individual “safety, security and well-being” (2007: 6-7). She demonstrates that each code guided the public’s patterns of thinking about the relationship between violence, state and safety.

In Costa Rica, discussions surrounding immigration, taking place in the public sphere, also reflected code-switching. As discussed in chapter 6, growing public recognition of the large immigrant population coincided with a noticeable decline in public services. This assumed correlation between the two became a popular topic of debates in the 2005 presidential elections, which labeled immigration as a threat. At the height of xenophobic public displays, the 2006 immigration reform process began forging a law, widely characterized as restrictive and reactionary, after another round of reforms and the implementation of a more moderate 2010 law, ushering a new public discourse. By 2012, officials no longer spoke of Costa Rica as a white and homogenous democracy threatened by immigration. Instead, the language shifted, immigration was newly labeled a matter of integration and Costa Rica was labeled a model of humane immigration policy. As the language switched, a process of erasure of any recognition of xenophobia ensued. There was no mention of ways Costa Rican democracy had produced exclusion. In other words, the shift did not entail any examination of these structures labeled democratic. There was no concerted modification to the institutions, nor ways of seeing and
acting in relation to Nicaraguans. Nor was there mention of Costa Rica’s restructuring that relied on Nicaraguans. Instead, Costa Rica was characterized as benevolent because it received disenfranchised, impoverished and hard-working migrants. Nicaraguans might still be regarded as “others” but the receiving society had been recast as welcoming.

Speeches at the presentation of the “Between Neighbors” program echoed a code of speaking about Costa Rican institutions and policies as inherently democratic. Presenters spoke in celebratory tones, invoking the idea of Costa Rican commitment to ensuring humane migration. The leaders exhorted the audience “to feel very proud as Costa Ricans, as citizens of a receiving country.” “Integration,” the director of migration and foreigners asserted “is a matter of human rights and public security.” He continued by pronouncing the need to assure the country’s “governability and national security” through immigration law. The integration program was a vehicle for security and governability through its emphasis on employment and entrepreneurism. In this context, the discussion of integration implied immigrants were valuable and welcome, so long as they were productive. Integration entailed ensuring control over migrants more than ensuring their participation and access. Furthermore, it provided a justification for monitoring and policing immigrant communities. Such discourses harkened back to other Central American countries’ 19th century modernization projects that criminalized “vagrancy,” that is, the application of a labor draft to anyone who was not a large landowner or farm laborer and contributing to the productivity of the country. Legal categories of belonging delineated the extent of one’s participation in political processes. At the time, those who owned the land held citizenship and voice, while laborers worked land and followed policy dictates. In 2012, the language of integration reflected a new era of policing public spaces of the city. In the context of President Laura Chinchilla’s “firm hand” program, the values of security and governability could
be observed in the appearance of police patrols on every street corner downtown, over the course of her presidency. But the shifts also seemed to criminalize the lower classes. A friend from a working class neighborhood told me that whenever a small disturbance took place, “robocops,” as riot police are commonly known, would appear to quell the activity. Back at the meeting, the minister couched his speech, once again, within the code. He concluded by exhorting the audience to approach immigration as a development factor, not a threat positioning migrants as components to be managed for the benefit of Costa Rica’s economic development.

Tellingly, the minister of security followed as the next speaker, a bulletproof vest underneath his suit. He characterized the 2010 immigration law as “a new model in the country.” He depicted it as less restrictive and softer than the previous. He asserted the law was unique in comparison with other countries’ laws, which he claimed categorized immigration “as a matter of public security.” He did not offer any particular country’s laws as evidence of the contrast. First, this assertion contradicted the statements made by other speakers who had conceptually aligned immigrant integration with matters of security. The assertion also stood in stark contrast to reports emitted by research organizations that classified Costa Rica’s 2009 law as “better than its 2005 law,” but still implying strong violations of human rights (Grohl and Carcedo 2012; Sandoval 2015). Furthermore, it contradicted everyday practices towards immigrants, particularly the presence of police in San Jose’s public parks, strolling around, asking after people’s identification papers and taking them away to deportation cells.

117 Monica told me he was wearing it, after greeting him with a hug, during the reception. She speculated it was in relation the protests over a new “Ley Mordanza,” censoring law, which provides immunity to police actions towards protesters.

118 Sandoval writes: “In July 2009, Costa Rica’s Legislative Assembly passed the current General Law of Migration and Alien Affairs (No. 8,764), which went into effect in March 2010 (Asamblea Legislativa de la República 2009). In general, this law eliminates a good part of the vocabulary linked to security that abounded in the earlier law, replacing it with the discourse of human rights and alluding to multiple international agreements ratified and in effect in Costa Rica. The human rights frame bestowed important legitimacy upon the new law. The new law combines this framing with specific provisions that make the regularization of the migratory process even more cumbersome and grants powers—such as to extend detentions for more than 24 hours—to the executive branch that, according to the Constitution, properly belong to the judicial branch (2015: 8).
Only one voice of dissent could be heard, hinting the actual approaches to immigration policies were rooted in the conflation of immigration with criminality. One youth leader, from a rural community, questioned the portrayal of Costa Rica during the course of the day’s speeches. He declared, “we’ve forgotten how to be neighbors; we don’t recognize the value of incorporating the immigration population.” He asked the audience to think about why immigrants come to the country. He, in turn, exhorted the audience to rescue “community dynamics.” While ministers and ambassadors celebrated the implementation of new initiatives as signals of democracy, the youth leader pointed to signs implementation was not necessarily a harbinger of acceptance towards the immigrant community. Still, he did not break with the idea of exceptionalism entirely. He framed neighborliness towards immigrants as a lost art. In contrast, scholarship shows the absence of neighborliness is a historical trend, stemming from the view “others” threatened Costa Rican harmony and homogeneity (Alvarenga 2007; Edelman 1999; Harpelle 2000). Costa Rican spaces of protest and policy-making operated within the confines of this code with few exceptions. This frame often restricted the conversations that could take place there. Throughout this chapter, I examine the ways different policy-making spaces, operating under the motto of integration, constrained immigrant voices.

A. Public and Political Incursions
Before moving on, it is important to point to the mechanics of the Network’s participation in these spaces of protest and policy-making. None of the events that followed were open-invitation, although participation was not entirely restricted. Instead, these were spaces where organizers convened individuals and groups via email, meetings and “networks” of communication. Although marches against gender-based violence were organized annually on November 25th, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, and
March 8th, International Women’s Day, the place and time always varied. Each year a network of feminist organizations arranged the march in coordination with municipal authorities. One year, a few immigrant youths recalled, the march wound for hours through the city. During my fieldwork (2012), the duration was less than an hour and the march proceeded straight down 2nd Avenue, a major downtown thoroughfare. Center staff received information about the timing of the march via listerves of women’s organizations. It was sparingly promoted in public, mostly through posts on Facebook. Meanwhile, meetings with public officials generally invited specific groups to attend, though in theory, they sought a broad audience to provide input for their programs. It was here, as in moments when women had exhausted local level resources, that the “vertical” connections of the network allow them to contribute their diverse perspectives in these spaces. Staff of the Center ensured some representative of the organization was “present” in all the meetings to which they were invited. Using this strategy, they maintained their place in a wide range of conversations surrounding immigration, women and violence. They also preserved the connections to these “momentary” and strategic venues of discussion. In the absence of staff to attend all the relevant meetings, I was occasionally asked to attend and report back to both the Center and Network. I was tasked with ensuring the space remained open to them.\textsuperscript{119} In the long term, as the Network women’s advanced in their training as promoters and once they felt “prepared” to participate, they became the representatives who maintained these connections, such as Elena’s entrance into the Resist! group.

They referred to this effort as a practice of 	extit{hacienda presencia} (being present). It was reliant on and reinforced these connections to spaces typically reserved for so-called specialists and technocrats: academics, politicians, NGO staff and directors. This strategy of scale relied on

\textsuperscript{119} For example, by securing their participation in the planning of special events or voicing the information or skills they could contribute to any taskforce that was forming.
two of the resources generated through organizing. First, they drew on the Center and the Network’s efforts towards producing knowledge. Secondly, they drew on their efforts to establish ties between Network members and individuals and entities whose positions permitted them to influence policy-making processes and ensure the everyday fulfillment of rights and access. These included University of Costa Rica academic departments, the Costa Rican feminist research organization CEFEMINA, the popular education research organization, CEP-Alforja, and the activist organization, the Jesuit Service for Migrants. There were clear efforts towards opening these spaces to women of the Network and preparing them to continue to participate in the organizations.

The use of the phrase “being present” also held symbolic value. Network women imbued new significance on the phrase “presente (present),” which had been utilized throughout Latin America to celebrate the solidarity of an individual or group when they could not be present. Their nuanced use of the term spoke to their constant efforts to maintain the tenuous spaces they had carved out for themselves in arenas that influenced policies, whether “civil society” marches, inclusion in umbrella organizations, or seats at government-organized roundtables. They worked to ensure their insertion and visibility. They performed the idea that those who lived marginality should be, and were capable of, speaking to the experience of marginality and its origins. They sought to show they could providing more than anecdotes about marginal communities. Moreover, they demonstrated there was significant diversity among those facing inequality. Through their participation, they demonstrated the need to apply the lenses of diverse marginalities to the formulation of initiatives aimed at overcoming inequality. The participation of the Network in these spaces signaled their conscious insertion into national processes to engage in the politics of those spaces.
Women’s strategies in these spaces reflected their recognition that much of the discourse over migration was labeled and institutionalized through these networks of organizations and in the government’s policy-making spaces. Their actions, within these spaces, demonstrated their recognition that it was not only their presence but their challenge to the way these spaces were structured that would allow them to put pressure on such “organizational-tactical arrangements,” which lent power to these codes (Wolf 2001). By making themselves visible to these individuals and entities, migrant women also positioned themselves tactically to exercise rights individually, but more importantly, on behalf of the community of migrants. Visibility in itself was not just about meeting with officials, but ensuring they were aware of the Network’s visibility to others. Here is where the practice of being present reinforced their inclusion in working groups, in national and transnational research, on activist boards and in government consultations. In turn, they institutionalized their inclusion producing the view that their presence was crucial to official policymaking strategies.

Consciously or unconsciously, they played with the tenuous legitimacy of the neoliberal shift towards a “representational” government strategy that sought legitimation through the appearance of diversity amid a narrowing definition of participation (Alvarez 1999; Hale 2002). The international community of states as well as human rights-focused NGOs and initiatives unequivocally reinforced the exceptionalist discourse. Still, as a broader swath of the Costa Rican community became aware of its own absence from these spaces, efforts to renew confidence in Costa Rica’s exceptionalism flourished. The convergence of waning confidence in the Costa Rican state and migrant integration efforts suggested the importance of recognizing their partial incorporation into these discussions. It permitted officials to claim to have included Nicaraguan representatives in discussions about them while ensuring discussions would not
question the validity of the integration model. Mobilization of the integration model and its attendant meanings, defined from above, was key in renewing and reproducing the notion of *pura vida*. Center and Network leadership routinely operated based on their own definition of integration, encouraging Network women to push the parameters of participation established by meeting organizers. By establishing connections with officials, Lila, Leticia and Monica tapped into the organizational-tactical power of the Costa Rican state as programs. This did not grant them an all-access pass to policy-making, it provided multiple venues to engage, albeit unevenly, in the politics of integration.

Anthropologist Julia Paley argues the political realm has been discursively de-politicized in the neoliberal area. Experts, officials and technocrats comprise the ranks of decision-makers. They are labeled as neutral actors, while their decisions are framed as objective (2001). The work of the Network shows the acts of participating and decision-making are political processes. Their insertion pointed to two areas of scholarship. First, the politics of participation of immigrant bodies and immigrant concerns into national spaces of negotiation whether social protest, government policy-making or program formulation activities. Secondly, it pointed to discussions of the elitism of democracy as demonstrated through spaces that bring together “marginal” residents, NGO personnel and state agents and representatives. Participation in these spaces reflected the possibilities for and limitations to participation in the context of democratic openings of shifting policies, a galvanized citizenry-civil society and the insertion of the transnational space from below through a movement towards “cultural citizenship.”

B. The View from the Margins
Network women’s strategies of “being present” addressed the manifestation and reproduction of the social order at different scales. More specifically, for women who were
accustomed to exercising limited agency in the private realm, they experienced their participation at broader scales as transgressive. For structurally marginal groups, recognition at all scales was a key issue in the struggle for participation. Law and policy-making spaces produced knowledge about migrants. Based on that knowledge, policies were created that structured migrants’ access to democratic participation. In the neoliberal era, technocratic governance was reproduced by confining participation to voting on a range of issues established by professional experts consolidating decision-making at the top. Nicaraguan women realized they had been marginalized by policies produced in this manner. But in order to reform policy, they had to intercede in these policy-making spaces to present their analysis, which demonstrated the marginalizing effects of laws and policies structuring immigrant lives. In other words, they had to make multi-scalar incursions at the level of household, community, workplace, public service institutions and policy-making meetings. This, in itself, was a transgression of the norms of exceptionalism in the neoliberal era. Moreover, they challenged commonsense notions of who participates and how within each of these spaces.

Similarly, anthropologist Maylei Blackwell uses geographers’ concept of scale to describe how feminist indigenous activists overcame barriers at one scale by organizing at another. Their organizing entailed “knowledge and political learning...[as well as] solidarity and new forms of consciousness” (Staeheli 1994: 388). Similarly, as they participated in public protest and policy-making spaces, the Network drew on women’s everyday experience of marginality as well as, the collective knowledge and practice of acting as a network that developed through Center and Network activities. In this way, organizing at the scales of household and community granted them leverage they would not otherwise have wielded at another scale, that of policy-making space. Blackwell argues movement between the two also
provides them with “differential consciousness” that enhances their organizing activities (2006: 116). In the case of the Network, through their activities at the scales of government and civil society they learned about broader-reaching forms of engagement. From activities with government officials, they developed an understanding of how policy-making was carried out and the repercussions of the process. Through their engagement with civil society protests, they observed the ways other groups were organizing around marginality produced by gendered, racialized and national hierarchies. Familiarity with each made them more effective at all four scales. They knew what knowledge to gather and which skills to develop, in order to make incursions in policy spaces. They also had a deep familiarity in their communities to recognize issues faced by migrants that policy discussion neglected. They learned to ask new questions towards analyzing the issues faced by migrant communities through their interactions with other movements. Finally, they pushed other organized groups to broaden their critiques and demands to include the way migrant status intersected with other forms of marginality.

Often, both the difference between these scales and the distinction between those that participate at each scale are naturalized. Geographer Sallie Marston (2000) directs attention to the idea that scales are socially constructed. Scale “is the embodiment of social relations of empowerment and disempowerment and the arena through which they operate” (Swyngedouw 1997: 169 in Marston 2000). This creates a way of seeing household, community and government as distinct spaces corresponding to different scales. Moreover, there is a shared perception that the degree of access to each scale corresponds to a position within the social hierarchy. This legitimizes the practice of technocratic decision-making. For example, Lila and Monica routinely mentioned that working groups were framed as spaces for an intellectual vanguard and that state spaces were reserved for citizens. Neither included them, as migrants.
Still, they used the leverage of the Network’s vertical connections to intervene in policy-making. This activity alone might be interpreted as simply reinforcing the legitimacy of decisions made in those spaces. However, they were simultaneously engaged in public protests and dissident associations, which questioned the changing institutional arrangements that made up the state. They also used their leverage as members of the Network to participate in these spaces from which they would normally be excluded. Furthermore, they enacted their transgressive practices in spaces historically designated for the participation of Costa Ricans, whether state, institutional or civil society spaces.” They recognized the social order was institutionalized at each of these scales and offered a new angle from which to engage in “everyday forms of state-formation” (Joseph et al 1994: 20).

Their participation in public protest had increased over the previous five years. The year I joined them, it began to take on a distinct tone. Reviewing photographs and accounts of past marches, I noted, they seemed to be increasing their efforts to highlight their presence in these activities and also to distinguish their preoccupations from those of other protesters. For example, in photographs from previous marches protesting violence against women, they were holding signs protesting violence against women. However, for the 2012 march, the slogan “women migrants resisting” was boldly splashed across their banner and the back of their t-shirts, highlighting their distinct identity. They were increasingly pointing to ways distinct and heightened forms of violence against them were being justified by their real or imagined legal, cultural and symbolic position as migrants.

Their entrance into public policy spaces was more recent, facilitated by the implementation of provisions of the 2010 immigration law in Costa Rica, the recognition of an absence of a state public policy on immigration, and, finally, by the work of the Center staff and
the Network members to open and advocate for the necessity of immigrant input in key forums. Still, interactions within these spaces revealed the persistent limitations on the ways in which migrants can participate, via notions of “acceptable” forms of participation. In the ethnographic moment, women were still exploring their roles in these spaces, focused on practices of “being present” and “intersectionality” by drawing on skills and practices discussed in the previous chapter: public speaking, being women who speak, and producing and valuing community knowledge.

They recognized, as I will discuss in the following examples, the exclusionary practices that took place in each space. I make this assertion based on my observer’s vantage point, catching exclusionary commentary and actions. Network members also highlighted these issues in their commentary following these events. I then close the dissertation by discussing how new spaces and scales of incursion produce new practices, forms of engagement, and discussions about women’s encounters with new limitations and forms of exclusion.

C. Marching For Whom? Migrant Women Also Suffer Violence
Since my arrival, whenever I asked after their political participation, women would tell me about the marches. “Ohhh,” Elena gushed, “I love the march against violence, when we all dress in purple and wind through the streets.” Felipe, Alicia’s 16-year old son, also mentioned the march. “Last year it went on forever, but I always enjoy it.” It was cold that November 24th. I walked through San Jose towards our meeting point wearing a couple of layers and my favorite knit cap and found myself sitting alone on the bench on Parque La Merced. Soon, I begin to see other groups arrive. After 15 minutes, Lila and Monica appeared. Just a few more minutes passed before a shuttle bus rented by the Center dropped off women and many children from Cartaguito. Members of Grupo la Merced passed through, some greeting us on their way to other activities and some gathering for the march, to increase the numbers of the Network women present. In
contrast to most groups in attendance, consisting of professionals, college students and NGO workers, families represented the Network. Lila produced t-shirts from a large bag and I unfolded our banner. Wearing jackets and carrying umbrellas, unsure of what weather the afternoon might bring, we looked at the t-shirts, shrugged and then, simply pulled them on over the layers of clothing and began to prepare to march. The Mesoamerican immigration collective, a group of leaders in the field of immigrant rights, had selected the design. It insinuated women’s social growth, depicting a figure initially hunched clutching her knees, then an image of her unfolding her body and beginning to take steps. In the final image she stood up straight, seemingly releasing a light from her cupped hands, out into the world. “Women migrants resisting” it proclaimed across the back. Others wore their Center shirts. Leticia asked me to ensure I snap some photos from angles where the sleeves proclaimed the names of their funders were visible, to please the organizations and provide evidence of how funds were being spent.

The groups began marching down the street. It was led, as were many in Costa Rica, by the Partido Socialista de Trabajadores (the Socialist worker’s party). Young, college-aged students held up red flags, rapped on drums and marched behind a banner advocating for a secular state. Behind them marched the hijas de la negrita (Daughters of the Black Virgin), a local feminist organization. Women from the Cartago province, organized with the “woman you are not alone” violence prevention program, held up a sign simply declaring “presente!” (present!)” in purple letters on an orange background. The women wore purple t-shirts with their logo, adorned with red ribbons and blouses peeking out around the collar. A series of smaller organizations followed with banners. Futbol por la vida (soccer for life), held up a banner covered with handprints, asserting “defendemos y apoyemos a las mujeres (we defend and support women).” A smattering of youth held up the signs. Behind them marched more socialist
party youth whose sign read “a socialist alternative for women workers.” The Network marched behind a group of women in their forties and fifties accompanied by children ranging from toddlers to teenagers to twenty-somethings. The feminist research institute, CEFEMINA, continued just behind us holding a black sign with purple lettering, the women dressed in purple. The Feminist Network Preventing Violence Against Women marched together with the Lutheran woman’s group. Members of Resist! held the largest sign, stating “we are Mesoamerican women resisting all forms of violence against women.” Purple scarves adorning women’s necks stood out against their colorful clothing. Behind them, the Network of Puntarenas Women Resisting marched. Most who marched there could be distinguished from others in the march, women whose hair had turned white and grey, some held up their long banner, others walk with the assistance of a cane. They sported purple shirts with red ribbons. ASTRADOMES, the association of domestic workers followed closely.

Just behind, a separate march of cattle ranchers had begun to catch up. Men and women strolled in jeans, work shirts and cowboy hats, alongside oxen pulling colorful carts. They carried machete covers and sticks to train the oxen. The woman’s march was hurried along its trajectory by one march and displaced from its meeting point by a police-academy graduation. This displacement was ironic considering many feminist scholars in Costa Rica have written that the police force is charged with maintaining the status quo and, thereby, the patriarchal order (Sagot; Carcedo 1993). Despite these confines, the women’s march managed to attract attention. It was accompanied by a small van with loudspeakers broadcasting music and chants. The socialists sounded out the rhythms with their drums. Although each group had prepared its

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120 Facebook posts, in the wake of Costa Rica’s successful run in the world cup (July 2014), questioned why it was permissible for fans to fill and block the major traffic arterials and intersections, while protests were criminalized and repressed for the same actions.
own chants, a few resonated with the whole crowd. “Qué pasó? Te dije que no! Que parte no entendiste, la N o la O? (What happened? I said no! What part of no don’t you understand, the ‘n’ or the ‘o’?)” Others pointed out how society goes in circles, declaring that “while the people try to move forward, the state moves backwards.” Still, another that resonated widely was “whomever doesn’t jump is [President] Laura [Chincilla]!”12] Women walked by handing out stickers. The children grabbed them and covered the fronts and backs of their t-shirts. They also picked up the chants quickly, shouting them and pumping their fists in the air.

While a loudspeaker blasted adoptions of other common march chants, the Network group would occasionally shout out its own message: “women migrants present!”; “women migrants resisting!”; “women migrants repudiating violence!” Their chants seemed to generate discord with other groups who were focused on oppressive institutions at the scale of the state towards women. In contrast, Network women focused on the everyday reproduction of violence towards women migrants perpetrated by women and men from above and below. Women migrants’ performance of their presence, their contribution and their demands for social rights challenged the nationalist framing of social rights in Costa Rica, dealing with issues for citizens as they manifested domestically.

When the next chant began, Lila and I were unable to make out the words. We turned to each other and tried to piece it together. A woman in her early 50s, noticing our confusion, turned to us. “What are they saying? We can’t hear!” we asked. She turned slowly and repeated the chant. We realized the chant advocated for a secular state as we passed the National Cathedral. We thanked her and kept moving. But she continued to speak, proceeding to explain the terms slowly, apparently judging from our appearance that we wouldn’t understand. “Laico

12] The government of President Laura Chinchilla 2010-2014 was seen as poorly managed, overseeing the complete dismantling of the caja.
(secular),” she said, “means that the state not have a religion. So what the chant is asking is for a separation of church and state.” We nodded and said, “yes, thank you, we just couldn’t hear the last word.” We looked at each other and shrugged, continuing on rather than addressing this apparent snub.

The final set of chants, shouted while passing the Caja, assumed a shared subject-position of holding citizenship. The march-wide chants turned towards “la caja es nuestra! (the caja is ours)” addressing the dismantling of the caja and protesting the implied redistribution of social wealth to elites. As the march finished in the Park of Social Guarantees, behind the caja, different groups performed poems, songs and monologues advocating for women’s rights. Among others,¹²² Lila made an impromptu demonstration of an immigrant woman seeking healthcare, which demonstrated migrants’ insecurities regarding the challenges of accessing public services. The performances terminated by calling out the names of women killed in femicides that year. Representatives of different organizations brought signs with women’s names up to a stand and posted them there. The memorial ended with a moment of silence for all the women killed that year. Network members strolled away during the performance, headed back to Braulio Carillo Park to help out with an information fair about immigrant regularization opportunities, tirelessly engaging in the work of making migrant issues visible.

The march, convened by feminist women’s organizations and framed within a “nationalist” discussion of issues for women, left out the issues Network women identified as the root of their problems abroad. In fact, a year later, the women sent me photos from the 2013 march, in which they held up a hastily written handmade signs stating, “women’ migrants exist!”

¹²² Women dressed in burkas and habits performed a satire of the “our father” prayer associating religion with women’s oppression. Women sitting behind tables handed out stickers advocating for therapeutic abortions, horrifying some of the members of the Network.
referencing their invisibility, even in these spaces. Network women’s increasingly distinctive signs pointed to a sense of erasure in the feminist spaces they expected would demonstrate the greatest acceptance. It is not uncommon that mobilizations unite behind previously agreed-upon forms of self-representation that encompass the common interests of the groups but then exclude the demands exclusive to certain groups or less palatable to the larger public.

Anthropologists draw on work of political philosopher Gayatri Spivak to understand this “need to project ‘sameness’ to outsiders” as the use of “strategic essentialisms” that draw on politically expedient discourses of belonging to insert complex issues into the formal and national political arena (Spivak 1989, 1990, 1993 in Stephen 2001). The cry of “the caja is ours” could be taken as a mantra anyone who felt they might have a rightful claim to it, could adopt. At the same time, the agenda and the common discourse emanated from the perspective of Costa Rican, urban and, implicitly, middle class feminist perspectives. Multiple feminisms within Costa Rica went unrecognized in the messages. Moreover, there was a notable physical absence of peasant, indigenous or afro-descendant women. Thus, the singularity of the message “stop violence against women” might have resulted exclusionary for others as well. Although the presentation of demands in a visible public space permitted new forms of dissemination and recognition, the more general protest discourse presented in chants and banners, excluded them. Most Costa Rican protest marches invoked the state in some form, whether demanding government intervention to protect citizens when they protest government violations of “human rights” through unethical laws or actions, or demanding compliance with laws they deem ethical. Thus, public protest often highlighted legal and cultural belonging to the nation-state as a platform for making demands. When carried out through an urban intellectual lens, however,
these protests effectively reinforced the association of homogenous racial, class and ideological belonging.

D. Intersectionality and Participation
The year I joined the Network in the march, they drew on their knowledge and analysis to assert the difference in their experience. By presenting themselves as aligned with the cause while demonstrating distinct subject positions as migrants, they pushed for the adoption of cross-cultural feminism in public arenas. They pushed for a message considering “the plurality [or multiplicity] of experiences that mark gender identities” (Hernandez Castillo et al 2006: 48) and the need to restore access to those whose needs were not considered within a nationalist frame of rights. Furthermore, it pushed for recognition that the Costa Rican economy and Costa Ricans themselves benefitted from the labor and presence of women migrants who occupied marginal “subject positions of globalized multicultural neoliberalism” (Postero 2007; Speed 2006). Network members insinuated that a feminism framed within national parameters reinforced migrants’ invisibility and exclusion. For this reason, their portrayal of difference was transgressive and critical to producing democratic participation.

Network women’s effort to highlight their distinct position in relation to the issue of violence against women corresponded to a growing critique of the use of strategic essentialisms. An established body of scholarship produced in Latin America problematizes essentialist views of marginal groups participating in social movements. Indigenous and Afro-Latin American women are among the most prominent advocates for their particular needs to be recognized. Women’s demands are made invisible when ethnicity is the organizing logic of a movement while ethnic demands often remain invisible when women’s or LGBTQ rights are the organizing logic. Similarly, women’s and ethnic minorities’ demands remain invisible when class is the organizing logic. Feminist scholars problematize this trend through the lens of intersectionality,
speaking of multiple feminisms, forms of indigeneity and sexual diversity. In particular, they argue for the right, not only to existing cultural diversity, but also to determine cultural diversity (Vidal Choque 2007).

Intersectionality is a tool that allows us to understand how a single body can be subjected to multiple systems of exclusion operating in the world. The frame implies that no single theory can explain all of the individual’s reality. Scholars suggest the need to construct a “differentiated citizenship in which ethnic and gender specificities are taken into account in the construction of a public, heterogeneous space in which interest groups can work together while maintaining their identities” (Hernandez Castillo 2006: 39). It draws on the well-established literature critiquing neoliberal multiculturalism (Warren and Jackson 1998, Collier et al 1998; Postero 2007; Hale 2002) and neoliberal feminism (Murdock 2008; Alvarez 1999) to recognize that marginal women are qualified to participate using knowledge grounded in personal experience and distinct forms of engagement. These literatures speak to the need for a true seat at the table, which would entail the opportunity to participate without relinquishing the enactment of difference.

Through their enactment of difference, the Network aimed to insert an intersectional lens into decision-making spaces at all scales, including social movement agendas. The Network’s struggle also coincided with these diverse feminisms in its engagement with cultural citizenship. Renato Rosaldo (1997) and William V. Flores and Rina Benmayor’s (1997) proposed to use the term “cultural citizenship” to describe how immigrant communities insert themselves into public and political life, access social rights and establish themselves as part of a community, in lieu of state-authorized residency. Alternatively, where immigrants obtained documentation but lacked access to social rights, cultural citizenship described the process of advocacy for access regardless of difference. For this reason Hernandez Castillo, Stephen and Speed argue the
struggle for cultural citizenship is not limited to undocumented immigrants, about whom the concept was developed. They made this link by defining cultural citizenship as “everyday activities through which marginalized social groups can claim recognition, public space, and, eventually, specific rights” (2006: 36).

All groups lacking recognition, including internally marginalized populations, share the struggle. It is also exercised by those who attempt to exercise specific values for governing and organizing social interaction (usos and costumbres) that diverge from “centralized” national culture. In the case of Mexico, they point out the right to difference was denied in the name of equality and as prerequisite for access to “rights” (Hernandez Castillo et al 2006: 35). Further, the denial of these differences subordinated their citizenship. Indigenous demands “point to the construction of a new type of cultural citizenship in which being different…with respect to the community’s dominant forms does not jeopardize the right to belong, in the sense of participating in the democratic processes of the nation state” (Hernandez Castillo et al 2007: 37). Nicaraguan women showed the introduction of difference to the protest did not deny its viability. Instead it demonstrated the framework for demanding inclusion needed to recognize that the state assemblage relied on Nicaraguan presence to mitigate dismantling of social welfare services and to uphold production levels. It recognized Costa Rican women’s marginal subject position related to the neoliberal restructuring of the country. It also recognized they were unintentionally complicit in Nicaraguan women’s greater exclusion. Finally, it would recognize the state assemblage implicitly augmented Nicaraguan women’s exposure to structural violence.

E. A Meeting of Institutions
Nicaraguan women also brought their struggle for inclusion into policy-making spaces. They engendered a right to participate and to receive response to their grievances although their
experiences, occupations, knowledge and forms of presenting themselves differed from those of the public employees and professionals present. They asserted their legitimacy in spite of difference. In Julia Paley’s ethnography of the insertion of community health organizers in a Chilean settlement into narrowly defined professional spaces (2001), she describes how women health promoters from marginal neighborhoods wield their so-called “lay” research as legitimately produced knowledge. She argues that these represent forms of democratic participation that emerge beyond the electoral space, as health promoters find alternative ways to assert their knowledge, values and forms of participation. Paley is quick to assert that while health workers insert themselves into policy discussions, they do not simply reproduce dominant forms of knowledge production. Instead, they disrupt the idea that knowledge is deemed “legitimate” based on who produces it. Instead, by conducting and presenting their own research about their own communities, they assert legitimacy should stem from the way knowledge is produced. She illustrates ways the limitations of participation at the community level mimic the limitations of so-called “democratic openings” in the post-dictatorship neoliberal period in Chile. Paley describes how women in squatter settlements are recruited to engage in “development” initiatives with public health organizations. Labeled “democratic,” these contradictory encounters reveal the limitations of neoliberal democratic forms of participation and, more specifically, the value for their grounded analysis. Her work speaks to the role of effectively limited democratic openings in galvanizing broad social movements and baring the elitism of democracy. Similarly, the Network was invited to participate in a discussion of migrant women’s encounters with violence, including domestic and sexual violence, in institutional and

123 Both Paley and Postero describe ways ideas about citizenship and participation are transmitted as “technologies of the self,” drawing on Foucault (1981). While this frame does not contradict my argument, it would be an unnecessary addition to my use of William’s analytical from to understand how hegemonic ideas are spread and are adopted into practice. Further, I find Foucault’s analysis incomplete as where Foucault does not offer instances where alternative technologies can be learned.
employment settings. Furthermore, officials expressed interest in discussing any difficulties women had encountered accessing the justice system.

At the time, throughout Costa Rica, there was a seemingly constant visible activism in relation to the Chinchilla administration’s increasingly flagrant *mano firme* (firm hand) governing policy. Chinchilla initially gained legitimacy from her clean record serving as Vice-president under the previous administration of Oscar Arias who had promoted himself as a candidate ushering in peace and prosperity. Instead, Chinchilla introduced *mano firme*. It seemed to be an express reference to *mano dura* (iron fist or zero tolerance) policies. Such policies criminalize everyday activities, most often, in working-class and immigrant neighborhoods throughout Central America and the United States wherever gang violence is perceived as threat (Zilberg 2011). Anthropologist Elana Zilberg demonstrates gang injunctions criminalize people for meeting up in public spaces, such as the front porch of a home, and associating with gang members or suspected gang members, among other activities. Often, the everyday tasks of speaking with family members and neighbors, work and even forms of conflict resolution are persecuted, appearing to be gang-related. Criminalization, ultimately, undermines community efforts to promote socially constructive behavior. Chinchilla’s policy followed the rising trend of variably neglecting or repressing any activity in San Jose’s impoverished and immigrant neighborhoods. The contrast between her celebrated inauguration and the sense of utter decline gripping the city had raised concerns and prompted invitations for immigrant women to convey their experiences before justice system representatives. In this sense, they

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124 Chinchilla evaded entanglement in corruption scandals that had plagued her associates in the Arias administration. She was also initially lauded as Costa Rica’s first woman president.

125 Activities, such as sitting on a front porch, are conflated with gang association. They also become targets of policing in the midst of post-war violence, exclusion and the criminalization of youth (2011). They undermined community interventions that recognized the community of the gang as a central space to reconstitute the social fabric around them.
provided a democratic opening by allowing women to experience and experiment with ways to participate in policy-making spaces.

A meeting with the judicial branch’s Commission for Access to Justice took place in the ballroom of another of San Jose’s exclusive hotels. The room was divided in half. One side was occupied by elegantly-decorated tables covered with a white tablecloth and decorated with a vase filled with bird of paradise. Next to it was placed a buffet of pastries, fruits and glass pitchers set in ice baths. The other side was filled with rows of chairs facing a small raised platform. The Network women had arrived and prepared to present a strong message. Lila was handing out t-shirts declaring “women migrants have had enough” in black letters across a background of bright red and pink checkered blocks as they walked to their seats. As they slipped their shirts on, Lila reminded them to be prepared to tell their stories of mishandled cases with police, education and health services. As the room filled, Lila and Natalia exchanged nervous glances. They had been invited to speak on the panel of “experts” that would initiate the presentation. They were representing the Council on Migration, an independent panel of professionals working on issues related to migration. They had discussed that as leaders and formal participants in the presentation they were also responsible for introducing new angles to the discussions taking place, specifically, to portray these issues as political. They sought to inject passion into the otherwise “sanitized” discussion of issues women faced daily. They staged a brief performance to accompany their speeches, with the hope of producing both affective and cognitive responses to their presentations.

The moderator explained the day’s objectives: to “make visible the forms of violence against women in the different spheres affecting women migrants.” The meeting would “fertilize” the construction of a pathway that the Council on Women Migrants and Refuges had
been forging to achieve better conditions for this “population” and to “reinstate the right to a life without violence.” The premise of the meeting recognized that “the conditions do not affect men and women equally.” After the introductions, the director of the Commission for Access to Justice led the meeting. In addition to the twenty members of the Network, the attendees included female police officers, representatives from Costa Rica’s social security administration and representatives from child protective services.

The director’s assistant began by introducing the first speakers: Lila and Natalia. Lila provided a passionate account of migrant women’s interactions with state institutions in which she questioned the behaviors circumscribed by exceptionalism, showing these were common practices. She began by proclaiming: “we, women migrants, when we come up against the system, we feel this way:” She paused while both she and Natalia raised their hands, grasping large metal chains they had brought, and shook them above their heads. The links clinked against each other, gently. “This is how we are,” Lila continued, women migrants confronting all types of violence: chained, impotent. Only the efforts by and the solidarity among women migrants allows us to move forward against this system. Even our mouths are chained. We depend on the political will of a few bureaucrats.

She clarified Nicaraguan women were aware Costa Rica had signed international agreements to improve the welfare of migrants. She asserted women migrants had familiarized themselves with their rights. With this knowledge, she said, women migrants had noticed different forms of exclusion. For example, they were aware of the tendency of receptionists in primary-attention clinics to refuse services, saying migrants were invading. She decried how “even the guard outside” would discriminate and impedes their entrance. She pointed out that this demonstrated “everyone decides that they have the right to declare that we are illegal here. They are the ones who make decisions about our lives in the banks, in migration.” She continued by positioning
immigration as a universal human right. Simultaneously, she emphasized the special circumstances in which Nicaraguan women migrated to escape the different types of violence they experience. Natalia’s followed with brief comments about dangerous preoccupation with legality. She added: “if she’s going to be killed, a woman isn’t going to stop to make sure she has her birth certificate with her before she leaves to migrate. In what world?!?” In spite of the policies, she concluded, to enact good policies, policymakers would need to get out from behind their desks and visit the places where women migrants resided. Natalia concluded by offering analysis, suggesting the structural nature of women’s exclusion served “the interests of elites.”

Subsequently, the director’s assistant introduced the Director of the Commission for Access to Justice, who sat on a stool with a microphone, legs crossed, seated comfortably as if to convey camaraderie. She began by stating her belief that all should have access to justice. She described her history, being born and raised in the working-class southern neighborhoods of San Jose. She described hearing continual, offhand and derogatory comments about her neighborhood and the people who lived there, throughout her career. She told the women, “I am proud to be from those neighborhoods. I emphasize, as well, that I am not different from others in my neighborhood, many of whom are Nicaraguan, people whose work supports the country.” Her description emphasized that one was not defined by where they were from. She spoke for more than an hour, conveying that she was troubled by the institutional arrangements impeding access and reproduced exclusionary discourses. She repeatedly emphasized her commitment to changing them, starting by listening to women who lived this reality. She declared her love for Lila and Natalia’s use of the chains because it conveyed “that we all have to develop ways to break these chains [as she had].” In this manner, she emphasized that when individuals took
responsibility for changing their conditions state institutions were obligated to support women in
the process.

She implied racism and prejudice were the work of uneducated individuals and should be
addressed by persecuting the perpetrators. She illustrated her commitment by describing a recent
case of an indigenous woman in Costa Rica who was turned away by her local clinic when she
suffered a migraine. At home the woman’s mother burned her on the face with a cigarette nine
times to “relieve the pressure.” When this didn’t work, she returned to the clinic where the doctor
recorded her case as “strange phenomena” given the appearance of burn marks on her forehead.
The director argued, instead, that the ultimate culprit was the healthcare system rather than what
the doctor labeled “backward culture.” She briefly noted that she had relentlessly pursued the
case. With that, she invited women to share their experiences.

The Network aimed to show how issues repeated themselves and were systematic, not
individual. Anita stood and recounted how she had almost died from poor medical attention. She
first explained she was a citizen with all her medical documents up to date. In spite of her history
of high blood pressure and heart disease, when she went to the clinic complaining of pain, the
doctor sat her on the floor to take her blood pressure although beds were available. The doctor
spoke on the phone the whole time and when finished curtly stated “you don’t have anything.
Go.” When she vomited as she exited, Anita emphasized, a clinic worker exclaimed
“disgusting!” Still after that they recognized her blood pressure was high. They gave her IVs and
sent her home. Still feeling sick the next day, she returned. The medical team identified the
problem was appendicitis. They rushed her to the hospital but it had already ruptured. The
doctors told her she survived miraculously. She had suffered two heart attacks on the operating
table. Had they performed the correct exams a day earlier, this wouldn’t have happened. She
concluded by describing the case of her daughter’s rape on the way home from school. Years later, she noted, the authorities hadn’t found anyone. The director replied briefly, “Thank you. Let’s talk afterwards.”

The representatives of social service institutions were quick to respond, accepting a role in institutional neglect but imploring migrants to understand there were justifications that should be heard. A social worker in her mid-thirties spoke. She began by expressing her regret these cases had occurred. She pointed out the institution was being restructured to improve the quality of services and that workers were receiving sensitization trainings. She identified communication as the root of the problem. She concluded her workmates “try to give good treatment and want to serve,” vehemently defending them as good people. However, she ignored the fact that she was using her own interactions with her workmates as her point of reference rather than the way they receive Costa Ricans whom they consciously or unconsciously assume do not belong. In this way, her comments demonstrated the danger of “remaining behind the desk,” to which Natalia’s earlier comments had referred. Next, a woman from child protective services spoke problematizing the way workers habitually followed rules rather than attend to actual needs. She noted that mistreatment of clients predated migrants’ presence. As a system, she argued, it would take the state years, if not centuries to change. Her comments, though critical, suggested creating access and pathways for women required a generational cultural shift. It came off as a way of chastising passionate responses, in lieu of hunkering down and “working” on culture. Both women balked at migrants’ suggestions or criticism of having being denied access. They made light of their multiple demands and the immediacy of their requests. Furthermore, they ignored the absence of spaces in which women migrants might voice their concerns to a receptive audience. There was a particular emphasis on the presentation of information in a specific
format, prohibiting emotion, dismissing complexity and avoiding discussion of the more grizzly realities of the issues at hand.

Natalia interjected with a final comment expressing frustration with the responses to Anita’s comments. She recognized the public employees had to respond to tremendous bureaucracy, but she also attempted to inspire a greater disposition to serve all service seekers well. She pointed out the contradictory discourse surrounding Nicaraguan presence in the country. “It’s alright when Nicaraguans come and take care of our children but when it comes to understanding the conditions they arrive in. That’s complicated [for us].” She emphasized the reality that at times people’s rights “are subject to whether the person attending them had a good breakfast.” She implored a new vision towards women was “fundamental.” She explained state employees were confused about whether regularized status is a precondition for obtaining insurance coverage and often sent migrants in circles. In other instances, employees intimidated immigrants, asking whether the immigrant had sufficient money to pay for the documents. “It’s an interrogation!” she exclaimed. The Network women laughed in agreement. She concluded by inserting a feminist critique into the discussion of services. She emphasized the need for universal insurance, referring to the need to ensure women directly and not use a patriarchal universalism extending coverage through husband or father. The latter, she pointed out, had deeper implications forcing women to stay in violent situations.

As Natalia trailed off, the director’s assistant pointed to the refreshments table and urged everyone to continue the conversations there. We moved slowly towards the tables. Anita tentatively followed the director, waiting to catch her eye and be signaled over to continue their conversation. Instead, someone brought the director a plate of food and she sat and ate with her assistants. Anita joined the rest of the Network women in line at the buffet and sat down with us.
All the while, Anita continued to glance over at the director, biding her time. But abruptly, the
director and her assistants stood up and disappeared quickly and quietly from the room. Anita
watched and decried this inadequacy, “she didn’t hear me,” she repeated the rest of the morning.
Network women nodded, resigned. Though encouraged to speak, they had not felt heard.

Spaces of government are also structured by limited parameters of discussion and
interactions. Moodie contends “in its more philosophical mode, neoliberalism recast governing
activities and non-political problems in need of technical solutions” (Moodie 2010: 43). This
mode emphasized the implementation of professionalized programs and policies.
Anthropologists Molly Doane characterizes these programs and policies as “brokered by the
salaried employees of privately funded, unelected organizations” (2012: 14; Paley 2001;
Murdock 2008; Sassen 2006). Network members confronted similar barriers to those Paley
describes in which community organizers confronted the challenge that scientific, but not in-situ
knowledge was deemed legitimate. The implication is, as Anthropologist Donna Murdock
argues, that those who produce knowledge about women are not the ones who experience
marginality. NGO hiring practices place value on those who “study not experience” conditions
(2008:26-7). Likewise, government representatives typically preferred to speak with NGO
personnel who could present information and research in what they deemed to be an objective
manner. When those who experienced marginality spoke, their presentation of cases was treated
as excessively complex and time-consuming. Further, spaces of discussion and knowledge
production were organized and planned by NGO personnel. Participatory methodologies often
utilized the “add women and stir” model of participatory decision-making, which did not
produce equal input. The “integration” mode of immigration law carried through to this event
where the stated goals were to listen to migrant experience with the goal of improving the
delivery of justice. But in practice, it was a space for government representatives to present themselves as open to the immigrant cause without laying the groundwork for further communication, dialogue nor resolution for existing cases of injustice.

At the same time, this event demonstrated Network women’s efforts to build legitimacy. The Center laid the groundwork for women to be able to enter and enact various roles in such cases. It drew legitimacy from its association with the University while its personnel were considered to provide essential perspectives on any discussion of immigration. As an organization founded on the principle of popular education, the Center also developed women’s confidence in local forms of knowledge production. As its ‘vertical’ network developed, members of the Network were increasingly able to insert themselves into public and formal political spaces to present this knowledge. This legacy, while ignored in many spaces, was clearly recognized within the Center, but also in many academic, research and NGO circles in Costa Rica.

F. A Game for Whom? Costa Rican Public Institutions and Sensitization Projects

I use the example of the evaluation of a “sensitization” initiative, aimed at bolstering immigrants’ ability to access justice, to point out the notions of “appropriate behavior” and the limited scope of what can be discussed in such spaces when there are actors present who are capable of challenging structure. We were meeting to evaluate the “routes to integration” initiative, designed by a division of the Ministry of Migration and Foreign affairs, the Directorate on Integration and Human Development (DIHD). The 2009 immigration law created a provision to “work with the population.” DIHD had responded by initiating a series of formal

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126 Notably, funds for this program were provided by the “Immigrant Social Fund,” which consisted of a small percentage of any immigrants’ fees for immigration transactions. The fund was advertised as being available to immigrant groups that proposed integration projects.
and informal courses and workshops to educate the population about immigrants. The initiative consisted of an informational packet, what they referred to as a “briefcases” that would be distributed in the near future to community development boards, a wide range of institutions and to key non-governmental organizations. The briefcase, designed by the staff of DIHD, would contain a board game and a “toolkit” with information and resources for “accessing justice” that community leaders, literate or not, could follow. The “toolkit,” in reality a guide, attempted to bridge the severe gap in the flow of information between migracion, the various state service providers and the immigrant and refugee population. The materials would be presented at informational fairs and community meetings around the country. They were created to serve as educational materials for everyone ranging from public officials to migrants who were illiterate. The guide would provide information about the services available, where to access them and the documentation required to access them. The board game would help strengthen familiarity with migrants’ access to services.

Those present approached the evaluation of the briefcase with different purposes. The room was filled with representatives of different NGOs: international refugee services, church organizations and UN initiatives supporting immigrants and refugees. NGO personnel, who routinely interfaced with employees at different state institutions, stated they were evaluating the materials relative to their ability to rectify many employees’ ignorance of changing requirements for attention and services, as well as their roles in providing prerequisites for regularization. Despite their constant interaction with the Center and the Network, they always projected a certain coolness towards them and other migrants who worked in this sector. Also in attendance were prominent members of the immigrant community and representatives from the immigrant community organizations. They were evaluating the materials’ legibility and applicability for
members of the broader immigrant community. Though not contradictory, this set up conflicting objectives. NGO personnel were focused on ensuring the steps listed could be understood by one public, while immigrant community members were attempting to ensure the guides—and the related policies—would provide relevant information to the broadest swath of the immigrant community.

The interest of the DIDH staff also differed from that of the other groups. The director, Karen, emphasized in her introduction that the guides had gone through several divisions and that DIDH was reluctant to make many more changes. Karen was forthright in conveying their expectation that this would be the final draft and that it would require only minor modifications. She explained the day would be divided into two tasks. Initially, small groups would review each section of the guide for comprehension, clarity and accuracy. Then we would reconvene, present the sections by group, and discuss our critiques. In the afternoon, we would divide into groups to play the game to assess its potential to clarify and familiarize people with the requisites and procedures for accessing justice for migrants.

Lila immediately reacted, “a game?” she queried. “You are going to make people’s access to justice into a game?” She looked at Amanda and me. We shrugged and nodded along with her. In the meantime, attendees were dividing into groups, to review the different sections of the guidebook. Lila looked around as this was occurring and began to voice her objections with everyone present. “How,” she queried loudly, “could they consider incorporating issues such as domestic abuse into a game? How would women, who have experienced violence, react to that?” Then, she made fun of herself: “I just can’t ever keep my mouth shut nor my thoughts to myself.” Despite her chuckle, a woman at the back, who was clearly vested in the valuation of the project, called out “please don’t be negative right away.” Lila grimaced with the scolding. In
reality, the game seemed inappropriate for educating a population under the duress of lack of access to justice. Further, board games were a common format used by UN offices and other NGOs. They were used to portray the challenges of migrant lives, in addition to documentaries about migration. The UN unit on refugee services had been handing out a board game styled after the game “Life”, complete with cards pronouncing, “border agent rejects your papers. Go back two spaces.” This style of games treated migrant justice as an issue of a series of steps and movements back and forward. It ignored the structures that reduced the proclivity of agents of the state to grant women access to justice. Moreover, it ignored the anguish and anxiety such instances of exclusion produced and the way these emotions interfered in migrant women’s ability to respond cogently using the language of rights or in any other manner service providers would deem rational.

In an effort to prove her point, Lila immediately requested that she, Amanda and I form a group, rather than intermix with staff from other organizations, to critique a section that would most benefit from the migrant perspective that the Center prided itself on providing. She then reserved the domestic violence section for us. Her intentions clearly reflected her sense that no one else would analyze it adequately, since they lacked a comparable wealth of experience with the ways domestic violence unfolded for migrant women. Once handed our copy, we tore through the domestic abuse section. The books were shiny, bound like a thick children’s book. Each issue migrants faced was illustrated by a series of clip art images and broken down into steps. Each image was assigned its own bright color: red, green, blue, orange or purple. The entire section was problematic, starting with the fact it was directed at a highly illiterate population. The graphics seemed to have been selected without sufficient sensitivity. For example, Lila highlighted that the image selected to represent physical abuse was a red boxing
glove. She felt it made light of a victim’s experience. Further, the sections were repetitive, and the steps were unclear. Even the instructions for using the guide were complex. Being that state institutions created the guide, the “routes” wove through state institutions, such as the police and INAMU, which were well known to provide services that proved insufficient in enabling migrants to remove themselves from threatening situations.

The group discussion that followed was tense, marked by migrants’ attempts to expand the instructions to pertain to undocumented migrants, while NGO and government employees felt it was inappropriate to discuss these unofficial populations and “unsanctioned” tactics to ensure access. Most groups presented minor critiques of the sections they reviewed. But the immigrants present challenged them. When an issue of whether and what documents should be requested when seeking services, Xochitl pointed out 50,000 migrants did not hold Nicaraguan, let alone Costa Rican, documents. Later, Lila was very clear in emphasizing the communities would not understand the contents, neither the images nor the non-verbal instructions. She repeated the phrase “when I take this to my communities” to critique the work and establish her authority in these circumstances. She also pointed out the problem of irregularity in the implementation of policies. While this was not a problem with the book per se, she demonstrated that no matter how familiar migrants became with the established procedures outlined in the book, they would still be hindered from accessing rights.

Karen attempted to defend some sections that didn’t mention how undocumented immigrants should handle things. She argued the government couldn’t actively condone something like that. She laughed briefly, giving the sense that she felt the immigrants present were asking too much. She was supported by nods of agreement throughout the room by NGO personnel. Together, inferred that immigrants should be thankful for the minimal
accommodations the project conceded. The growing tension in the room was underscored by an awkward pause any time an immigrant raised his or her hand to speak.

During the second half of the activity they divided Lila, Amanda, Monica and me up to form groups with representatives from other organizations. I was grouped with workers from two different NGOs who clearly knew each other well. Two came from an organization ensuring education for refugees and a third woman, Carla, from a church-led immigrant labor rights organization. They clearly mistook me for one of them and spoke their opinions about those in attendance, in front of me. Mostly, I listened to their conversation as they discussed the internal rivalries of their organizations. Then the conversation shifted towards the earlier discussion of the guide’s contents. Referring to Xochitl’s comment, they noted “if you don’t have documents, that’s your government’s problem, not ours.” The conversation then turned to Lila’s interventions. Carla stated: “We trained Lila and Monica in 2009, but they still lack preparation: they don’t understand what these spaces are for.” I remained quiet. Clearly, she felt her perspective was normal enough for them to make me privy to these comments. Carla continued, “These are spaces to critique the material not to denounce problems.” The comments first pointed to their normative views of what the work of supporting immigrants should entail. But further, their evaluation of Lila and Monica’s “development” pointed directly at their paternalistic views of them. Moreover, their assertions were erroneous, in no small part, because they referred to women who had begun organizing with the Nicaraguan Revolution before these NGO personnel had been born.

NGO personnel expressed a variant of paternalism when speaking about the migrant population. On the one hand, as college-educated Costa Rican women, with degrees in social sciences or human development areas, they were quick to criticize the ignorance of other Costa
Ricans staffing state agencies and their ignorance of laws. On the other hand, they viewed the initiatives of migration as sufficient, as exhibited in their commentary throughout the day. Their perspectives seemed based in a nationalist framework, in that immigrants in Costa Rica deserved information so long as they followed the rules or fit the victim framework, *par excellence*. They seemed unwilling to consider migrants’ expressions of frustration or displeasure might be warranted, even rational responses to exclusion. They appeared unmoved by critical perspectives addressing the transnational arrangements and interdependence of Costa Rica, the U.S., the UN, Nicaragua and Colombia. Moreover, they did not see these as “intersectional” spaces or sites to address the transnational arrangements, but instead sites to accept the work in front of them.

These women dutifully created initiatives for migrants. I observed many on the weekends at different informational fairs and workshops throughout the year. However, they weren’t activists but instead paid advocates, brokers for immigrants who did not challenge the socio-political and legal structures of belonging in Costa Rica.

While Amanda drove us back across town in her car, I asked after Lila and Monica’s relationships with these organizations and women. “Why do they speak of you in this manner?” I asked, softening but relaying the comments uttered. “You see Laura, they want to speak for us.” they told me. “They want to make us invisible.” By speaking up and raising questions considered inappropriate within these settings, Network women responded to the way dominant values influenced the meaning assigned to different forms of participation within these spaces. Network women were viewed as outsiders based on their lack of university-level credentials, their ascribed identity as immigrants, their lack of affiliation with professional organizations and their inconformity with the norms. They were considered to be authorities with regard to their personal stories but not in the broader analytical tasks. On this basis, NGO and government
workers dismissed Network women’s attempts to expand the parameters of the conversation. For example, Lila critiqued the images based on her direct experience with victims of domestic violence, feeling it trivialized victims’ experience. Her commentary was not dismissed because it was inaccurate. Instead, the question was dismissed because she broke with the parameters of the conversation, which focused on the clarity of the image. She was not conceded the authority to speak as a woman who was considered to lack preparation, a reference to both her perceived lay status and her national identity. Her commentary and the reaction to it responded to the social hierarchy operating within the space itself and at that particular scale. In this way, the space and scale reflect the dominant patriarchal culture that is inflected by racialized systems of belonging and neoliberal exaltation of professional expertise.

G. The Politics of Democratic Participation
In the wake of political-economic restructuring, experts established new parameters of participation. Women, among other marginalized groups, were encouraged to participate in political, social and economic life by voting, raising self-sufficient citizens, and providing for the subsistence needs of their families. When invited to participate in discussions of policy formulation, “marginalized’ groups often found they were only included in ways that “reinforce[d] existing power arrangements.” Thus, democratic openings were not indicative of increased substantive participation (Alvarez 1990: 4, 20). Many encountered limitations to the discussions as their participation was externally circumscribed. They were welcomed to contribute anecdotal rather than analytical commentary.

These modes of insertion illustrate the narrowing terms of political participation scholars identify as a neoliberal form of multiculturalism (Hale 2002). As demonstrated in many ethnographies, the state abandoned previous infra-structural commitments in favor of an
exclusive focus on social control (Gill 2000; Doane 2012). Without the investment in infrastructure nor initiatives, legal incorporation of women’s demands (e.g. labor laws, maternity benefits) remained on the books but were not thoroughly implemented bringing little change (Alvarez 1990:20). Such laws also assumed women’s access to formal work, thus they did not assist women with attention to their class position or address the tendency towards the informalization of labor.

In Latin America, the neoliberal era has also been marked by a shift in participation, via the incorporation of previously unincorporated groups into the political spectrum, whether by granting citizenship to indigenous groups or by including the “input” of those policies purport to support, permitting governments to make claims about advances in representation and democracy (Collier and 1998; Warren and Jackson 1998; Postero 2007; Paley 2001; Alvarez 1999). While few scholars identify the motivation for incorporation, they are able to discuss the outcomes, transferring decisions about community organization and resources from communities’ boards to government boards (Collier 1998; Paley 2001). Here, the criteria for insertion limit the parameters of participation, both the scope of what can be addressed and the perspectives that inform decision-making (Paley 2001; Alvarez 1990; Postero 2007). Policy-making is divided into the “collection” of data and the scientific analysis of this data. Often, those affected by policy are limited to acting as objects of data collection.

Insofar as this project also addresses organizing in this period, the efforts of anthropologists towards showing women confront a technocratic political terrain marked by social scientists where decisions are made based on data produced about an object of study (Paley 2001). In the attempt to insert the perspectives of these “objects” of study within the parameters of neoliberal participation, NGOs often bifurcate between a group of paid
professional administrators capable of articulating with policy-making spaces by their “certified” training in scientific practices, and the marginalized groups they represent, who increasingly receive NGO services, expelled from their position as subjects of change. Further, as spaces formerly “occupied” by the state give way to non-governmental organizations, there is a shift towards the professionalization of representation, blurring the lines between ideas of “state” and “civil-society” (Murdock 2008; Edelman 2001; Paley 2001; Harvey 2005). This move, in turn, reinforces the professionalization of political spaces (Paley 2001; Murdock 2008). Both state representatives and NGOs take part in the production of neoliberal political actors and thereby the reproduction of the increasing elitism of democracy (Doane 2012; Collier 1994; Warren and Jackson 1998; Postero 2008; Murdock 2008; Paley 2001).

Other ethnographers have explored who is able to participate in formal political communities, particularly, the interstices where governments provide pathways to participation. Collier (1998), Paley (2001), Murdock (2008) and Postero (2007) describe specific ways preparation for participation takes place, in most instances, with communities whose forms of participation draw on distinct socio-political-economic relationships. Ultimately, they argue, members of these communities who are indeed able to take a seat at the formal political table are those who engage in practices stemming from, what Murdock refers to as, “elite policy arenas” (2008: 33) As states have dealt with the increasing volume of the voice of indigenous social movements, their actions, whether consent-generating or coercive, have become increasingly transparent. Leaders selected by state officials are often regarded as unrepresentative of indigenous interests (Warren 1998, Collier 1998, Jackson 1998). Government officials do permit indigenous communities to select their leaders, at times. However, literature shows they are then politically coopted, experiencing rising mobility in return for un-contentious politics. In other
cases, they are rendered politically impotent through state structures themselves. Although the audibility of their voices may increase, their potential to affect change does not (Warren 1998; Collier 1998). As channels within the state are exhausted and the impossibility of immediate structural change becomes evident, the creation of parallel governing structures appear to be the most feasible recourse (Collier 1998; Warren 1998). More specifically, it is the clash between usos y costumbres with neoliberal forms of electoral democracy and notions of professionalism that produce new marginalities (Hale 2002).  

Under neoliberalism, there is an increasing emphasis on the knowledge produced by experts in academic and formal political contexts. University degrees confer legitimacy and demark the ability to participate. Meanwhile, firsthand experience is rarely considered a form of expertise in these settings. The knowledge produced employing “scientific” research methods are valued over locally produced knowledge. Finally, universal and imported models of “development” are preferred over local assessment of ways to analyze and address community issues. Participation is increasingly an elitist endeavor. Thus, just as under neoliberalism power is increasingly concentrated, in the executive and in formal politics, the power to determine how to promote well-being is taken out of the hands of those marginalized sectors, who these models purport to effect. The elitism of participation, decision-making and knowledge production allow those who benefit from the redirection of wealth from bottom to top economic quintiles but enables the production of polities, which largely benefit the sectors determining policies and less

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127 These forms of politics often tie indigenous ways of being to the past, whereas, indigenous feminisms emphasize not only the ability to engage through their cultures, but also to engage in a politics of their culture, moving “legitimacy” away from so-called authenticity or tradition (Blackwell 2007; Gargallo 2012; Hernandez Castillo 2006). They point out that movements can be inherently pluralist and reflective of the changing community context. Representation by those who leave the community and are trained in how to participate in other cultural contexts, and then held up (often from the outside) as representative of a particular group, may only grasp the strategic essentialisms, rather than the complex and changing movement context.
so, those who they target creating the ability to erect new mechanisms of accumulation by dispossession.

The professionalization of politics is treated as a critical issue because the exclusion of those marginalized from the process of formulating policies most often results in uneven access to rights and resources across gender, class, regional, racial, ethnic, and citizenship lines (Collins 2012; Murdock 2008; Postero 2007; Hartsock 2006; Stocker 2005; Paley 2001). But, as Moodie argues, “granting cultural rights while denying equality effectively shapes forms of resistance” (2010: 43). The tension that arises when women encounter limited forms of participation drives many to organize; the contradiction between the portrayal of participatory democracy and women’s real experiences presents “political openings” for counter-claims (Winegar 2012; Postero 2007; Mendez 2005; Alvarez 1990). Certainly, as Murdock shows, NGOs are not simply the “handmaidens of neoliberalism” but, instead, are filled with people attempting to navigate a complex terrain of participation amidst a crisis of funding for programs and declining socio-economic conditions of those participating (2008). Further, those affected find ways to produce “scientific” knowledge without the associated training, instead, learning to convert grounded expertise about their communities into quantifiable and categorical data (Paley 2001).

The stories I recount throughout this chapter point to the conflict over the purported designation of spaces. If, in these brief moments where immigration officials acknowledged the work still ahead in bridging the gaps in access to services for migrants, they still do not make room for migrant voices. Where could they speak? Should they have spoken in the large meetings, where speaker after speaker relayed the message that Costa Rica continued to be a world leader in human rights through its immigration initiatives? In the absence of such sites, women interjected issues where they can, in small openings that may not seem appropriate to
those involved in those initiatives. They attempted to create a new consciousness into activities that otherwise do little to resolve a broader structural gap. While the women attended many meetings, again to carve out and maintain the spaces they had opened, they were provided a platform. They were invited to consume the knowledge provided, but not to create knowledge. Most meetings were spaces where the supposed benevolence of Costa Rican integration initiatives was highlighted. There, the symptoms of structural inequality, disjuncture between services and hindrance to access were tidily addressed through educational initiatives. For example, NGO and government workers created a certificate in immigration and social justice studies or held an informational neighborhood fair to resolve gaps in the flow of information. So, while the NGO personnel were not incorrect in their assertion that these were not spaces “suited” to resolving such issues, they did not offer a solution to migrants’ implicit question: where are the spaces? The NGO personnel critiqued migrants’ inability to read the situation, the space, and the environment and then act appropriately. They assumed it was migrants’ ignorance that guided their seeming incapacity to make the distinction. But the issue was not that Lila, Monica and others did not understand these spaces. First, they were cognizant NGO personnel saw these spaces from this perspective. More importantly, they applied a critical lens to each of these spaces, demonstrating they represented another scale at which the issues they face in Costa Rica should be addressed, but regularly proved inadequate in doing so. They criticized the lens through which all of these spaces were designed, performing transgressions in each to introduce information and ideas that expanded discussions taking place therein. They did not expect their interventions to prompt immediate resolutions. They were vocal about their perception that the activities in these spaces did not resolve larger issues. Namely, the limited parameters stymied efforts towards realizing a broader practice of equality.
From the perspective of immigrant women, these spaces were constructed along the lines of a national discussion, whether through disputes over the shifting role between state and citizens or, insofar as they took place within government institutions, in relation to national policies. Although migrant women were “invited to the table,” they were rarely invited to speak openly about the intersecting experiences of exclusion throughout their lives. In this way, these discussions precluded a vision of transnational interdependence. Nor did they move the discussion beyond the frame of citizens’ rights. Instead, they invited women to engage as women, as subjects of rights assuming documented, or “regularized,” status. This practice implicitly defined “deservedness” through a statist individualist framework, distinct from the transnational and universalist stance Network members were adopting. Moreover, Network women protested the expectation they would celebrate the limited gains and concessions resulting from such activities. When they sensed they were being forced into this narrow frame, their fundamental rejection produced reactions that were as much physical and emotional as they were cognitive, which their outbursts suggested. Accordingly in these spaces, women, organized with the Network, engaged in the politics of participation by rendering visible how the operative unidimensional parameters of discussion in these spaces reproduced exclusion. Network women’s interventions provided a counterpoint to the way “integration” was operationalized. The Network’s efforts show how hegemonic processes are mapped onto social interactions at large, where the adherence to dominant codes clashed with women’s purposeful embodiment and performance of alternative interpretations.
X CONCLUSION: SCALES OF VIOLENCE AND ERASURE

Informed just a few minutes earlier that the director of the women’s institute would be presenting a speech at a women’s rights march, Lila located a piece of poster board and scribbled the message she thought the director most needed to hear, “women migrants exist.” The response of Network women to their effective invisibility across scales and borders provides a lens on dispossession, migration, and social movements in the neoliberal era. Lila’s response, as well as the bulk of Network activities, pointedly regard challenges related to violence, legal status, social rights, exploitation and participation as issues subsumed under their concern with social hierarchy in Nicaragua and Costa Rica. More specifically, these social hierarchies position women as inherently suffering subjects, justifying their treatment as sites of extraction of social, economic and political wealth. They were supposed to provide care, participate economically and generate wealth. They were expected to provide their uncritical support for political projects. However, even strict adherence to these expectations was rarely met with reciprocity, namely some form of reinforcing women’s sense of belonging. In this way, it became clear transnational interdependence between the two countries built on these hierarchies. Network women challenged these arrangements by identifying their underpinnings, in patriarchal and nationalist thought, and their manifestations at each scale. They point to a burgeoning trend of movements engaging with the logic and codes that emerged in the neoliberal era and their roles in producing practices that redirect wealth to the top. Their efforts targeted the manifestations of dominant culture that generate consent around processes that dispossessed and enabled dispossession.

The experiences members of the Network demonstrated violence compounded throughout their lives. More importantly, these forms of violence nested together, each exacerbating the others. The inattention of police and healthcare providers to migrant women’s
experiences of domestic violence exposed them to further violence. It left them without resources that could have aided significantly in stopping the violence and treating their physical and emotional wounds. In this case, institutional violence exacerbated interpersonal violence. Moreover, as women traversed these scales, their experiences underwent a process of erasure and their suffering remained invisible. Erasure generally did not occur outright, but instead through retrenchment in dominant paradigms of masculinity as well as new ostensibly inclusive ways of being. The practices that excluded women and caused them to suffer, also reproduced gender, class, racial and national hierarchies. Anthropologists have described similarly subtle processes of erasure through the lenses of exclusionary actions directed at Latino immigrant communities in the United States (Hill 2009) as well as black, indigenous communities throughout Latin America (Briggs 2004; Postero 2007) and women in Latin America (Alvarez 1999; Murdock 2008). This dissertation builds on this discussion by showing both violence and its erasure to be intertwined forms of dispossession. Furthermore, it provides a lens on the way patriarchy undergirds national and global political economy. In effect, it recognizes national policies in both countries, as well as arrangements between the two, are implicated in perpetuating violence, migration and erasure.

A. Erasure and Opportunity

In the final months of my fieldwork, Leticia introduced a new framework to Network women, which they could draw on to analyze their communities. Rather than simply ask after the challenges they faced, she began asking them to identify *nudos* (knots) they experienced in their lives. She described *nudos* as phenomena that were multi-faceted, simultaneously presenting challenges and opportunities. Among other things, a *nudo* could be a dominant element of culture, a social pattern or an everyday event. For example, the integration model of immigration
policy could be viewed as a *nudo* by using inclusionary language while maintaining exclusionary structures. The Network could exploit this disjunction by pointing out this contradiction and enacting participation on their own terms. The practice of Network itself was a *nudo*. It was the result of self-reflective practices that effected transformation, but also revealed new obstacles. Network women were learning to analyze the potential of any circumstance to simultaneously oppress, exclude, limit, challenge, support or enable them.

As I reflected on the trajectories of women’s lives, I realized the idea of *nudos* proved an apt metaphor for the exclusion and violence they faced without committing the error of framing women as victims. Instead, it positioned them as agentive individuals who recognized the complexity inherent in their decisions and actions. It wove together their journeys experiencing the Revolution, leaving situations of violence and poverty, migrating, living in Costa Rica, forming a support network, and expanding as a public and political movement. It encapsulated their nostalgia for life in Nicaragua, their hope for the future in Costa Rica and their trepidation with regard to the challenges each presented. Finally, I found that *nudo* captured the way deep exclusion galvanized their organizing. In reference to the oppositional movements that have emerged during the neoliberal turn, Nancy Postero points out “neoliberalism’s effects are classified as negative or positive without examining the complexity of how subjects engage with it” (Postero 2007: 17). These effects constitute a *nudo* galvanizing migrant women’s organizing. Women’s assertion, “we are not just women to be pitied,” captured their efforts to peel back the layers of dispossession, revealing the systems of thinking responsible for the erasure of women’s suffering. Moreover, it demonstrates that power is productive, generating reactions and actions.

B. **Violence and Dispossession:**
Concurrent with a wealth of intellectual movements advocating for the incorporation of historically marginalized communities in the U.S. and Europe, there had been a significant rise in
migration between countries of Latin America over the past decades. In some ways, the notoriety of the deep-seated racism behind the former had obscured the acute and growing social and economic division structuring the latter. However, they require our attention because they build on the same structures and have pernicious effects. Historically marginalized communities were a part of capitalist development beginning in its earlier stages and continuing to the contemporary phase of late capitalism. Economic and political inequalities were perpetuated by ideas of cultural difference. Both the nexus of economic and political equality in the neoliberal era and historic perceptions of difference perpetuate contemporary migration between countries of Latin America, including Guatemala and Mexico, Nicaragua and Costa Rica, and Bolivia and Argentina or Brazil.

Generally these result from differentiated forms of restructuring in the neoliberal era, whether the contraction or expansion of productive sectors (Hujo 2012). In this sense, neoliberal restructuring produces a labor force holding tenuous legal status and lacking cultural inclusion, illustrating how market-led democracy precludes universal extension of democratic rights (Motta et al 2011). In neoliberal logic, the market and democracy are synonymous (Paley 2001; Keating 2004). Yet, organized by comparative advantage, markets take the most impoverished people, often women, out of their nation-states, the framework within which citizen rights are constituted (Keating et al 2010; Hartsock 2006). The exclusion of migrants and families from democratic processes illustrates the actual logic of the market, showing how it erodes democratic participation. However, difference in the market is also built on perceptions of difference and deservedness generated by cultural systems.

This relationship was clearly demonstrated in Network women’s experiences. Although violence itself forced women out of their homes, the normativity of violence, including women’s
tacit consent to it, equally influenced women’s departure and situation abroad. Thus, the experiences of Network women showed the advancement of dispossession through the production of consent, as much as coercion. Raymond William’s concept of structures of feeling assists in understanding how violence is normalized at each scale. Moreover, women’s ways of seeing were also products of the cultures of *mando* and *pura vida*. Women did not lack a sense of efficacy so much as they experienced these forms of exclusion as natural. This interaction between the violence they experienced and their regard for themselves as undeserving obscured alternatives. *Mando* denied, or stripped, women of any sense of security, community or dignity at home. Still, women did not simply conform themselves to this violence. They instead attempted to remove themselves from the violence. Abroad, *pura vida* stripped them of any sense of deservedness. Thus, the research revealed how these broader understandings of national culture also informed values and practices in relation to different institutions or, more specifically, different scales. Each of these, *mando and pura vida*, can be analyzed as manifestations of patriarchy and neoliberalism or, better said, the political economy and the body politic.

The transnational interdependence between Nicaragua and Costa Rica also relied on the uneven development and the concomitant perceptions among countries in the region. It is the view of Costa Rica as the principle destination for Nicaraguans that channels sufficient migrants to the country to fill the workforce. Furthermore, this migration relies not only on the knowledge of available work, but also the perception that Costa Rica offers an exception to the everyday experience of violence in the Central American region. As women’s stories demonstrate, women expected to recuse themselves from the violence of war, of domestic abuse, of poverty, of declining participation and of eroded access to state programs. The perceived access to rights in Costa Rica encompassed protection from each of these forms of violence. In contrast, through
the lens of Costa Rican exceptionalism Nicaraguan women embodied these forms of violence. The presence of their bodies was perceived to threaten the Costa Rican institutions with which they engaged: household, public services, civil society and political spaces. The many ways of consciously or unconsciously responding to this perceived threat resulted in the systematic exclusion of Nicaraguan women at each scale, through a variety of practices. In this way, Nicaraguan women were treated as exceptions to the Costa Rican body politic and, therefore, excluded from participation in Costa Rican universalism. In this way, the notion of an exceptional country both attracted and marginalizes exceptional bodies. *Mando* and *pura vida* produced structures of feeling in accordance with the function and perception of different institutions across scales. The ways of seeing produced within each normalized women’s exclusion and suffering at each scale. In this way, the transnational assemblage that emerged through the neoliberal era relied on the experience of violence and its erasure.

Furthermore, the dissertation demonstrates how neoliberal restructuring intensified the violence of social exclusion, through the decline in employment and services. It aggravated the effects of interpersonal violence and political marginality. The erasure of violence acted as one form of dispossession, the contraction of the state and social rights acted as another. Together, they pushed women out of their communities, networks and places of origin. They dispossessed women from the wealth of their labor and pushed them into the exterior. These forms of violence across scales played a significant role in their decision to leave. Women’s resilience might have been sufficient in the face of a singular form of violence. They might have relied on community and family networks to resolve poverty. They might have relied on government institutions to resolve interpersonal violence. But instead, facing violence at different scales, they were forced abroad. In turn, abroad women were stripped of the familiarity, resources and networks they had
cultivated at home. Clearly, the way that violence of different scales nest together throughout women’s lives, constitutes a prime mode of effective dispossession.

More broadly, the dissertation suggests South-South migration responds to the regional uneven development brought about by neoliberal restructuring. Yet this assemblage is not simply a product of the neoliberal era. Instead, it builds on past configurations, alliances, and interregional relationships. In the case of Costa Rica and Nicaragua, it exacerbates the migration patterns, but also the conflicts between the two countries. It also draws on the relationship of the two countries with the United States. The ability to garner support for the plight of Nicaraguan migrants is complicated by the confidence invested in Costa Rica and the mistrust in Nicaragua. Each of these is indicative of each country’s position in the international milieu. The position of Central America and the relationships between its different countries echoes worldwide. It demonstrates the need for conversation with regions of Southeast Asia, such as Indonesia and Malaysia or Sri Lanka and United Arab Emirates.

C. Grounded Experience and Organizing

Democratic openings throughout Latin America have foregrounded state projects towards enfranchisement and extension of citizenship to those residing within states who have been considered “outsiders” to the nation-state and excluded from democratic rights. These forms of incorporation are described following a neoliberal logic of multiculturalism (Hale 2002). In many cases, such excluded groups clamored for their inclusion, often exploiting the slippage between discourses of a new democracy and elitist democratic practice, among them indigenous, women, afro-descendants and LGBTQ.128 The Network firmly partook in the push to overcome

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democratic dispossession as they promoted participatory democracy and attempt to expand
democratic practice beyond the framework of citizen rights.

The idea of nudo can also be applied to the broader global political moment in which the
work of the Network takes place. Uprisings around the globe, among them “Occupy
Movements” and the “Arab Spring,” instigated discussions around the world concerning the
meaning and practice of democracy (Nugent 2012; Dole 2012; Motta et al 2011). These
movements have been the focus of recent ethnographic work exploring the “crisis of
representative democracy” (Nugent 2012). As revolution (Hafez 2012; Lancaster 1992),
democratization (Paley 2001) and the extension of citizenship to historically excluded groups
(Postero 2007; Collier 1998) have failed to offer meaningful decision-making to the majority,
they have revealed new layers of dispossession and have been the impetus for setting new social
movement agendas. The struggle over declining rights and resources has laid the groundwork for
struggle over the meaning of democratic participation as states claim the reallocation of
resources is made in the context of representative democracy (Motta et al 2011).

The consolidation of the Network and its growing insertion into broader movements took
place in the midst of a different type of democratic opening. In Costa Rica, a broader swath of
civil society had begun to sense the impact of neoliberal reforms and become weary of
increasingly blatant “iron fist” policies of state security in the midst of growing poverty and
declining services. At the same time, on a less-public stage, the implementation of a 2010
immigration law opened new spaces of discussion and insertion for migrant organizations, most
prominently the Center and the Network. This opening rapidly showed the limitations of state
institutions to respond to this shifting terrain of consensus surrounding migration and the
growing efforts framing migration through a human rights perspective. Finally, the growth of
projects focused on gender-rights and gender-based violence prevention provided new spaces of engagement with national and international communities.

A nudo could aptly describe the situation produced by violence at each scale. Significantly, these situations unfolded as women navigated the different situations, whether seeking ways to resist violent situations or ways to endure them. Through migration and women’s particular experiences abroad, the contradictions of their marginality became apparent. Dispersed throughout Nicaragua and enmeshed in the commonsense understandings of how they fit into the world around them, most seemed to find ways to survive the circumstances they encountered. However, once abroad, their newfound proximity to others who both shared their experiences and lacked a secure sense of how things “should be” brought women to question their circumstances together. Slowly and gradually, they began to explore the gender, racial and national hierarchies operating throughout their lives. Women recognized their exclusion from rights, participation and well-being took place in a transnational realm. They gradually came to question the naturalization of their preclusion from rights at each of these scales.

Their responses vacillated between resilience and resistance. Some responses, such as their work in the home, offered the potential for an oppositional movement. In the moment, it provided an alternative. They did not question gender binaries entirely nor did they entirely denaturalize gender interests. Still, they supported women’s exploration of new gendered ways of being. It is clear women were continually questioning the expectations of the gendered ways of living their lives. On the other hand, while they regarded their marginality in Costa Rica as undeserved, most members did not seem to possess the base of knowledge to understand the larger economic structures. For example, while they readily retained and recalled new ideas about gender in the policy meetings they attended, they rarely recalled discussions of economy
and labor we had sat through, together. The Network’s migrant feminism took advantage of any of these instances of violence or erasure as an opportunity to learn about the logic and practices of *mando* and *pura vida* and to consider ways to disrupt and replace them. In their place, they proposed alternatives, which they felt enacted cross-cultural feminist principles. The movement’s emphatic pluralism in its organizing logic, analytical frames and public performances demonstrated that embeddedness in transnational social fields, through migration or recognized global marginality, promulgated the beginnings of a potentially global systemic critiques.

D. Hegemony and Dissent

Network women’s activities show one implication of South-South migration is the voices originating in new marginal immigrant sectors join a chorus contesting the elitism of democracy. In Latin America, these movements highlight, in particular, the unique constructions of race, space and nation that condition the relationships of different countries to each other, but also the relationships between ethnically and regionally distinct groups within state borders. It shows the way established sites of human interactions are not static institutions but active social scenes where the larger structure is negotiated through struggle over the dominant values, meanings and practices in that particular space and at that particular scale. Anthropologist Ellen Moodie saw “crime stories [were] technologies for the transformation of structures of feeling in El Salvador” (Moodie 2010: 114). For Nancy Postero, NGO courses about citizenship for “’new’ indigenous citizens of Bolivia” transformed structures of feeling about participation in Bolivia (Postero 2007: 218). In the same vein, I position the Network as a site where new meanings met with practice to produce emergent structures of feeling about differences structuring relationships within and between each country. More specifically, the work of the Network speaks to the ways residual critical consciousness re-emerges in new arenas shaping the organizing logic, analytical
framework and agenda. The feminist politics of the Network demonstrate the slippage between dominant narratives of past movements and the lived experience of movements in practice.

Anthropologists such as Charles Briggs (2004) demonstrate that acts of violence manifesting structure undergo a process of erasure, insofar as they are naturalized. The ways inequality and suffering are naturalized have become focus of a wide range of prominent contemporary movements ranging from “Black lives matter” activism to indigenous, queer and Afro-Latinx feminisms. These groups challenge the erasure of their suffering as well as their intrinsic value. They employ novel strategies of creating public spectacles, intended to shock people into rethinking the connection of their acts to the social order. They also introduce new perspectives into everyday conversation and humor. These mundane strategies aim to challenge everyday ways of seeing. Ultimately, they implement multi-scalar strategies, staging actions in the sites where the social order is reproduced.

Network women’s experiences and efforts demonstrate, no matter how pervasive *mando* and *pura vida* may be, they are not totalizing. Instead, they are replete with residual, emergent and alternative elements that produce a range of situationally contingent responses. What the dissertation clearly reveals is the way in which women came to organize and the gradual development of a movement and strategies grounded in their own experience. Women are confident that their strategies have the potential to transform the gendered hierarchies in the culture around them, at the very least, for future generations. Their organizing focused on disrupting the terms of consent and, furthermore, shed light on the processes and struggles that had been erased. Most importantly, women sought to understand and disrupt the thought processes perpetuating consent towards gender inequality implicated in the larger processes of global economic restructuring.
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—  
2002 Our Weak Civil Society has Been Weakened Further. Revista Envío (250).

Montoya, Rosario  

Moodie, Ellen  


Murdock, Donna F. 2008 When women have wings: feminism and development in Medellín, Colombia. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press


Nowrasteh, Alex

Nugent, David

Nugent, David

Nygren, Anja

Olujic, Maria

Ong, Aihwa

—

—

Paley, Julia

Palmer, Steve

Palmer, Steve
Parreñas, Rhacel Salazar  

Parsons, Nia  

Perez, Aleman, Paola  

Perla Jr, Hector  

Pessar, Patricia  

Pessar, Patricia R and Sarah J. Mahler  

Pons Cortes, Gabriel  

Poole, Deborah  

Population Council, (No Author)  

Poster, Nancy Grey  

Pribiliský, Jason  
Quesada, James  

Radcliffe, Sarah A., and Sallie Westwood  

Ramírez Caro, Jorge  

Randall, Margaret  

———  

Ray, Raka, and Seemin Qayum  
2009 Cultures of servitude: modernity, domesticity, and class in India. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press.

Red, de Mujeres Nicaraguenses  

Roberts, Bryan R and Alejandro Portes  

Robinson, William I.  

Rocha, Jose Luis  

Romero, Mary, Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, and Vilma Ortiz  

Rosaldo, Renalto  
Roseberry, William

—

—

Roseberry, William, Lowell Gudmundson, and Mario Samper K

Ruchwarger, Gary

—

Saad-Filho, Alfredo, and Deborah Johnston

Safa, Helen I

Safa, Helen I and Peggy Antrobus

Sagot, Monserrat

Salzinger, Leslie


Sandoval García, Carlos


2004a Are We Costa Ricans Exceptional? Revista Envio 270.


Sandoval Garcia, Carlos, Monica Brenes Montoya, and Laura Paniagua

Sassen, Saskia

Sassen-Koob, Saskia  

Schepers-Hughes, Nancy, and Philippe I. Bourgois  

Schiller, Nina Glick, Linda G. Basch, and Cristina Szanton Blanc  

Scott, James C.  

—  
1998 Seeing like a state: how certain schemes to improve the human condition have failed. New Haven [Conn.]: Yale University Press.

Segura, Denise A., and Patricia Zavella  

Sepúlveda-Pulvirenti, Emma  
1996 We, Chile: personal testimonies of the Chilean arpilleristas. Falls Church: Azul Editions.

Sharman, Russel Leigh  

—  

Sheriff, Robin E.  
2001 Dreaming equality: color, race, and racism in urban Brazil. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.

Silber, Irina Carlota  

Silva, Eduardo  
Smith, Carol A

Speed, Shannon

—

Speed, Shannon, Rosalva Aída Hernández Castillo, and Lynn Stephen

Staeheli, Lynn

Stasiulis, Daiva K., and Abigail B. Bakan

Stephen, Lynn

—

—

Stevenson, Linda S

Stocker, Karen
Tessler, Laura  
2006 Now There is No Treatment for Anyone: Health Care Seeking in Neoliberal Nicaragua. Tuscon: University of Arizona.

Tilly, Charles  

Tsing, Anna  

Uzwiak, Beth  

Vincent, Susan  

Wade, Peter  

—  

Walker, Thomas W.  

Warren, Kay B., and Jean E. Jackson  

Weinstein, Liza, and Tarini Bedi  

Whisnant, David E.  

Wiley, Hames  
Williams, Raymond

Wilson, Tama Diana

Winegar, Jennifer

Wolseth, Jon

Wolf, Eric R.

—

Wolf, Eric R., and Sydel Silverman

Yelvington, Kevin A.

Young, Grace Esther

Zarate Vidal, Margarita

Zilberg, Elana

Zolniski, Christian
LAURA NUSSBAUM-BARBERENA
Curriculum Vitae

EDUCATION
2016  Ph.D. Anthropology University of Illinois at Chicago (Graduation: May 2016)
  Dissertation title: Repossessing Democracy: Nicaraguan women migrants constructing a culture of participation. Committee: Molly Doane (chair); Mark Liechty, Gayatri Reddy, Tarini Bedi, Ellen Moodie.

2010  M.A. Anthropology, University of Illinois at Chicago

2001  B.A. Whitman College, Sociology-Environmental Studies; Minor: Latin American Studies

RESEARCH INTERESTS
Socio-cultural Anthropology; Social Movements; Gender, Race and Space; Migration; Transnationalism; Cultural Activism; Transnational Feminisms; Violence; Latin America; Costa Rica and Nicaragua

AWARDS
External Research Awards


Internal Research Awards
2013  Dean’s Scholar Fellowship, UIC: “Repossessing democracy: Nicaraguan migrants, gender and the politics of dispossession” Dissertation writing award 2013/14 year. $25,000; tuition/fee waiver


2012  Alice J Dan Dissertation Research Award, Center for Research on Women and Gender, UIC. “Engaging the Everyday Politics of Dispossession in South-South Migration: Transnational Organizing Among Nicaraguan Women Migrants and Sending Households.” $1,000.


2009  Charles Reed Memorial Fund: Award for preliminary dissertation research in Costa Rica. Department of Anthropology, UIC. "Resisting Exclusion: Cultural Activism in Social Movement Formation in San Jose, Costa Rica." $750.
**Travel Awards**

2014  LAS Ph.D. Student Presenter Award, Awarded by UIC College of LAS, Travel to American Anthropological Association Meeting, Washington DC $500

2012  Student Presenter Travel Award, Awarded by UIC Graduate Student Council for travel to Second International Sociological Association Forum, Buenos Aires Argentina $275

2011  Student Presenter Travel Award, Awarded by UIC Graduate College for travel to Society for Applied Anthropology Conference, Seattle, WA. $300

2009  Student Presenter Travel Stipend; Awarded by American Ethnological Society for travel to AES/CASCA Conference. $200

**PUBLICATIONS**

**Peer-reviewed articles**


In Preparation  Tentative title: Rethinking loving relationships: gender, space sociality and violence in immigrant neighborhoods. For submission to *Signs*.

**Journal Special Issues**


**Edited Volumes**

In Preparation  Nussbaum-Barberena, Laura and Rebecca Nelson, Editors  Invited submission. Tentative Title: Unsung Feminisms: Feminisms from the Margins in Latin America. Planned submission of manuscript, July 2016 to Lexington Books

**TEACHING**

Adjunct Lecturer, University of Illinois at Chicago, Department of Anthropology 2016  Introduction to Economic Geography (Geog 161)

Lecturer, School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Liberal Arts Department 2016  Testimony and Social Movements in Latin America (FYS 1001 06)

Lecturer, School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Liberal Arts Department 2015  Women, Testimony and Social Movements (FYS 1001 12)

Instructor, University of Illinois at Chicago, Department of Anthropology 2014- The Human Adventure, Introduction to Four Fields of Anthropology (Anth 100)

Instructor, University of Illinois at Chicago, Department of Anthropology 2015 Structural Violence and Social Movements in Central America (Anth 277/LALS 270)

Violence and Migration: Perspectives from Central America (Anth 277/LALS 270)

Honors Project committee service  Alicia Lobo, Department of Anthropology (2015)

Teaching Assistant, University of Illinois at Chicago, Anthropology Department  2008-11 Cultural Anthropology (Anth 101); Human Evolution (Anth 105); The Human Adventure (Anth 100); Introduction to Geography (Geog 100)
INVITED PRESENTATIONS


2014 "We are not just women to be pitied": gender, migration and organizing. Department of Anthropology, University of Illinois at Chicago, and Field Museum, Annual Spring Reception; Field Museum, Chicago IL, April 2.

2014 “Strike Ethnography” Led Presentation and Class Ethnographic Activity during UIC Faculty Strike. February 19.

2013 "Migration, Organizing and Transnational Interdependence between Costa Rica and Nicaragua”; CENDEROS, Costa Rica Delivered to West Texas A&M University, Graduate Social Work Service Learning Trip. May 15.

2013 Recuperando la democracia: migrantes Nicaragüenses, género y la política del desposeimiento, Center for Research in Women’s Studies (CIEM), University of Costa Rica. (in Spanish) March 1.


CONFERENCE ACTIVITY/PARTICIPATION
Organized symposia


Organized symposia, continued


Volunteered Conference Papers


Guridy-Cerritos, Vanessa and Laura Nussbaum-Barberena


Volunteered Conference Papers, continued

Gomberg-Muñoz, Ruth and Laura Nussbaum-Barberena.


Gomberg-Muñoz, Ruth and Laura Nussbaum-Barberena.

Gomberg-Muñoz, Ruth and Laura Nussbaum-Barberena.


FIELDWORK EXPERIENCE

2009- Ph.D. Dissertation: 15 months of ethnographic research in Costa Rica and Nicaragua.


2012 Research Assistant Ethnographic research in Viroqua, Wisconsin. Pilot study for research on rural development initiatives, agricultural cooperatives and organic farms. [PI: Dr. Molly Doane] Anthropology Department, UIC. December-July.

2012 Research Assistant, Anthropology Sickle Cell Project in Chicago, IL. Interviews, Transcription and Coding Dr. Crystal Patil, Anthropology Department, UIC; January – July.


2011 Research Assistant. Ethnographic research in Chicago IL. Interviews with organizations assisting immigrants changes to migratory status as well as recruiting long-term participants [PI: Dr. Ruth Gomberg-Muñoz] Anthropology Department, Loyola University, Chicago. May-July.

2011 Research Assistant. Anthropology Department, University of Illinois at Chicago Dr. Brian Bauer: Translation of Spanish Colonial Documents, Spanish to English
RELEVANT PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

2004- Program Coordinator, Social Justice and Development Semester Internship and Research
2008  Program in Costa Rica/ Nicaragua. Institute for Central American Development Studies. San Jose, Costa Rica Assisted in course design; led site visits; supervised student internship and field research. Liaison to communities and community organizations.
(2005-2008) Admissions Coordinator: Processed admissions material; admissions committee.

2001- Academic and Administrative Assistant. Center for Sustainable Development Studies, 2002  Atenas, Costa Rica (School for Field Studies, Boston University)

DEPARTMENT SERVICES
Graduate Student-Faculty Liaison, Department of Anthropology (2013-14)
Conference Co-Chair; Presentation Committee Chair. Second City Anthropology Conference (2013-14)
President Geography and Anthropology Graduate Student Association (2011-12)
Conference Co-Chair UIC Second City Anthropology Conference (2011-12)
Co-Organizer Student Brown-Bag Series (2011-12)
Treasurer Geography and Anthropology Graduate Student Association (2010-11)
Secretary Geography and Anthropology Graduate Student Association (2009-10)
Committee Member Geography and Anthropology Graduate Student Association (2008-9)

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS
American Anthropological Association
Society for Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology
Society for Applied Anthropology
Association for Feminist Anthropology
Affiliated Researcher, Center for Women’s Studies (CIEM), University of Costa Rica (UCR) (2012-13)
Affiliated Researcher, Department of Social Sciences, Central American University (UCA) (2012-13)

OTHER AFFILIATIONS
Bi-national network of Nicaraguan women migrants in Costa Rica and family members in Nicaragua.
Volunteer. Costa Rica and Nicaragua. August 2012-Present
Chicago Community and Worker’s Rights, Advisory Board Chicago, IL (May 2010-August 2011, Present)
Hispanic-American Community and Education Services/ Workers Rights Defenders, Volunteer.
Waukegan, IL (May 2010-August 2011)
Street Vendor’s Association, (AVA), Advisory Board Member Chicago IL (May 2010-May 2011)

LANGUAGES:
English: Native speaker
Spanish: Fluent in speaking, writing and reading
French: Intermediate reading