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## "Women Must Occupy and Give Themselves the Place They Deserve"

*Women's Activism and Feminist Agency  
in Mozambique and Nicaragua*

*Many women in the countryside challenge the way things are without using the word "gender," without ever studying women and men. In Moeda, they ask, "What do you do in the morning and the afternoon?" Women realize, "Nobody gives water to me. I'm tired of giving water to others."*

—TEREZINHA DA SILVA, Centro de Formação Jurídica e Judiciária, Former Director of Faculty of Social Sciences, Universidade Eduardo Mondlane (UEM), President of the Board of Forum Mulher,  
Interview, Maputo, Mozambique, 7/23/99

*Sometimes I went out of the house, and my husband came home and could not find me. I knew he was going to get mad! We discovered independence. We recognized we were women, and we had rights also. We are different feminists. For me, it is about human respect. Men have to respect and understand without abuse. Women must occupy and give themselves the place they deserve. There are rights women have in the home.*

—ESPERANZA CRUZ DE CABRERA, Comité de Madres de Héroes y Mártires,  
Interview, Managua, Nicaragua, 1/31/00

### Introduction

Terezinha da Silva and Esperanza Cruz de Cabrera highlight two important aspects of women's activism and feminist agency: (1) gendered participation in productive and reproductive labor continues to play a defining role in the relations of power and inequality between women and men; and (2) the process of women's mobilization, participation, and organization in political activism is often a transformative experience for women in both the public and private spheres of life, shaping their own relationships to and understandings of feminism. Through her work as a scholar-activist in Mozambique, Terezinha da Silva recognized that women's resistance often emerges without any direct identification with feminism or the study of gender. Through her work with the Mothers of

Heroes and Martyrs in Nicaragua, Esperanza Cruz de Cabrera discovered what she considers a different kind of feminism based on human respect. Together, these women, and the movements in which they have participated, are making critical contributions to the theories and practices of women's organizing, challenging notions of feminist agency in the process.

This book tells the story of women's transformation from women's activism to feminist agency in revolutionary and postrevolutionary Mozambique and Nicaragua.<sup>1</sup> It explores the extent to which women were able to mobilize within national liberation movements and integrate a feminist analysis into the vision and practice of social change of revolutionary movements seeking to overturn political, social, and economic structures and claiming to establish an emancipatory vision of society. The book also explores the impact such mobilization had on the state, society, and women's organizing. Essentially, women's activism in the revolutionary periods in both countries, characterized by the mobilization of women by male-led revolutionary state parties, was transformed into feminist agency in the contemporary postrevolutionary periods, characterized by the organization of women into autonomous organizations in civil society. It is this process of women's transformation from mobilization to organization that is the subject of this book.

Mozambique and Nicaragua provide a unique opportunity for comparison. In both countries, guerrilla movements committed to implementing a socialist agenda were successful in seizing state power. In 1974, after fighting a ten-year war of liberation from Portuguese colonization, the Frente de Libertação de Moçambique (Liberation Front of Mozambique [Frelimo]) became the government of an independent Mozambique. In 1979, the United Opposition, led by the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional de Nicaragua (National Liberation Front of Nicaragua [FSLN]), defeated the forty-six-year U.S.-supported dictatorship of the Somoza dynasty. In addition, both countries experienced revolutionary "civil" wars driven by foreign-supported counterinsurgency forces (Renamo, Contras) attempting to destabilize their socialist experiments. With the electoral defeat of the Sandinistas in 1990, and the decision of Frelimo to adopt a Western-style capitalist democracy in 1992, the socialist agendas in both countries were overturned for neoliberal multiparty democracies. However, the electoral victories of Frelimo in 1994, 1999, and 2004, in contrast to the electoral defeats of the FSLN in 1990, 1996, and again in 2001, provide very different postrevolutionary contexts for the development of autonomous women's movements in each country. Moreover, the recent reelection of the Sandinistas back into power in Nicaragua in 2006 makes this an exciting time to evaluate the changing nature of the party, and the changing nature of women in relation to the party, in contemporary Nicaragua.

What has the situation been like for women in Mozambique and Nicaragua? Were the concerns of women incorporated into the Frelimo and Sandinista agendas? What was the relationship in Mozambique and Nicaragua between

the goals of the socialist transformation of society and the liberation of women? Have women organized autonomous feminist movements on their own behalf in the postrevolutionary periods in either country? Do women need to organize autonomously in order to articulate their interests into the vision and practice of social change, or can women successfully integrate a feminist analysis into other existing social change organizations? What impact has democratization had in both countries? What kinds of women's organizing is taking place in civil society today? How is feminism being constructed in Mozambique and Nicaragua? These are the questions I attempt to answer in this book.

## Argument of the Book

My research reveals that while women were mobilized by the revolutionary parties in each country, Frelimo in Mozambique and the FSLN in Nicaragua, a gendered analysis of women's oppression was absent from the theories and practices of the revolutionary struggle, particularly with regard to the economic, cultural, and personal intersections of production and reproduction. This absence was due to the origin, mobilization strategies, and theories adopted by Frelimo and the FSLN, and subsequently by the national-level women's organizations in each country: the Organização da Mulher Moçambicana (Organization of Mozambican Women [OMM]) in Mozambique, and the Asociación de Mujeres Nicaragüenses, "Luisa Amanda Espinoza" (Luisa Amanda Espinoza Association of Nicaraguan Women [AMNLAE]) in Nicaragua.

The theories of women's emancipation were flawed, and the organizing practices did not allow women the autonomy to develop a gendered or feminist analysis of their own oppression. Although the women's organizations in Mozambique and Nicaragua were active and participatory, they lacked both the ideological autonomy to theorize women's oppression and the organizational autonomy to make their own decisions. In particular, the parties and women's organizations wanted to integrate women into the fields of defense and production, thus circumscribing their understanding of women's emancipation. Women's emancipation within the reproductive sphere of the family (including family farming, unpaid domestic and caregiving labor, reproductive autonomy, freedom from domestic violence, and freedom from gendered cultural attitudes and expectations of appropriate behavior for women and men) was not adequately addressed by either revolution. Frelimo, the OMM, the Sandinistas, and AMNLAE each adopted a strictly class-based analysis of oppression generally, and of women's oppression in particular; this analysis offered little or no conceptualization of the productive power of the reproductive sphere of labor, of sociocultural forms of oppression, or of the connections between the needs of women and the goals of the revolution.

A comparative examination of the revolutionary and postrevolutionary periods in both countries reveals that women have gone from being mobilized

by the revolutionary state parties in power for the purpose of achieving the socialist/nationalist goals of Frelimo and the FSLN, to organizing themselves for feminist political change, to varying degrees, within both countries today. This has varied in each case to a large extent because of the degree of ideological and organizational autonomy achieved by women and the nature of the party politics. In Nicaragua, many more spaces for women's organizing emerged during the 1980s than in Mozambique because of the multidimensional organizing strategies adopted by Nicaraguan women. As a result, not only did autonomy struggles begin much earlier, but the electoral defeat of the Sandinistas in 1990 created an environment conducive to autonomous organizing separate from the party, in contrast to the electoral victory of Frelimo in 1994.

Despite the fact that the organizing strategies adopted by women in Mozambique and Nicaragua during the revolutionary and postrevolutionary periods have been different, the conceptions of feminism emerging in both countries are remarkably similar. The contemporary constructions of feminism emerging in both countries, and, I would argue, in much of the developing world,<sup>2</sup> challenge the equality/difference, practical/strategic, and economics/sex-violence-culture divides that exist in many Western feminist discourses.<sup>3</sup> As a result, they offer critical insights for the direction of future feminist theorizing and organizing.

## Why Study Women and Revolution in the Developing World?

The recent wave of democratization and the alleged triumph of capitalism that have taken place in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, as well as in various countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, make this an opportune time to explore the extent to which political and economic transformations that claim to be emancipatory—whether socialist, capitalist, or liberal democratic—have produced greater freedom and equality for all citizens involved.

Although more countries than ever before have adopted democratic electoral systems and neoliberal capitalist economic systems, economic inequality throughout the world is increasing. The gap between rich and poor is widening both within and between advanced industrial societies and the developing countries of the periphery. In 2002, in a study conducted for the World Bank, economist Branko Milanovic found that 84 percent of the world receives only 16 percent of its income.<sup>4</sup> According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the 20 percent of the world's people in the countries with the highest incomes account for 86 percent of total private consumption expenditures, whereas the poorest 20 percent account for only 1.3 percent of total consumption.<sup>5</sup> Half of the world's population (2.8 billion people) lives on less than two dollars a day, and 1.2 billion people live on less than one dollar a

day.<sup>6</sup> Over a billion people around the world are deprived of basic consumption needs; the average African household consumes 20 percent *less* than it did 25 years ago.<sup>7</sup> Meanwhile, economic development for rural women in the developing context continues to mean that women assume the quadruple burden of unpaid subsistence agriculture/family farming, paid agricultural labor on farming cooperatives, child-rearing and the reproduction of social relationships, and all of the unpaid domestic labor of the household, including food preparation, water retrieval, and household maintenance. The 1995 Human Development Report, which focused specifically on *Gender and Human Development*, estimated that in addition to the officially estimated \$23 trillion of global output, \$16 trillion of unpaid and underpaid work is performed around the world, \$11 trillion of which is the unpaid, invisible work of women.<sup>8</sup>

These conditions make a socialist critique of capitalism relevant, an economic critique of democracy necessary, and a feminist critique of both democracy and economic development—both the Marxist and the capitalist variants—urgent. Much of the classic literature on democracy defines democracy as universal (i.e., male) suffrage, revealing the gendered nature of the discourse of democracy.<sup>9</sup> There is also an extensive literature that addresses the gendered nature of the discourse and practice of development.<sup>10</sup> Both capitalist and socialist paths toward development have focused on increasing women's activity in the public sphere of paid labor, without acknowledging the productive value of, or offering to restructure, women's unpaid activity in the private sphere of "reproductive labor."

This book aims to: (1) provide an understanding of the nature of women's activism, women's organizing, and women's movements in a global context; (2) describe how feminism and feminist agency are being constituted in two cross-regional countries in the developing world; and (3) discuss how this knowledge can inform global feminist theorizing. Specifically, this book explores gendered constructions of work, production, reproduction, development, democracy, and movements for emancipatory change by collecting and analyzing empirical evidence of the status, organizing conditions, and struggles of women in the political, military, economic, and sociocultural spheres of life during the revolutionary and postrevolutionary periods in Mozambique and Nicaragua. It is my contention that focusing on the interconnections between the "private, reproductive" sphere of the family and the "public, productive" sphere of the state, civil society, and the market within developing countries provides a unique vantage point through which we can construct an emancipatory vision of a new society, precisely *because* these interconnections highlight the intersections of gender, race, and class-based oppressions. Examining women's oppression from the perspectives of women located at the intersections of gender, race, class, and postcolonial-based oppressions within developing countries experiencing economic dependency and counterinsurgency will provide not only a heightened understanding of

the problems suffered by women globally but also a unique perspective with which to articulate a theory and practice of a movement to eliminate all forms of oppression.

## Why Compare Mozambique and Nicaragua?

Mozambique and Nicaragua provide a unique, cross-regional, cross-cultural comparison for examining the ability of women to mobilize *as women* and develop a feminist agenda within the context of revolutionary movements fighting for social change. In both countries, anti-imperialist national liberation movements fought to implement a self-identified emancipatory agenda within the context of colonization, dependency, and counterinsurgency directed by foreign powers. While one may not have expected the socialist revolutions occurring in Russia in 1917, China in 1949, and Cuba in 1959 to integrate a feminist analysis of women's oppression into their revolutionary struggles, it seems reasonable to expect that revolutions occurring in the 1970s and 1980s would be more likely to do so, as feminist ideas had become part of the global public discourse, as evidenced by international meetings on the status of women (Mexico City, 1975; Copenhagen, 1980; Nairobi, 1985). Furthermore, both countries adopted multiparty capitalist democracies in the 1990s and have seen a tremendous increase in autonomous women's organizing in the ensuing decades. As a result, the two countries provide the basis for comparing the conditions for, and consequences of revolution, democratization, and feminism on women's organizing efforts in the contemporary period.

## Basic Demographics

Both Mozambique and Nicaragua have experienced colonization, dependency, exploitation, mass deprivation, nationalism, popular resistance, socialist-inspired revolution, foreign-funded counterinsurgency, and, today, neoliberal multiparty capitalist democracy.

Mozambique and Nicaragua are small, dependent, "peripheral" countries that have been incorporated into the world economy as producers of raw commodities. Both have predominantly agricultural, export-led economies that have relied heavily upon the traditional exports of cashews, sugar, and cotton (Mozambique) and cotton and coffee (Nicaragua). Mozambique exported \$2.381 billion and imported \$2.649 billion in 2006. Nicaragua exported \$1.978 billion and imported \$3.422 billion that same year.<sup>11</sup> Each country has an unfavorable balance of trade, with Nicaragua's import-to-export ratio even lower than that of Mozambique. In early 2004, Nicaragua qualified for \$4.5 billion in foreign debt reduction under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative, and in November 2006 the country received

**TABLE 1.1. BASIC POVERTY AND DEVELOPMENT INDICATORS**

	MOZAMBIQUE	NICARAGUA
Total population	20.5 million	5.5 million
Urban population	34.5%	59.0%
Share of income richest 10%	39.4%	33.8%
Share of income poorest 10%	2.1%	2.2%
Population living below \$2 a day	74.1%	79.9%
Population living below poverty	69.4%	47.9%
Population undernourished	44.0%	27.0%
Population with improved water	43.0%	79.0%
Population with improved sanitation	32.0%	47.0%
Total fertility/births per woman	5.5	3.0

Source: Human Development Report, 2007/2008.

over \$800 million in debt relief from the Inter-American Development Bank.<sup>12</sup> The country still maintains \$3.7 billion in external debt. Mozambique also received debt relief through the IMF's HIPC initiative and Enhanced HIPC initiatives and currently has \$2.4 billion in external debt.<sup>13</sup> Labor force participation in Mozambique in 2006 was estimated at 81 percent agriculture, 13 percent services, and 6 percent industry, while in Nicaragua 52 percent of the population was employed in services, 29 percent in agriculture, and 19 percent in industry.<sup>14</sup> Both countries have struggled with poverty and underdevelopment and remain among the poorest countries in their regions (see Table 1.1).

In 2007, Mozambique had a total population of 20.5 million people, while Nicaragua had a total population of 5.5 million people. Income disparity within each country is virtually the same, with the richest 10 percent controlling 39.4 percent and 33.8 percent and the poorest 10 percent controlling 2.1 percent and 2.2 percent in Mozambique and Nicaragua, respectively. Large portions of each population live below poverty: about 70 percent in Mozambique and 50 percent in Nicaragua. The Nicaraguan population is more urbanized at almost 60 percent, while 65 percent of Mozambicans live in rural communities. Both countries have a young population. In Mozambique, 44.7 percent of the population is between the ages of 0 and 14, compared to 35.5 percent in Nicaragua.<sup>15</sup> Of the Mozambican population, 52.5 percent is between the ages of 15 and 64, with 61.3 percent in the same age group in Nicaragua. Only 2.8 percent in Mozambique and 3.2 percent in Nicaragua is 65 years old or older. The age of the population, younger in Mozambique, reflects low life expectancies, high fertility rates, low standards of living, and years of war.

## Human Development Statistics and Gender

The Human Development Index (HDI), a statistic created by the UN Development Programme and designed to assess and compare basic indicators

of human development across countries internationally, is a simple average of three other indicators: longevity, measured by life expectancy at birth; educational attainment, measured by a combination of adult literacy and the combined gross primary, secondary, and tertiary enrollment ratio; and standard of living, measured by adjusted real gross domestic product (GDP) per capita. The Gender-Related Development Index (GDI) uses the same indicators as the HDI but breaks down the results to reveal any disparities between women and men. HDIs and GDIs range between 0 and 1, with 0 being the lowest possible index and 1 being the highest. In 2007, HDIs and GDIs were calculated for 193 countries.

How do Mozambique and Nicaragua compare in terms of economic and social development? Mozambique has an HDI of 0.384, an HDI rank of 172, a GDI of 0.373, and a GDI rank of 149. Nicaragua has an HDI of 0.710, an HDI rank of 110, a GDI of 0.696, and a GDI rank of 98. How each of the indicators breaks down gives a rough estimate of the disparity between the two countries (see Table 1.2).

Obviously, there are vast disparities in human development between Mozambique and Nicaragua: a thirty-year difference in life expectancy, almost a 40 percent difference in adult literacy, a 20 percent difference in total primary, secondary, and tertiary educational enrollment, and a \$2,400 difference in purchasing parity per capita. These differences in economic, social, and human development have affected the struggle for women's liberation in both countries. In comparison to Mozambique, in Nicaragua there is a much stronger infrastructure upon which to build a foundation for women's movements. The

**TABLE 1.2. SELECTED 2007/2008 UN DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME HUMAN AND GENDER DEVELOPMENT REPORT INDICATORS<sup>16</sup>**

	MOZAMBIQUE	NICARAGUA
HDI rank	172	110
HDI value	0.384	0.710
Life expectancy at birth	42.8 years	71.9 years
Women	43.6 years	75.0 years
Men	42.0 years	69.0 years
Adult literacy	38.7%	76.7%
Women	25.0%	76.6%
Men	54.8%	76.8%
Combined educational enrollment	52.9%	70.6%
Women	48.0%	72.0%
Men	58.0%	70.0%
GDP per capita	\$1,242	\$3,674
EEI, Women	\$1,115	\$1,773
EEI, Men	\$1,378	\$5,577
% Women in Parliament	34.8%	18.5%
GDI rank	149	98
GDI value	0.373	0.696

Source: Human Development Report, 2007/2008.



“massification” of education, the access to, and impact of, global discourses on gender equality and women's rights, and the opportunities for women's transnational communication and organization all seem to have had an impact on the degree of emergence of feminist agency in Mozambique and Nicaragua.

Mozambique has a 99.66 percent indigenous African population, including Shangaan in the South, and Macua and Maconde in the North. It was never a typical settler colony, with the Portuguese investing very little in infrastructure. Most of the Portuguese who were there fled after the coup in Portugal in 1974 and subsequent Mozambican independence in 1975. Nicaragua, in contrast, experienced a much longer history of settler colonization, and has a 69 percent mestizo population. Officially independent from Spain since 1821, Nicaragua has suffered at the hands of U.S. neocolonialism and military involvement for more than 150 years. It is impossible to discuss the contemporary context of women's activism and feminist agency in Mozambique and Nicaragua without first understanding the Mozambican and Nicaraguan experience with colonization, imperialism, and underdevelopment.

## Portuguese Colonial Legacy in Mozambique

Mozambique was colonized by the Portuguese, who first arrived in Southern Africa in 1498. The Portuguese began to settle and trade along the Mozambican coast in the sixteenth century, and by the seventeenth century they “competed with Arabs for the trade in slaves, gold, and ivory.”<sup>16</sup> To increase Portuguese colonial influence in the interior of the country, the Portuguese king granted *prazos*, large landed estates in the lower Zambesi Valley of Mozambique, to women *prazeros* provided they married Portuguese men: “Prazo ownership was designed to be kept in the female line for three generations in an attempt to bring Portuguese men in to settle the land; after that the land was supposed to revert to the king.”<sup>17</sup> As the Portuguese colonial state increased in power after the establishment of European colonial boundaries at the Berlin Conference in 1884, it succeeded in suppressing the resistance of African peoples, particularly the Macondes in the North and the Tsonga in the South, and eliminating the autonomy achieved by the Afro-Portuguese *prazeros*.<sup>18</sup>

Through the purchase of twenty-five-year, renewable land concessions, three large companies controlled by foreign investors (the Mozambique Company, the Niassa Company, and the Zambezi Company) established Mozambique's twentieth-century export-led colonial economy based on cash crop production, forced cultivation, and settler farms of sugar, tea, tobacco, cashew, rice, maize, groundnuts, cassava, potatoes, copra, sisal, and cotton.<sup>19</sup> The forced labor of cotton reached its height from 1938 to 1961, when almost one million peasants, the majority of whom were women, were legally required to plant cotton: “Despite the fact that most cotton growers in Mozambique were women, colonial authorities assumed ‘real’ producers to be male, just

as they understood ‘real’ work to exclude a wide range of essential tasks they dismissed as women’s ‘domestic chores.’”<sup>20</sup>

Despite claims to the contrary, Portuguese colonization was characterized by two racialized, hierarchical systems of economic, political, and cultural exploitation: (1) *chibalo*, a system of forced labor based on coerced recruitment or contract with private companies or the state in which Mozambicans were forced to use their most arable land for the cultivation of rice, sisal, and cotton, sometimes at gunpoint, for the nascent textile industry in Portugal; and (2) the *assimilado* system, wherein those Black Mozambicans who could prove themselves assimilated enough into Portuguese culture through their ability to speak and write the language, style of dress, cooking, and so forth, could achieve higher political status, more human rights, and greater economic opportunities. The *assimilado* system was a racist system that defined both progress and humanity as moving from that which was African to that which was European. Only 1 percent of Mozambicans ever achieved the *assimilado* identity. Writing in 1969, national liberation leader Eduardo Mondlane<sup>21</sup> eloquently summarized the consistent nature of Portuguese colonialism from the late nineteenth century to his leadership of, and participation in, the war for national liberation:

Thus, in the years between 1890 and 1910, the main characteristics of Portuguese colonialism were established: a centralized net of authoritarian administration; the alliance with the Catholic Church; the use of companies, frequently foreign, to exploit natural resources; the concession system; forced labour, and the extensive export of workers to South Africa. There have inevitably been minor changes; but in its essence, the system today is the same.<sup>22</sup>

There are many structural similarities between the Portuguese colonization of Africa and Spanish colonialism in the Americas, including: a centralized, authoritarian, colonial state; close ties between the colonial state and the Catholic Church; and the exploitation of the indigenous peoples and natural resources through a racialized forced labor system and an agrarian export-led economy.

## Spanish Colonial and U.S. Neocolonial Legacies in Nicaragua

The Spanish colonial project was initiated after eight centuries (711–1492) of religious civil war, conquest, and reconquest against Muslim Arabs. This period has been identified as one of “militant Christianity linked to an expansive state, an emphasis on military values and valour—especially individual

heroism and radically centralized political institutions.”<sup>23</sup> Many Latin American scholars have attributed the fundamental aspects of Spanish colonialism in the Americas to these Iberian roots:

As the cause of Christ was advanced in Spain by force of arms, the profession of arms acquired more respectability and legitimacy. It was the defender of the nation and of the faith, and received special recognition for its role through the *fuero militar*, a separate legal code exempting the military from the jurisdiction of civil courts. The special status accorded the military in most of Latin America reflects this heritage.<sup>24</sup>

The first Spanish conquistador, Gil González de Ávila, arrived in Nicaragua in 1522, naming the country after one of the indigenous agricultural peoples, the *Nicarao*.<sup>25</sup> For the next three hundred years, Spanish colonization established an export-oriented economy based upon the Indian slave trade and the commodities of hides, grain, cacao, and indigo.<sup>26</sup> It is estimated that the indigenous population of Nicaragua was decimated from one million to around ten thousand during the first six decades of Spanish colonial rule, with five hundred thousand Indians sold in the slave trade between 1527 and 1548.<sup>27</sup>

Spanish colonization was characterized by exploitation, Christianization, and militarism. Operating under the auspices of the Spanish crown-church-state, the *conquistador* was a military entrepreneur who sought fame, fortune, honor, wealth, and the capture, conversion, and control of the “natives.” Many attribute the development of the Latin American *caudillo*, the personalistic, patriarchal leader who often uses his military prowess to appeal to the people, to the legacy of the conquistador. The *encomienda* system was a harsh system of indigenous labor in which Indians were forced to work on lands divided among the colonizers, ensuring their place at the bottom of the racialized hierarchy of the colonial period: (1) *peninsulares*, Spanish colonizers directly from Spain; (2) *creoles*, Spanish born in the Americas; (3) *mestizos*, those born of Spanish and indigenous parentage; (4) *indios*, the indigenous peoples of the Americas. While Spanish and Portuguese colonization share the characteristics of export-led agricultural exploitation and racialized, hierarchical, socio-cultural oppression, it is the decimation of the indigenous population and the creation of a new ethnic class, the *mestizo*, that distinguishes the Spanish colonization of the Americas. This explains why Thomas Walker describes the people of contemporary Nicaragua as “relatively homogenous and culturally integrated. There are no major racial, ethnic, linguistic, or religious divisions. Practically all Nicaraguans are Catholic, speak Spanish, and share a common cultural heritage.”<sup>28</sup> However, there have been political, economic, ethnic, linguistic,

and geographic divisions within Nicaragua, beginning in the colonial period and continuing well into independence.

In 1522, the conquistador Hernández de Córdoba founded the colonial cities of Granada and León, whose economic and social elites would come to represent two political parties, the Conservatives and the Liberals, respectively, who would engage in a series of civil wars that would define the early independence period from 1821 to 1857. Moreover, the “privately organized and financed invasions,” or filibusters—first by British, then by American, privateers—occurred several times during the colonial and independence periods, revealing a heightened sense of foreign interest in Nicaragua beyond the Spanish, particularly for an interoceanic canal, that would define the postindependence period well into the twentieth century.<sup>29</sup> The British first arrived on the Miskito Coast of Nicaragua in 1633 and went on to effectively control the eastern half of the country until 1894.<sup>30</sup> The political links the British established with the indigenous population of the Atlantic coast of Nicaragua, the Miskitos, secured British dominance in the Caribbean and effectively prevented both Madrid and Managua from establishing a unified, independent Nicaragua for more than 200 years.<sup>31</sup>

U.S. influence in Nicaragua came first in the form of Commodore Cornelius Vanderbilt, who financed the Nicaraguan Conservatives through his “transport service from the Caribbean along the San Juan River and Lake Nicaragua overland to the Pacific—the quickest and cheapest way to travel from the U.S. East Coast to California.”<sup>32</sup> In 1855, American filibuster William Walker contracted with the Liberals to help them defeat the Conservatives in a civil war, only then to declare himself commander of the Nicaraguan Army and “elect” himself president.<sup>33</sup> These imperialist actions united Conservatives from throughout Central America, whose troops captured and killed Walker in Honduras with the help of the British Marines.<sup>34</sup> With the imperialist Walker, the Liberal alliance discredited Central American Liberal movements and secured Conservative political power in Nicaragua for three decades. Moreover, the actions of Americans, with diplomatic recognition from the American government, laid the foundation for U.S.–Nicaraguan relations for years to come: “The spectacle of Walker and Vanderbilt, two Americans, struggling for mastery over a supposedly independent Nicaragua aroused bitter antagonisms which later action by the United States would intensify.”<sup>35</sup>

In 1893, a Liberal revolt brought dictator José Santos Zelaya to the presidency, whose commitment to Central American integration and refusal to grant the United States canal-building rights through Nicaragua led the U.S. government to send troops to Bluefields in 1909 to support the Conservative overthrow of Santos Zelaya under the Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine.<sup>36</sup> When Santos Zelaya resigned, U.S. Marines were sent again to Nicaragua to fight side by side with Conservatives in 1912 to quell the Liberal

rebellion of Benjamin Zeledon.<sup>37</sup> This time, the U.S. Marines stayed: "In the twentieth century, the United States government imposed its dominion over Nicaragua, first by direct armed intervention (from 1912–1925 and from 1926–1933) and later through the client dictatorships of the Somoza family (from 1936–1979)."<sup>38</sup>

During the second U.S. Marine occupation, the United States intervened politically to broker a peace treaty, The Peace of Tipitapa, between the Liberals and Conservatives, which awarded Liberal General Moncada with the Nicaraguan presidency in return for the cessation of hostilities.<sup>39</sup> The treaty was acceptable to everyone except Augusto Cesar Sandino, a passionate Nicaraguan nationalist and anti-imperialist who led a six-year guerrilla war against the U.S. Marines: "On July 1, 1927, Sandino issued his political manifesto in which he denounced Moncada as a traitor and pledged to drive the Americans from his homeland."<sup>40</sup> In 1933, the Hoover administration removed the U.S. Marines, leaving an organized, trained, and armed new military force, the Guardia Nacional de Nicaragua (National Guard of Nicaragua), under the leadership of an English-speaking Nicaraguan, Anastasio Somoza García, who was nicknamed "El Yanqui" for his pro-American stance.<sup>41</sup> Tension between the Guard and Sandino and his followers led to an invitation to Managua to rework the 1933 Peace Agreement. After a farewell dinner for Sandino and his staff on February 21, 1934, with President Sacasa, "Sandino and his party were intercepted by the Guard who took him and two of his generals to an airfield and killed them."<sup>42</sup> From 1936 to 1979, the Somoza family dynasty ruled Nicaragua like its own private *finca* (ranch), in large part through its control of the National Guard and the support of the United States, until the political descendents of Sandino, the Sandinistas, led the revolutionary insurrection that was as much nationalist and anti-imperialist as it was antidictatorial and socialist.

## History of Revolution and Counterinsurgency in Mozambique and Nicaragua: Frelimo, Renamo, the Sandinistas, and the Contras

In 1961, "frustrated with the lack of nationalism" of the pro-Soviet Nicaraguan Socialist Party (PSN), "several young Marxists split from the PSN" and founded the Sandinista National Liberation Front (i.e. FSLN), which, after years of guerrilla activities, organizing among the masses, and fighting an eighteen-month war of liberation, defeated Somoza's army and came to power in 1979.<sup>43</sup> Nicaraguan revolutionary leaders characterized their revolution as "a popular, democratic, and anti-imperialist revolutionary struggle" based on "a political project of national unity and an economic project of a mixed economy."<sup>44</sup> In 1962 in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, three anticolonial

groups united under the leadership of Eduardo Mondlane and formed the Liberation Front of Mozambique (Frelimo). Frelimo's focus during the ten-year war of national liberation was unity, people power, and class struggle, identifying Mozambique as a nation of workers united by the exploitation of colonial capitalism.<sup>45</sup> Revolutionary socialism and Marxism-Leninism emerged from this ideological origin, the experiences in the liberated zones, and the concern that "a black bourgeoisie, if left unchecked, could co-opt and ultimately destroy the revolution."<sup>46</sup> An anti-imperialist revolutionary regime in Central America, and a Black African revolutionary regime in white supremacist Southern Africa, both inspired by Marxism during the cold war, aroused the animosity of the United States and South Africa. As a result, both countries suffered massive destruction and unspeakable human tragedy due to "civil" wars initiated by counterinsurgency forces (Renamo in Mozambique, Contras in Nicaragua) that were created, funded, and supported by foreign governments to destroy their socialist experiments.<sup>47</sup>

The sixteen-year postindependence war in Mozambique from 1977 to 1992 must be understood within the context of the minority white supremacist apartheid regimes ruling Southern Africa, and the cold war. The Mozambican National Resistance (MNR)<sup>48</sup> was created by the Rhodesian Central Intelligence Organization in 1977 as a counterinsurgency force designed to destabilize the Marxist-Leninist Frelimo regime that had begun supporting and granting refuge to Zimbabwean guerrillas fighting for majority rule in Rhodesia. The first MNR recruits were disgruntled Portuguese, former members of the Portuguese secret police (PIDE) and elite Black units of the Portuguese colonial forces (many of whom had fled to Rhodesia after Mozambican independence) and dissidents from Frelimo, including Andre Matsangaissa and Afonso Dhlakama, "who had been expelled for corruption or had left because of unfulfilled personal ambitions," respectively.<sup>49</sup> Some rural Mozambicans were later drawn into Renamo out of opposition for Frelimo collectivization policies, reeducation camps, and modernist hostility toward traditional power and belief systems. With the achievement of an independent Zimbabwe in 1980, "South Africa took over sponsorship of Renamo and dramatically augmented its military capacity."<sup>50</sup>

By 1982, Renamo had destroyed 840 schools, 12 health clinics, 24 maternity clinics, 174 health posts, and 900 shops.<sup>51</sup> In 1987, the Renamo massacre in Inhambane province killed 424 civilians, including pregnant women, children, and other patients in the town's health clinic.<sup>52</sup> Human Rights Watch has documented the particularly brutal tactics of Renamo, including cutting off ears, noses, lips, and sexual organs as well as instituting forced conscription of child soldiers.<sup>53</sup> The human, economic, and infrastructural costs of the proxy war devastated the people of Mozambique: between 1980 and 1988, UNICEF estimated that 494,000 children under the age of five died from war-related causes; 1,800 schools were destroyed and 978 rural health clinics,

almost half of the clinics in the country, were destroyed or were forced to close because of Renamo attacks; and a UN study estimated \$15 billion in losses.<sup>54</sup> Women suffer uniquely in times of war, not just as victims of murder, but as survivors of torture, violence, kidnapping, rape, forced marriage, and sexual abuse in refugee camps.<sup>55</sup> Kathleen Sheldon cites a study of 110 women in a refugee camp in Zambia in which 87 had been the victim of at least one attack or violent episode, 44 percent of whom had witnessed a murder.<sup>56</sup> More than 5 million Mozambicans, "mainly women and children, who had fled to safety on the outskirts of cities and towns, or in neighboring countries" returned home in 1992 after the war had ended.<sup>57</sup> Alice Dinerman summarizes the dramatic events that shaped the postwar context in Mozambique and transformed Renamo from a terrorist organization into a political party:

The war took one million lives, devastated the country's economy, brutalized the population and left most people destitute. On one side stood the government, dominated by Frelimo, the ruling party which had won Mozambique its independence from Portugal in 1975. On the other was Renamo, a proxy army created and used by the dying white supremacist regimes of the region to destabilize Mozambique. The war produced no clear victor and an internationally-brokered peace deal guaranteed Renamo, widely recognized as the main perpetrator of wartime atrocities, a place in Mozambique's post-war political system.<sup>58</sup>

The signing of the General Peace Agreement in October 1992 and subsequent successful implementation of the UN mission in Mozambique (ONUMOZ) to facilitate the process of demobilization and multiparty elections are a true testament to the power of peace and the hope of consolidated democracy in the region and in the world.<sup>59</sup>

The counterinsurgency in Nicaragua also must be understood within the context of the cold war, specifically the Reagan Doctrine, which provided support for the low-intensity conflict of anticommunist "freedom fighters." On January 19, 1979, the day of the triumph of the Sandinista revolution, "a DC-8 jet, disguised with Red Cross insignia, landed in Managua to evacuate commanders of the Nicaraguan National Guard, a force the United States had created more than fifty years before. Over the next few days, U.S. operatives airlifted remnants of Anastasio Somoza's praetorian army to Miami from where they could reorganize to renew their fight against the Sandinistas in the future."<sup>60</sup> On January 23, 1981, three days after his presidential inauguration, Reagan escalated the war against the Sandinistas, stopping all aid and loans approved by Congress for Nicaragua under the Carter administration.<sup>61</sup> By the end of 1981, "the Reagan administration, acting primarily through the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) began to unite, train and arm" the

ex-National Guardsmen, who were engaging in robberies, assassinations, and attacks along the Honduran–Nicaraguan border.<sup>62</sup> By early 1984, the *Fuerza Democrática Nicaragüense* (Nicaraguan Democratic Force), better known as the *Contras*, had grown to a counterinsurgency force of between eight and ten thousand troops and had received \$64 million in support from the U.S. government.<sup>63</sup> On November 25, 1986, it was announced that a \$10 to \$30 million Iranian arms payment had been laundered through Swiss bank accounts to illegally and covertly fund the *Contra* war against the will of Congress, revealing the lengths to which the U.S. executive branch was willing to go to interfere in the domestic affairs of Nicaragua.<sup>64</sup>

The *Contra* war cost tens of thousands of Nicaraguan lives. Death reports range from 30,000 from 1980 to 1989 to 46,000 between 1982 and 1987, according to competing official statistics.<sup>65</sup> As Thomas Walker points out, using the lower of the two figures, a loss of 30,000 people within a population of 3.3 million represents 0.9 percent of the population, the equivalent of 2.25 million people from the United States during the same time span.<sup>66</sup> The aggregate effect on the Nicaraguan gross national product of the economic damage caused to the productive forces in the country, the losses due to the financial blockade, and the added costs for defense and security are estimated at \$9,087 million.<sup>67</sup>

It is evident that had South Africa and the United States *not* intervened in the domestic politics of these two revolutionary regimes, many more Mozambicans and Nicaraguans would be alive today to celebrate and to contest their policies. However, the question remains: despite the tragedies caused by external military interferences, how have the internal attitudes and decisions of Frelimo and FSLN betrayed their own socialist visions, especially for women? In the words of Sofia Montenegro, prominent Nicaraguan feminist theorist and activist, “One of the tools of feminism is to question, to challenge ideas. This is so important for a revolution! We must re-invent the politics, re-name reality, return it to the people, understand ourselves. Many people say we lost the revolution because of the American War. This would have been paradise. But what about the endogenous reasons?”<sup>68</sup> It is within this devastating context of colonialism, underdevelopment, and counterinsurgency that I explore both the achievements made by and for women within the Frelimo and Sandinista revolutions as well as the limitations of a revolutionary reorganization of society because of the framing of the revolutions and the subsequent unwillingness to challenge multiple forms of oppression, particularly those occurring in the sociocultural sphere of civil society and the private sphere of the family. I do not focus on the question of the overall “success” of the revolutions, as Margaret Randall did when she asserted that it was the unwillingness of twentieth-century revolutionary parties to alter their vision to include all groups in society, particularly by developing a feminist agenda, that led to their failure, although this assertion will emerge quite often in my



interviews.<sup>69</sup> Rather, my concern is the relative success of the revolutionary movements in addressing the needs and concerns of *women*. I also want to assess these revolutions against an emancipatory ideal type, based on the notion that a revolutionary movement will not be fully emancipatory—and therefore should not claim to be—unless it attempts to fight oppression in all its manifestations and to achieve the democratization of not only the state and the market but also civil society and the family.

The achievements of these revolutions cannot be understated, particularly in the areas of health, education, and access to basic economic resources for populations that dictatorial and colonial authorities have denied the basic right to rule and govern themselves for centuries. However, it is necessary to understand that the greatest limitation of both of these revolutions was their inability (or unwillingness) to translate such public, political, and economic gains in the productive sphere of the state and the market into private political, economic, and cultural gains in the reproductive sphere of home and family. What is perhaps most striking is the fact that two countries, on two different continents, with very different cultural histories, produced such similar stories about women's experiences within Marxist-Leninist revolutions. It is my contention that postrevolutionary societies will remain as unequal as nonrevolutionary societies as long as the sexual division of labor and the secondary status of women in the sphere of home and family remain unchallenged. Moreover, I contend that the literatures of women and development, global feminisms, and feminist theory not only need to better inform one another, but also need to place women's feminist agency in the developing world at the center of their discourses in order to remain more empirically relevant and theoretically useful to the majority of the world's women.

## Chapter Summaries

Chapter 2, "Feminist Contestations and Commonalities across First World/Third World, African, and Latin American Divides," places my analysis of women's activism and feminist agency in Mozambique and Nicaragua in the context of the theoretical debates between First World and Third World feminisms, with focus on the contributions made by socialist, African, Latin American, and global feminisms. It argues that using intersectionality as a theory and a method of study not only produces the most inclusive way to approach, analyze, and understand comparative feminisms but also provides a normative framework for the creation of an anti-oppression politics.

Chapter 3, "The Birth of Revolutionary Women's Organizations in Mozambique and Nicaragua," provides a history of the women's organizations in each of these countries, the OMM in Mozambique and AMNLAE in Nicaragua, examining both the theories and practices adopted by the two women's organizations in relation to the state parties in each country, Frelimo and the FSLN,

respectively. To shape the history, the theories of women's emancipation adopted by Frelimo and the FSLN, and by directive, the OMM and AMNLAE, will be briefly examined, highlighting the distinctions made between *Marxist* production and *feminist* reproduction. I discuss the relationship between the OMM and Frelimo and AMNLAE and the FSLN in great detail, arguing that both women's organizations lacked the ideological and organizational autonomy to develop a gendered or feminist analysis of women's oppression.

Chapter 4, "Autonomy Struggles Emerge in Mozambique and Nicaragua," focuses on the struggle for ideological and organizational autonomy that emerged between the women's organizations and the parties and within the organizations themselves. Both the OMM and AMNLAE experienced similar organizational identity and autonomy struggles throughout the 1980s but emerged from the 1990s in quite different forms, due to the nature of the organizing strategies adopted and the party politics. In Nicaragua during the 1980s, many more spaces for women's organizing emerged than in Mozambique because of the multidimensional organizing strategies adopted by Nicaraguan women. Not only did autonomy struggles begin much earlier in Nicaragua, but the *electoral defeat* of the Sandinistas in 1989 created an environment conducive for women's autonomous organizing, in contrast to the *electoral victory* of Frelimo in 1994.

Chapters 5 and 6 attempt to measure the "value added" of a socialist revolutionary analysis for women by providing an assessment of the policy impact of Frelimo, the FSLN, the OMM, and AMNLAE on women in Mozambique and Nicaragua in the areas of women's conditions, equality, status, and rights in the political, economic, social, cultural, and familial spheres of life. Chapter 5, "Political Participation, Legal Reforms, and Cultural Constraints," examines the areas of politics, the law, culture, and the family, and Chapter 6, "Military Participation, Economic Production, and Gendered Reproduction," examines the areas of military participation, economic production and reproduction, and gendered participation in paid and unpaid labor. Particular attention is paid to regional differences as well as to the distinction between matrilineal and patrilineal societies in Mozambique. Generally speaking, in both countries, the greatest advancements have been in the political sphere in terms of women's participation in public office and guarantees of basic civil rights, while the weakest achievements remain in the spheres of economics, culture, and the family. Whereas the economic limitations of women in both countries have both exogenous and endogenous causes, the limitations for women in the spheres of culture and the family are primarily endogenous.

Chapter 7, "Democratization and Civil Society in Mozambique and Nicaragua," examines the complicated changes that each country has undergone in the period of political democratization. The concepts of democracy, democratization, and civil society will be discussed critically, examining what changes have taken place in each country in the postrevolutionary period. In this

chapter, I argue that although there have been gains in political democracy, economic democracy has lost ground in both Mozambique and Nicaragua. In addition, I assess the potential and the limitations of postrevolutionary participatory democracy occurring in the form of autonomous organizations in civil society. Although there is more organizing, greater freedom, and a greater diversity of voices represented today, these voices sometimes have less power to effect change on a national level, particularly in Nicaragua. Moreover, nongovernmental organizations are increasing in number within an expanded civil society to fill the void of an ever-shrinking neoliberal state. I caution that civil society is becoming a weak substitute for a fuller understanding of democracy in the state, the market, and the family. In other words, expansion of civil society is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for the consolidation of political, economic, and participatory democracy.

Chapter 8, "The Contemporary Women's Movements and Emergent Feminisms in Mozambique and Nicaragua," concludes the book with an examination of the nature of women's organizing in each country in the postrevolutionary period. The theoretical debates, strategic challenges, and prominent women's organizations existing in both contemporary women's movements are discussed. In Mozambique, women's organizing focuses on the law, land, family, economic development, and, more recently, violence against women. In Nicaragua, women's organizing is coalescing around an intersectional approach to body politics, attempting to establish a link between practical gender needs and strategic gender interests such as domestic violence, reproductive rights, women's health, and economic opportunities. In addition, I examine the contemporary constructions of feminism emerging in each country in the context of the theories and practices of comparative intersectional feminisms discussed in Chapter 2 and argue that the constructions of feminism emerging in both countries challenge some of the dualisms that are taken for granted in many Western feminisms, and as a result, have much to offer to the future of global feminist theorizing and organizing.