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***"Era un pleito":* Gender Dynamics and the Politics of Immediate Needs in Loma Verde, Nicaragua**

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“Era un Pleito”: Gender Dynamics and the Politics of Immediate Needs in Loma Verde, Nicaragua

by

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Thesis

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Master of Arts

The University of Texas at Austin

May 2011

A la gente de Nicaragua,
que ama tanto vivir

For Andrea

Acknowledgements

"Take risks. Start writing." For this advice, encouraging me to develop my own creative intellectual voice, and providing invaluable guidance, inspiration, and support along the way, I offer my most sincere and heartfelt appreciation to Javier Auyero. For sharing her wealth of knowledge and always offering a listening ear, I thank Virginia Garrard-Burnett. For his constant and enduring friendship over the last two years, *gracias mil a mi querido* Daniel Mora-Brito. For his gentle companionship, and the many ways he challenged me to sharpen both my ideas and my writing, I thank Blake Scott. For my parents, thank you for instilling in me a passion for social justice and insisting that I take Spanish in high school. For Shannon and Karen Pappas, Cara and Judson Taylor, and Lesley Boyd, thank you for walking with me on the long journey to Nicaragua and back. For their generous hospitality and giving me a safe space in which to process my field experiences, I extend much gratitude to my dear friends Beth and Alan Claassen Thrush. For my Nicaraguan friends and colleagues, thank you for embracing me and teaching me so much about your beautiful land. Most of all, for opening up their homes and entrusting me with their stories, I am profoundly grateful to the people of Loma Verde. None of this work would have been possible without them.

April 6, 2011

"Era un pleito": Gender Dynamics and the Politics of Immediate Needs in Loma Verde, Nicaragua

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2011

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Much attention has been paid to the increasingly important role of women as social and political actors in Latin America. Though recent scholarship has examined women's activism in primarily urban contexts, this paper focuses on the case of poor rural women in Nicaragua. Based on participant observation and interview data collected over five consecutive weeks, this paper traces the pathways by which women's activism emerged in a context where traditional gender roles still predominate. These women's forms of participation—often on the basis of their interests as mothers—constitute a "politics of immediate needs" that responds to concrete matters of survival while introducing new issues of direct concern to women into the public sphere. However, community participation has also generated additional burdens for women who now juggle productive, reproductive, and activist roles. By exploring the complexities of these dynamics, this paper provides an ethnographic account of the highly nuanced contestatory process by which women enter the public sphere, collectively organize, and begin to challenge various gendered aspects of their society.

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Chapter One: Introduction

"…politics is also deeply embedded in the lives of those
destitute people who do not **mobilize** in the usual sense of
the term, without, however, being in any way **passive**." *Javier Auyero*

"Desde que una mujer trabaja con otra mujer
la mujer tiene más confianza en la mujer." *Flora Méndez*

REIMAGINING POLITICS

Twenty-six year old Flora Méndez[1] is anything but passive. The first time I met her, she was walking up a hill in Loma Verde with one arm bracing a heavy bucket of sand on her head. A recent construction project had just been completed in the village, and the remaining sand was being sold on a first-come, first-serve basis. To expedite the process, Flora had enlisted three or four other young women who made the trek several times up and down the hill with her under the scorching mid-day sun, each time with their buckets filled to the brim. Flora was preparing for the next stage of construction of her home, which at the time consisted of a cement bedroom, a lean-to kitchen and an open-air patio surrounded by cornfields.

Flora has been a "volunteer mother" since she was 17. Today, in addition to serving on the community's official *Gabinete de Poder Ciudadano* (GPC), she also coordinates a revolving credit fund committee and oversees a multi-site early childhood development program. During the summer of 2010, I observed how Flora—and other

[1] The names of the women and their village have been changed to protect confidentiality. However, based on the historical information and physical description offered later, some individuals who are familiar with the region may recognize the place under discussion.

women like her—have become important social and political actors in the small rural village of Loma Verde, Nicaragua. In the pages that follow I analyze how this process occurred against the backdrop of a society in which traditional gender roles still persist. Based on participant observation and interview data collected over five consecutive weeks, I describe how the ways in which these women organize, mobilize, and participate in community life constitute a "politics of immediate needs"[2] that responds to concrete matters of survival—health, education, and economic opportunity—paying special attention to the relationship between their participation in these activities and their daily household dynamics. As it will become clear, for the women of Loma Verde, "the personal is political," and vice versa.

One of the important contributions that feminist scholarship has made to the social sciences is to expand the understanding(s) of what is considered "political" (Hanisch 1970; Bookman and Morgen 1987; Naples 1991). Questioning the notion that politics is confined to what takes place in the so-called public sphere, the feminist perspective contends that the underlying power relations that govern society relegate certain issues and concerns (often those of women) to the private or domestic sphere, thus rendering them invisible. Within a feminist framework, the public/private divide is replaced by a conceptualization of politics that recognizes the intricate relationship between the two spheres and the need to engage women to confront the social and political inequalities reproduced by the artificial separation thereof. *Doing politics* thus

[2] This phrase has been used by many authors and has been associated with "popular feminism" in Latin America. See Jaquette (1994).

consists of more than directly confronting or engaging the state or its institutions; rather, it include a variety of struggles, as Naples (1991: 479) put it, "to gain control over definitions of "self' and "community"; to augment personal and communal empowerment; to create alternative institutions and/or organizational processes; and to increase the power and resources of their community."

Addressing the underlying causes of oppressive social relations, many feminists argue, requires challenging traditional hierarchical gender roles[3] and the "sexual division of labor" (Harstock 1983) which has historically perpetuated women's exclusion from the public sphere (Habermas 1989). This line of reasoning might seem to imply that a transformation of domestic roles and responsibilities must necessarily precede women's social and political inclusion. However, the experiences of the women of Loma Verde suggest that such inclusion can be gained in a variety of unexpected ways. By tracing the pathways by which women's activism emerged, I demonstrate how their current participation was precipitated by a combination of factors, including an acute preexisting awareness of personal and community needs, the specific opportunities presented by non-governmental organizations and the government, and a willingness to confront their skeptical and sometimes hostile partners in order to get involved. I then show how these women became increasingly empowered in their public roles while, paradoxically, little appeared to change in the domestic sphere.

[3] Here I am informed by the understanding articulated by Lorber (1994:1), who noted that gender "establishes patterns of expectations for individuals, orders the social processes of everyday life, is built into the major social organizations of society, such as the economy, ideology, the family, and politics, and is also an entity in and of itself."

The dynamic described above hints at some of the complexities of empowerment, a concept whose meanings have evolved and expanded greatly since its early usage by feminists and critical pedagogues like Pablo Freire.[4] It now includes a wide range of considerations including: self-confidence and control over life decisions (Kabeer 1999), political efficacy (Friedmann 1992), and/or economic independence (Eyben and Napier-Moore 2009). In the 1990s, the empowerment of women gained traction as a poverty-reduction strategy within the United Nations, subsequently becoming an essential tenet of development discourse and practice worldwide (Fernando 1997; Eyben and Napier-Moore 2009). While this newer discourse tends to foreground more individualized and instrumental aspects of empowerment (e.g. skill development), I favor an approach taken by Kathy Ferguson (1986: 217), who argued that empowerment is "the ability to act with others to do together what one cannot do alone." Implicit in Ferguson's description is the recognition that strategies of resistance employed by disenfranchised, marginalized, or oppressed people take place within a set of social relations that affect both individual and collective capacities as well as forms of social action.

The situation of the women of Loma Verde, who challenge certain aspects of established gender roles while still performing others, reflects the reality that the transformation of social norms and practices is a piecemeal process, hardly accomplished overnight. In the meantime, while the acquisition of new knowledge and skills has helped

[4] The notion of what it means to "be empowered," the extent to which the empowerment of individuals can be induced via external processes or actors, and what the concrete outcomes of such empowerment are remains an open and unresolved question. For a treatment of these issues in the context of social movements, see Hellman (2008). For more on empowerment and its roots in feminist thought, see also Marques-Pereira and Siim (2002).

women to grow in self-confidence, the most meaningful outcome and benefit associated with their participation has been the formation of a network of mutual encouragement and support that now sustains their individual and collective endeavors.

Very little, in fact, of what is done by the women of Loma Verde for their community is done alone. Thus, though scholars often differentiate between "collective action" and "community work"[5] (though they can overlap; see Naples 1998b), I purposefully use these terms interchangeably here to emphasize the sense of collective purpose and identity found in these women's narratives about their community activities and shared struggles. I also theoretically draw upon both social movement and community-based activism literature as a way of blurring the distinction often made between social and political forms of participation. But let there be no mistake: this is not a story about dramatic protests or large-scale mobilizations. This is an ethnographic account of the lived experiences of poor rural women who are juggling productive, reproductive, and community responsibilities. It is an analysis of the micro-mobilizations of this new kind of "activist mother" (Naples 1998a) and the "little protests"—the small daily acts of role negotiation—that are part and parcel of their community activism. It is a story about the varied and sometimes contradictory meanings of empowerment and resistance, both individual and collective, for women in Latin America.

[5] Generally speaking, the term "collective action" is used within the social movement literature to refer to various types of mobilization or protests originating in specific grievances and explicitly seeking political remedies or legal change, while descriptors like "community work" or "grassroots organizing" have been employed to capture an array of voluntary or paid activities aimed at some form of community improvement that may or may not have an expressed political objective.

METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

"Research is not and cannot be a
value free endeavor" *Mo Hume*

Though the present analysis is based primarily on ethnographic research I conducted during the summer of 2010, my contact with the people of Loma Verde began much earlier. While working for Food for the Hungry, a relief and development organization, I traveled to Loma Verde numerous times between August 2006 and April 2009 to conduct interviews with residents, attend community meetings, and translate for visiting delegations. Over time, I became familiar with the contours of the village and began to form relationships with several of the women whose stories are included in this study. My brief glimpses into women's daily lives and their role in community affairs during those early encounters laid the groundwork for the kinds of questions that I would seek to answer later—this time as a researcher—when I returned to Loma Verde in 2010.

As other ethnographers have noted (Scheper-Hughes 1992; Alcalde 2010), the kinds of inquiries we make—and the lenses we employ to interpret the answers we find—are often influenced by our personal, political, and intellectual biographies. In my case, my long-term commitment to Nicaragua, my previous connection to Loma Verde, and my established interest in exploring issues around women's agency and empowerment undeniably shaped both my personal approach to the community and the practicalities of data collection. From the beginning of my fieldwork, this preexisting relationship afforded me an immediate kind of access, credibility, and relational proximity to the nitty-gritty details of individual lives and group processes that I may not have enjoyed

otherwise. At the same time, the level of *confianza* bestowed on me demanded much more than the supposed "neutrality" of a detached outsider. For me, the only conceivable ethical response was to give in return, to emotionally invest in the lives of the women whose stories appear in these pages—not only by listening, which I did, but also by assisting in small but concrete ways in daily household tasks and community projects.

The danger of this deeper kind of engagement, of course, is that one can get too close, becoming so engulfed in the details of the maelstrom that the capacity to truly see "what is going on" is lost. As Burawoy (1991: 2) notes, "the closer you get to measurement on some dimensions—intensity and depth—the further you recede on others—objectivity and validity." However, the degree to which such objectivity can be achieved is questionable at best, since the so-called "bias" resulting from participant-observer interactions is in fact the "distinguishing feature of all social science" (ibid: 3). At the same time, power differentials may still lead to "other"-izing, the essentialization or exploitation of research subjects, even those whose voices and experiences we most want to represent (Bhopal 2010). Maintaining balance between distance and immersion and arriving at the elusive ideal of "dialogue" (Burawoy 1991) thus requires constant vigilance and care on the part of the ethnographer. In my own research, I have sought to be conscientious of these dangers, striving for the kind of "critical, reflexive" ethnography described by Lancaster (1992: 73) that "carries with it a political and moral dimension." While every theoretical framework and methodological lense is, as Kenneth Burke famously noted, a way of seeing and a way of *not* seeing, here I intentionally examine social reality from the female perspective, foregrounding the voices of subaltern

women in order to better understand the connections between the dynamics of their daily lives and the "public issues of social structure" (Mills 1959).

Turning to the specifics of my fieldwork: I lived in Loma Verde from June 18th – July 24th, 2010, during which time I stayed with five different families (one per week) who volunteered to host me. In each of these households, either the man or the woman (or both) were heavily involved in community activities. In addition to gathering fieldnotes about each family's dynamics, I observed four large-scale community events, nine organizational meetings (including agricultural and ceramics cooperatives, health promoters, and political leadership), and seven training workshops. Supplementing these notes are semi-structured interviews (see Appendix) lasting between 30-60 minutes which I conducted with 12 women, ages 24-42, all of whom were active participants in one or more of the aforementioned groups. For additional perspective, I also interviewed 9 men (pastors, political leaders, and husbands of activist women).

NICARAGUA IN CONTEXT

With a geographic area of 50,193 square miles, Nicaragua is the largest country in Central America. Most of its 5.8 million inhabitants are concentrated in the Pacific region, which encompasses the departments of Leon, Granada, Chinandega and the capital city of Managua, which has a population of 1.2 million. In terms of ethnic composition, 69% of the population is *mestizo*, located primarily in the Pacific and Central regions, while several different indigenous and afro-descendent groups inhabit the two semi-autonomous Atlantic regions (RAAN and RAAS). The country is primarily

Catholic (58.5%), though there is a strong and growing *evangélico* (Protestant) minority (21.6%).

Decades of war and an ongoing susceptibility to natural disasters have exacted a heavy toll on Nicaragua's infrastructure and economic capacity, ranking it consistently as one of the poorest countries in Latin America. As of 2005, the poverty rate was 48% ($2/day), and the extreme poverty rate ($1/day) was 17%. The most severe levels of poverty are concentrated in the Atlantic and Central regions of the country; meanwhile, overall rural poverty is a staggering 70%. The country's high underemployment rate (46%) has precipitated a large amount of both internal and external migration, contributing to a large number of female-headed households (36.7%). Nevertheless, the country continues to maintain a significant rural population (44%).[6]

The situation of women in Nicaragua is particularly precarious. Nationally, almost 7 out of every 10 women work in the country's informal sector, earning an average of 20% less than their male counterparts. Violence against women is common, with one of every two women reporting being abused by her husband.[7] Even among women, however, access to basic services and infrastructure varies. Rural women[8] have substantially less access to education, housing, potable water, electricity, and health care than those living in urban areas (see Table 1). Rural women also tend to marry extremely

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[6] Due to increasing urbanization rates over the last 30 years, distinguishing between 'urban' and 'rural' has become increasingly difficult. See Long and Roberts (2005).
[7] See United Nations Children's Fund Report (2000).
[8] Throughout Latin America, "the rural poor tend to be less educated, have less access to services, and worse health indicators than poor households in urban areas" (López and Valdés 2000: 44). Among this population, rural women are especially vulnerable due to lower education levels and discriminatory practices in land titling, labor and credit markets (Korzeniewicz 2000).

young, between 13-15 years of age, depending on the region, a fact which makes them especially vulnerable to dependence on and potential mistreatment by their husbands (World Bank 2009).[9]

Table 1: Urban and Rural Women in Nicaragua

INDICATOR	URBAN WOMEN	RURAL WOMEN
Illiteracy	12.3%	37.7%
4 years or more of school	77%	43%
Housing (2-room)	30%	50%
Cooking fuel	61% use butane or propane gas	92.7% use firewood
Piping/potable water	86.2%	27%
Electricity	44%	2.5%
Deliveries attended by a doctor	90%	33%

Sources: United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization (2008), World Bank (2009)

Historical background

Nicaragua's current socioeconomic context has been shaped by a long history of political instability and conflict. Following its independence from Spain in 1821, the country briefly formed part of the United Provinces of Central America before becoming an independent republic in 1838. Two rival political forces (the Liberals and the Conservatives) subsequently vied for government control, often resulting in bitter periods of civil war and requests for U.S. intervention. From 1909-1933, Nicaragua was occupied

[9] For a treatment of theoretical issues and case studies related to rural politics and gender relations, see Bock and Shortall (2006).

by U.S. Marines, who initially arrived to support the Conservatives against a Liberal revolt, but stayed on to protect various U.S. interests in the region. From 1927-1933, General Augusto C. Sandino led a guerrilla war against the U.S. military, which, together with the Great Depression, led to their eventual departure. Before leaving, the U.S. Marines set up and trained a National Guard, headed by Anastacio Somoza García, who rapidly consolidated power and took over the presidency in 1937. Over the course of the next four decades (1937-1979), the Somoza family gained control not only of the government and the military, but the majority of businesses as well.[10]

The social and economic consequences of the Somoza dictatorship were devastating for the majority of the population, but were especially felt by women, who were not even considered citizens by law until 1950, when they were granted the right to vote (Metoyer 2000). In some cases, women could not earn their own money and their children were under the complete control of their husbands (Stephens 1988). Men could end marriages on the basis on women's adultery, but male infidelity was accepted and often celebrated.

The illiteracy rate, while about 50% nationwide, was 93% among rural women. Diseases like malaria, tuberculosis, and parasitism were endemic. Fueling these health problems, in part was the fact that thirty-five percent of the urban population and 95% of the rural population lacked access to potable water. The average life expectancy was just 52.9 years (Rosset and Vandermeer 1983). A lack of adequate medical care for pregnant

[10] Among other holdings, Anastasio Somoza García and his family owned textile companies, sugar mills, rum distilleries, the merchant marine lines, the national Nicaraguan Airlines (Líneas Aéreas de Nicaragua--Lanica), and La Salud dairy, the country's only pasteurized milk facility. See the Library of Congress' Nicaragua Country Study online at http://countrystudies.us/nicaragua/.

women, especially in rural areas, contributed to an extremely high infant mortality rate, estimated at 120-140 per 1000 live births (Zwerling and Martin 1985).

Women in revolutionary Nicaragua

Prior to the Sandinista Revolution in 1979, women in Nicaragua had little history of collective mobilization.[11] During the 1970s, however, thousands of women participated in the revolution[12], gaining new skills and confidence which prepared them for a newfound level of social involvement (Maeir 1985). Following the triumph of the revolution, the FSLN-affiliated *Asociación de Mujeres Nicaragüenses Luisa Amanda Espinosa* (AMNLAE)[13] engaged women in large-scale social projects such as health and literacy campaigns, as well as national defense activities. Women also began to take active roles in a variety of labor unions,[14] cooperatives, and professional associations (Morgan 1990).

The Sandinista's 1980 literacy campaign and *Jornadas Populares de Salud* (1980-1982) had an enormous positive impact on the lives of thousands of women—both as participants and beneficiaries.[15] Women comprised 80% of health brigade activists (led by Dora María Tellez, one of the most prominent woman leaders in the new government),

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[11] One of the few exceptions is women's unsuccessful mobilization in the 1930s to demand suffrage rights. They did not receive the right to vote until 1955. See Morgan (1990).
[12] By the end of the guerrilla period, 30% of FSLN combatants were women (Molyneux 1985).
[13] AMNLAE grew out of AMPRONAC (Association of Women Confronting the National Crisis), which claimed about 10,000 members in 1979 (Zwerling and Martin 1985).
[14] The most prominent of these organizations were: *Asociación de Trabajadores del Campo* (ATC), *Unión Nacional de Agricultores y Ganaderos* (UNAG), and *Centro Sandinista de Trabajadores* (CST).
[15] For a detailed breakdown of geographic and demographic data concerning the Sandinista Revolution's activities in the early 1980s, see *Envio* (1982a).

and 60% of all teachers (Luciak 1995). At the end of the literacy campaign, according to government figures, more than 500,000 people had been taught to read, and the national illiteracy rate was reduced to 13% (Rosset and Vandermeer 1983). While these figures are impressive, Glenda Monterrey, AMNLAE secretary in 1981, emphasized the perceptible change in women that occurred.

> Mothers were teachers in the city and their daughters teachers in the country…they lived three, four, or five months with the peasants, working in the fields, teaching at night, and becoming a real part of these families. They experienced the terrible conditions of peasant life, and a new sense of solidarity was built at the same time, as these young women were able to take charge of their own lives, [and] make a valuable contribution. (Zwerling and Martin 1985: 91)

These opportunities to contribute to society outside the home were a substantial part of Nicaraguan women's growing sense of empowerment during the 1980s, and an important qualitative dimension of the impact of Sandinista policies on women.

The aforementioned community level initiatives were complemented by specific legal, policy, and infrastructural changes aimed at increasing women's social and political rights. AMNLAE played an instrumental role in advocating for many new pieces of legislation, including a ban on media exploitation of women (Walker 1985), equal custody rights and the right to alimony, and the recognition of de facto marriages (Luciak 1995). In addition, the Sandinistas passed laws that guaranteed the right to equal salaries, required employers to pay salaries directly to all employees over the age of fourteen, outlawed discrimination against pregnant women in the workplace, established pre and

post-natal benefits, and decriminalized abortion.[16]

Most importantly for those living in rural areas, women were given the right to own land and to participate in agricultural cooperatives[17] under the same terms as men, including decision-making, access to credit, technical assistance, and capital inputs (Metoyer 2000). As part of the cooperatives, women received classes on farm organization, chairing meetings, and giving reports, among other skills. By 1987, women represented 35% of the year-round salaried agricultural work force and 45% of the seasonal workforce (*Envío* 1987). Access to health care also substantially increased. Hundreds of new clinics were constructed in underserved areas[18] and fees for hospital and clinic visits were eliminated. By 1982, about 70% of the population had access to health care, compared with 28% before the revolution (Rosset and Vandermeer 1983). In terms of education, 52% of the participants (41% in rural areas) in the Adult Education Program, an extension of the literacy campaign, were women (*Envío* 1983).

While these programs undeniably had a positive impact on women's lives, the scale of their implementation was hampered by the escalating Contra War.[19] Economic and military pressure from the U.S. on the Sandinista regime intensified greatly during the mid-1980s, substantially reducing available resources for social programs. Defense

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[16] For an ethnographic study of the local gendered conflicts that emerged in the wake of some of these Sandinista policies during the 1980s, see Montoya (2003).

[17] In 1975, 133 cooperatives with 3144 participants were registered through the National Bank of Nicaragua. At the end of 1981, there were 3, 820 cooperatives in the country with a total of 62, 359 members. This number decreased to 22 cooperatives in 1978. See *Envio* (1982b).

[18] In 1978 there were 43 clinics. By 1983, there were 532. Rural hospitals increased from 37 in 1977 to 46 in 1982. The national health care budget allocated for health care increased from 8% to 11%. Polio vaccinations quadrupled. See Zwerling and Martin (1985).

[19] For an early chronology of the Contra war, see Rosset and Vandermeer (1983).

spending rose 43% between 1980 and 1986. A mandatory draft was instituted in 1983, leading to a feminization of the workforce as thousands of men left to fight the Contras in the northern central mountains. During this period, more than 30,000 people lost their lives and another 500,000 were displaced (Lancaster 1992). With rampant inflation and ongoing rationing of many basic necessities, those who remained struggled simply to feed their families. Ultimately, the twin "daily terrors" of economic crisis and war (ibid: 7) took an enormous toll on the Nicaraguan people.[20]

Under such a relentless assault, a policy of "national unity" eclipsed all other considerations. This directly impacted the advocacy work of AMNLAE, whose leaders were pressured by the FSLN hierarchy to limit their grassroots activism to mobilizing women for tasks directly related to the defense of the revolution, such as participating in neighborhood militias and assisting with critical economic activities like coffee and cotton harvests.[21] In practice, this meant that key issues related to what Molyneux (1985) termed women's "strategic gender interests"[22] such as sexual harassment, abortion, shared childcare responsibilities[23] and domestic violence were discussed timidly, if at all (Chinchilla 1990).

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[20] For more on the traumatic effects of economic hardship, war, and natural disasters on Nicaraguans, sees Cabrera (2002).

[21] From the beginning, the extent to which the Sandinista Revolution dealt with women's direct concerns was limited by its fundamentally economic aim of altering the structure of production relationships. Many Sandinista leaders at the time believed that addressing issues of class would bring about transformation in other areas, including gender relations. See Randall (1994).

[22] Molyneux (1985) distinguished between "practical gender interests," which address matters such as employment and healthcare, and "strategic gender interests", which have to do with overall power relations between men and women.

[23] In 1982, the AMNLAE drafted the Provision Law, which attempted to introduce child-support obligations and housework-sharing by men. The law generated enormous controversy and was never ratified. See Molyneux in Walker (1985).

The neoliberal turn and women-state relations

The defeat of Sandinista President Daniel Ortega in the 1990 presidential election ushered in a new era in Nicaraguan politics, including a new approach to social policy. Responding to Nicaragua's severe debt crisis, successive presidents Violeta Barrios de Chamorro (1990-1996) and Arnoldo Alemán (1996-2001) implemented many of the neoliberal[24] economic policies prescribed by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, including market deregulation, debt control and repayment, trade liberalization, and privatization of both industry and government-supplied social services (Metoyer 2000). For people in rural areas, these policies frequently led to decreasing access to land, shortages of capital, and higher rates of seasonal migration (López and Valdés 2000).

Ironically, the social, economic, and political conditions for women under Nicaragua's first woman president Chamorro deteriorated significantly. With the decline in state and other formal sector jobs, women were increasingly pushed into the informal employment sector, while simultaneously forced to assume greater responsibility for meeting household needs (childcare, for example) due to a reduction in state-provided social services; this is because of "the systemic inequalities between women and men and the traditional roles that assign women the primary responsibility for child care and household maintenance" (Metoyer 2001: 407). In this context, the decreased budget for

[24] Loker (1999: 11) defines neoliberalism as a "theory of political economy that claims that the market is the most efficient mechanism for the distribution of goods and services in society, that private property and capitalist economic principles are the most efficient means for the production of goods, and that state interference with the workings of the market…should be minimized."

health care services in Nicaragua was particularly devastating; according to a FIDEG study, 43/100 sick (and 56/100 female-headed households) had no access to health care in 1993, a 13% increase from 1988.[25]

As the State shrank and social services decreased, a rising number of both domestic and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) stepped in to fill the gaps. Throughout the country, urban and rural women increasingly turned to small-scale, grassroots feminist NGOs for basic needs assistance and advocacy (Álvarez 1999; Ewig 1999). Meanwhile, propelled by the increasing importance of women's issues within the global development agenda, a veritable industry of more technically oriented NGOs specializing in gender policy assessment, project execution, and social services delivery sprang up to serve the needs of governments seeking "specialized knowledge about women and gender" (Alvarez 1999: 190).[26]

Although some of these NGOs dedicated to women's issues were permitted entrance into certain realms of policy-making, such as participating on the board of the National Police Stations for Women and Children (Delgado 2003), their actions were also constrained by the state. For example, under President Alemán, the Ministry of the Family was given oversight of all NGOs with women-oriented programs (Kampwirth 2003). Any external funding received by these organizations was henceforth subject to

[25] FIDEG stands for *Fundación Internacional para el Desafío Económico Global.*

[26] Critics have claimed that this preference for *asesoria* has privileged certain kinds of women's NGOs at the expense of others which are more movement-oriented, questioning whether or not this development has truly resulted in better gender policy or women's rights advocacy. See Álvarez (1999).

review by the government. Feminist NGOs with more overtly political objectives fell under more intense scrutiny.[27]

The setbacks Nicaraguan women experienced during this period were part of larger context of corruption and *caudillismo* that characterized the presidency of Alemán. This was epitomized in the aftermath of Hurricane Mitch in 1998, one of the worst natural disasters in Nicaraguan history which exacerbated an already critical economic situation.[28] More than 1 million Nicaraguans were affected by the hurricane, which caused an estimated $1.5 billion in damages (Metoyer 2001). Following the disaster, the government directly received $58.5 million in relief donations, as well as a variety of longer-term loans from multilateral organizations, with millions more being channeled through local NGOs. However, controversies swirled around the fairness and efficiency of the distribution of resources aimed at reconstruction and recovery efforts (*Envío* 1999). In addition to being heavily criticized for his slow response to the disaster, President Alemán was later convicted of embezzling $100 million during his term in office, including siphoning off hurricane relief donations for personal construction projects (*Envío* 2002).

Altogether, the failure of neoliberal policies to resolve Nicaragua's pressing social and economic problems and pervasive corruption generated a growing sense of disillusionment and a desire for political change among the country's population, which opened the door for the Sandinistas' return to power. Although skepticism abounded

[27] For an analysis of how neoliberalism has impacted women's political participation, see Jaquette (2003).
[28] At the time, 40% of Nicaragua's export earnings were dedicated to debt service and combined unemployment and underemployment hovered at 60% (Metoyer 2001).

regarding Ortega's intentions, by 2006 some local feminists were nevertheless cautiously hopeful that his victory might lead to a renewed focus on pro-women policies (Blandón Gadea 2006).

Ortega returns: what new for women?

Thanks in part to a divided opposition and a change in electoral law, Daniel Ortega won the presidential election in November 2006 with 38% of the vote.[29] Since assuming office in 2007, the new Ortega administration has placed a renewed emphasis on social policy. The government eliminated many school and clinic fees, built new housing, and sought to address issues of food insecurity through programs like *Hambre Cero,* which targets female-head-of-households.[30] Another program called *Usura Cero* offers microloans and small business training to women, and reportedly distributed funds to 77,000 women in its first two years (Rivas 2010).

The new government also made several legal and structural changes affecting women. For example, in early 2007 it created a new governance structure called the *Consejos de Poder Ciudadano* (CPC), which was intended to increase local ownership of development planning processes and decision-making. In February 2008, the National Assembly also passed the *Ley de Igualdad y Oportunidades*, establishing new policies

[29] During the FSLN's years out of power, Ortega and then President Arnoldo Alemán entered into a power-sharing agreement, widely known as *"el pacto*", within which their two parties (the FSLN and the PLC) divided control of virtually all government institutions and electoral processes; this arrangement has remained in effect up to the present day. See *Envio* (2000).

[30] Zero Hunger beneficiaries (female heads of household) receive a *Bono Productivo*, which includes 1 pregnant cow, 1 female pig, 1 rooster, 5 chickens, construction materials to build animal pens, 5 fruit plants, 5 forest plants, tubes, fertilizer, and periodic technical assistance and training.

that all government agencies are required to follow in order to ensure equal opportunities and reduce discrimination and mistreatment of women.[31] However, Ortega has also been heavily criticized for his support of the ban on therapeutic abortion[32] which was passed by the FSLN-controlled National Assembly shortly before he took office, and—despite repeated large scale protests by the autonomous women's movement and international public health agencies—remains in effect. This is part of a larger shift in the political climate in Nicaragua, in which the spaces to express dissent towards the government (and Ortega in particular) have been diminishing (Friedman 2008; see also *La Prensa* 2008).

The preceding historical overview has shown that Nicaraguan women have experienced significant legal, political, and social advances as well as a variety of setbacks over the last forty years. Recognizing the importance that the particularities of place bring to bear on these macro-level policies and processes (Harcourt and Escobar 2005), I turn now to an examination of the trajectory of women's social participation and the dynamics of community activism in the small village of Loma Verde, focusing on the lived experience of the women themselves.

[31] Ley de Igualdad de Derechos y Oportunidades. Ley No. 648. Approved February 14, 2008 by the Asamblea Nacional. Published in La Gaceta Nº 51 on March 12, 2008.
[32] The term "therapeutic abortion", which was legalized in 1893 under Penal Code Article 165, refers to abortions done to save the life of the pregnant woman.

Chapter Two: The Politics of Immediate Needs

"What my eyes saw was simultaneous; what I shall write is successive, because language is successive. Something of it, though, I will capture." *Jorge Luis Borges*

THE SETTING: LOMA VERDE

Henry, a short thin Nicaraguan man whose soft eyes light up when he grins, picked me up on Friday, June 18th at 9:30am from Marta's pink brick house in Somotillo. Somotillo is a one-stoplight town (pop. 10,899[33]) five kilometers from the Honduras border in the department of Chinandega; it serves as the municipal hub for the area (1,089 km^2), which also includes 31 *comarcas* (outlying rural communities). As community development facilitators for the last five years in Loma Verde, Henry and Marta were two of my "key informants" at the beginning of my work in the village.

That morning, I jumped on Henry's motorcycle and we headed to a noisy outdoor market where I bought some basic provisions for the week. "They have rice and beans and eggs," Henry said. "You won't need them." The day before, I had sent my suitcase ahead with Regina, whose family I would be staying with my first week in Loma Verde. With my backpack stuffed to the hilt and various fruits and vegetables stashed in red and green plastic bags hanging from both arms, I precariously balanced myself behind Henry as we slowly made our way northeast on a rocky dirt road towards Loma Verde. During the drive, Henry brought me up to date on community events since my last visit over a

[33] As of the 2005 Census. http://www.inide.gob.ni/censos2005/CifrasMun/Chinandega/SOMOTILLO.pdf

year earlier. From my previous work in the region I was already familiar with various aspects of the rural village. However, my understanding would grow exponentially this time around, thanks to numerous interlocutors who shared their collective memories and personal experiences with me during the five weeks I spent with them.

The entrance to Loma Verde is marked by a small blue hand-painted sign on a concrete bench (which also serves as a bus stop) that says: "Welcome to Loma Verde, founded in 1982, Population 400: Productive Activity, Agriculture and *Artesanía."* A rock-laden path runs through the center of the community gradually sloping downward toward a stream that used to divide the *"parte abajo"* (also known as "sector la plaza") from the "*parte arriba*" (or "sector escuela," for the location of the elementary school) on the other side. Houses—mostly adobe with a few brick ones scattered throughout—are clustered together on either side of this central pedestrian thoroughfare, and in the less accessible green hills above where some families grow corn and other vegetables.

According to the government's 2005 census, half of the households in Loma Verde live in extreme poverty, while another 31% live below the poverty line.[34] The overall illiteracy rate in 2005 was 33%, but is decreasing.[35] With the exception of four families, no one possesses a legal title to their land. Most inhabitants are subsistence farmers and rent small plots from wealthier property owners in the area in order to plant crops (mainly corn and beans). Some families supplement their diet by raising chickens,

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[34] The Nicaraguan government census defines "poverty" at the household level as having one of 5 basic needs unmet, and "extreme poverty" as having two basic needs unmet. The five basic needs categories are: overcrowded housing, structurally inadequate housing, insufficient basic services, low education, and economic dependence.

[35] Census data (INIDE 2005) shows that the illiteracy rate among men and women (14-29) is decreasing.

pigs, or cows; others have fruit trees or small patio gardens where they grow vegetables like squash, tomatoes, and green peppers for family consumption. However, hunger is an ever-present concern during the dry months (January-May), when families rely on crops harvested in the winter to last them through the next planting season. There are a small number of wells by which the community accesses water. All cooking is done using traditional wood-burning stoves. Most families have one outdoor latrine.

Physical access to Loma Verde is extremely limited. There is only one extremely rocky road to the community, which is prone to flooding during the rainy season. Public transportation consists of an all-terrain covered truck, which travels to and from Somotillo twice a day. A large number of residents access electricity illegally via the main power lines that run through the community. There is no phone service, with the exception of one landline and a few individuals who have cell phones (though making or receiving calls requires a twenty minute trek into the hills to find a signal). What little news that arrives from outside the community typically comes through word of mouth, radio or less commonly, television. One trained nurse lives in Loma Verde; the nearest clinic is 3 kilometers away and the closest hospital is in Somotillo, 45 minutes away. There is one elementary school (K-6) within the community, but children must travel at least two kilometers for secondary education. A few families with refrigerators run small *pulperias,* where residents can buy snacks, juice, soda, bread, batteries, and other small items; the nearest large market is located in Somotillo.

"The dirt was caked on their faces"

Loma Verde initially formed due to migration from another nearby village in the 1930s and 1940s, and for many years was considered a sector of the nearby *comarca* Jiñocuao. In 1982, the community was finally granted official status within the municipality, at which point it formed its first local governance committee, the *Comite de Defensa Sandinista.*[36] The Sandinista government at the time trained and compensated men and women to be health and literacy promoters, including Arturo and his wife Alicia in Loma Verde. Sitting in a green plastic chair in the kitchen with his wife on the door stoop next to him, Arturo recalled the many problems they confronted at that time and the difficulties of making changes:

> Women wore pillow cases as skirts. It was dirty. There was zero personal hygiene. The dirt was caked on their faces. People came to sell but not to buy. People here didn't even know their own bodies. People wouldn't listen to talks on family planning. They listened more to outsiders than to each other.[37]

These comments were echoed by Miguel and Diana, both long-time leaders in Loma Verde.

> Back then we hunted armadillos. The neighboring communities discriminated against us. The youth couldn't marry anyone outside the community—they felt inferior. The other communities called us 'indios', which hurt us a lot. (Miguel)
>
> The pigs walked around free, you would see the excrement of the animals in the street. From the community entrance you could smell it. And if someone bathed and changed their clothing, people would say, what, did you get married last night or something? (Diana)

[36] As noted in a previous section, the *Comité de Defensa Sandinista* was intended to be a grassroots level form of vigilance against the Contras.
[37] All translations by the author.

These serious issues with health and hygiene were compounded by distrust in the leadership at the time, which is said to have mismanaged funds and other donations, leading to a split in the community.[38] Eventually Alicia stepped down. "I got tired of working like that," she said; later, though, two of her daughters (Raquel and Regina) would become two of the most active women in the village.

Crises and interventions

Over the years the community's serious health and economic problems have attracted the attention of various non-governmental organizations.[39] In the early 1990s, Loma Verde's reconfigured *comité comarcal*[40] received donations from the European Union and the Red Cross to dig several wells and construct numerous latrines throughout the community. The faith-based *Asociación Kairos para la Formación* (AKF) conducted spiritual formation and leadership workshops and community exchange activities, and provided short-term assistance in the form of loans and *canastas básicas*. In the wake of the catastrophic Hurricane Mitch in 1998, which destroyed many people's homes and eliminated vehicular access to the village, an emergency radio system was installed with support from the Lutheran Church. In 2001, Save the Children began to train volunteer

[38] In my interviews with both men and women, problems with alcoholism among male leaders were also mentioned, leading to a committee decision in the early 2000s to prohibit the sale and consumption of alcohol within the community.

[39] This rise in NGO activity coincides with the "shrinking state" that occurred following the defeat of the Sandinistas in the 1990 presidential election. During the 1980s, bilateral and multilateral cooperation occurred largely in coordination with the Sandinista government; in the 1990s and early 2000s, NGO activities increased and became more decentralized (Kampwirth 2003).

[40] The *Comité Comarcal* (1990-2006) was a 6-member body comprised of 3 men and 3 women, the coordination of which rotated among several men during this period. With the victory of Daniel Ortega in the 2006 presidential election, the leadership structure changed to a 16-member body in 2007 known as the *Gabinete de Poder Cuidadano* (GPC).

mothers and established the first revolving credit fund in the community. In 2003, a large Somotillo-based Baptist church with an affiliated mission in Loma Verde initiated the *Evangelismo Comunitario Salud* (ECS) program[41], forming three new groups in the process: health promoters, a patio garden group, and a pottery collective. In 2004, *Asociacion para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos* (ADP) began similar local interventions in the area of health education and formed an agriculture cooperative, which 30 families joined. Member families contribute corn and/or *trigo* to silos located in a communal bodega, from which they and other families can now purchase grain at a favorable rate throughout the year. The ADP cooperative is one of two local sources of credit available to residents for planting and harvesting their crops (various kinds of grains and beans). The other is through Save the Children, who upon their departure in 2006, left C$27,000 (approximately USD$1,300) to be managed by a group of village women.[42]

Seeds of change

The proliferation of NGO groups during the 1990s and early 2000s brought with it a significant increase in individual participation within the community, of both men and women, but other problems remained. Among them, many of my interlocutors mentioned, were an ongoing conflict between the two "sides" of the community, and a sense of dissatisfaction with the community's leadership. "The *comité comarcal* didn't do

[41] Community Health Evangelism, as it is known in English, is a development strategy created by LifeWind International (formerly Medical Ambassadors) which has been replicated by many other churches and development organizations around the world. For more information, see http://www.lifewind.org/che.htm

[42] Based on exchange rate as of August 2010. All the women of the community were initially invited to participate in this cooperative, but only 16 of them do.

anything, just for themselves," remarked Carolina. Meanwhile, the arrival of multiple Protestant denominations added another layer of tension as residents became polarized along both geographic and religious lines.[43]

Following the victory of Sandinista Daniel Ortega in the presidential election of 2006, a new local governance structure called the *Gabinete de Poder Ciudadano* (GPC) was established in Loma Verde. Within the GPC, the number of people serving on the former *comité comarcal* rose from 6 to 16, and members were given specific responsibilities over distinct areas such as health, education, women, youth, etc. Miguel, the GPC coordinator, is a young man in his early 30s and a long-time Sandinista supporter whose political acumen is widely recognized in the community.[44] In the evenings, his eyes were glued to the screen of his small television as he followed the news from Managua. During our wide-ranging conversations about local and national politics, Miguel explained to me how the members of the expanded *gabinete* have tried to increase people's sense of ownership over the resolution of their problems.

> If the community participates, it's informed. If it's informed, there is awareness (*sensibilización*), care for the environment, and respect for ourselves. We began to say, Loma Verde will be what we want it to be…Being poor doesn't mean we have to be dirty (*cochina*), we told the people. The change in Loma Verde, the recovery of the dignity of Loma Verde, is in our hands. Yes we can, if the willingness (*voluntad*) is there.

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[43] The Catholic Church has the longest history in the community, extending back to the 1970s; the three other denominations (Lutheran, Baptist, and Church of Christ) entered the community in late 1990s and early 2000s. Early on, there was a tendency for these latter churches to compete with one another for adherents, but the pastors and leaders I interviewed told me that this is no longer a significant issue.

[44] During my fieldwork, I observed Miguel's close relationship with the mayor and city council of Somotillo, who visited the village for an event inaugurating a construction project funded by the municipality in May 2010.

Though GPC structures have been criticized in some quarters for being highly politicized and agents of state control,[45] this does not appear to be the case in Loma Verde. To the contrary, the prevailing sentiment (of both men and women) expressed toward the GPC and the broader Sandinista government is a positive one. Pastor Ricardo told me, “Before, if you weren’t Sandinista [in Loma Verde], the projects never came to you, but it’s not like that anymore. Everyone benefits now.” Leonor, a local dispute mediator and health educator, views the government’s latest policies as particularly favorable for women like her. “Now,” she said, “the loans and *bono productivo* are given in the name of the woman even if the man is the one who has to pay it back, because a woman’s word is more reliable than a man’s.” For Leonor and others, the state is seen as an ally that has provided women with previously unattainable support and resources.

Women also expressed specific appreciation for the expansion of the GPC decision-making circle, and cited the requirement that the leadership be comprised of equal numbers of men and women as evidence of “*menos machismo*”[46] in the community.[47] Yolanda, a single mother, school teacher, and GPC member, explained, “Now it’s not just the coordinator who can do *gestiones*,” she said. “Any of us can go to the municipal government in Somotillo with a proposal, and they will listen to us.” This was concretely illustrated during my stay in the community on several occasions, as I

[45] See, among others, *El Nuevo Diario* articles from December 9th and 13th, 2007.
[46] “*Machismo*” is a term used to refer to a particular form of dominant masculinity characterized by attributes such as physical strength and sexual prowess. It can also express itself in chauvinistic and violent behavior towards women.
[47] I never witnessed an equal number of men and women at the GPC meetings I attended. When I asked Arturo about this, he told me “well, the meetings are long and some men do not like their wives to walk alone at night, so they don’t come.” In this sense it is interesting to note the differences between discourse and practice.

witnessed multiple women coordinating with government ministries and NGOs to organize events and mobilize resources, processes described in greater detail in a subsequent section.

Coinciding with these changes in governance, some residents also deemed 2006 a turning point in terms of the level of organization and unity among villagers, though various competing narratives circulate concerning exactly how (or if) their longstanding divisions were overcome. For some, the newfound unity was consolidated later, in 2008, after an outbreak of leptospirosis brought the community together to save the lives of their livestock, which almost had to be killed to prevent the spread of the disease. For others, the changes can be traced back to a meeting in 2009 in which the GPC invited the pastors from all four local churches (Catholic, Baptist, Lutheran, and Church of Christ) and coordinators of other local organizations to help plan and participate in the very first elementary school graduation held in the community.[48] Meanwhile, religious leaders told me repeatedly, "This [our progress] is not just a project of men; it is the hand of God." Still, many of my interlocutors also made comments suggesting that amidst the positive developments, tensions remain.[49] "The people over there [referring to the school side] don't appreciate everything we do for them." "They [referring to the plaza side] don't take us into consideration. Meetings are never held over here." "We [school side] never receive any benefits."

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[48] In 2009, 5th and 6th grade were added to the local primary school.

[49] While an in-depth analysis of religious dynamics is not the focus of this study, several residents commented that religious tensions remain between the Catholics and evangelicals due to differences in what is considered acceptable behavior (e.g. drinking, smoking, dancing, celebrating patron saints).

Despite these unresolved issues, the increased coordination and collaboration between political and religious leaders (in some cases one and the same) has undeniably contributed to various practical improvements in community life, several of which have required fairly complex and long-term processes of resource management and community mobilization. For example, responding to the community's annual water shortage, in 2008 two NGOs combined efforts to begin the process of building nine rainwater storage tanks throughout the community (at locations decided upon by residents). With the exception of a few technical experts, all of the construction work was done by residents; by the time I left the village in July 2010, eight of these tanks had been all or mostly finished. Additionally, shortly before my arrival in June 2010, the municipal government had allocated funds to Loma Verde to construct a large ditch to divert water from the creek that for decades had divided the village in two and created a dangerous crossing during the rainy season. On my first day in Loma Verde, Alicia told me that the mayor's office had delivered the concrete and other materials and sent engineers to oversee the process, but it was the community who built the ditch, which they finished in just one month. "You should have seen it; there was no one in their houses—everyone was out there helping," she noted proudly.

During my five weeks living in Loma Verde, I repeatedly observed other community-wide mobilizations (clean-up, assemblies, public events) similar to that which Alicia described. While in a few cases both men and women were involved in these events, the majority of village level activities were either planned and/or executed predominantly by women. Given the historic exclusion of women from public leadership

roles, how did this transformation occur? What effects has it had on the daily lives of these women and their families? The following section delves into these questions by focusing specifically on the lives and trajectories of the women who are involved in various forms of community activism in Loma Verde.

ACTIVISM ANTECEDENTS AND ACTIVITIES

The literature on activism and social movements points to two broad explanations for an individual's decision to participate in collective action. First, *a priori* biographical factors, such as the influence of parents or mentors, experiences with injustice (broadly defined), or beliefs about personal efficacy and the possibility of change may predispose an individual to respond favorably to calls to action (McAdam 1988). Second, individuals may become volunteers or activists in response to a specific opportunity, problem, or request despite the absence of any prior observable inclination toward such community involvement (Auyero 2003).

In either case, once engaged, volunteers, community workers and activists tend to base their continued involvement on various kinds of benefits. Such benefits can generally be grouped in four (not mutually exclusive) categories –tangible, intangible, individual, and collective. Tangible benefits might include things like developing new skills, learning new information, or receiving material goods. Examples of intangible benefits include: a heightened sense of empowerment, voice, influence, stronger relational bonds, or recognition (Auyero 2003; Polletta 2006; Wood 2003). In a later section, I explore the specific meaning of the benefits women in Loma Verde experienced

as a result of their activism. Here I lay the groundwork by tracing how women initially became involved in the community and the kinds of work they engaged in. I then discuss how this involvement has affected women's daily lives and household dynamics.

In Loma Verde, like much of Nicaragua, women historically had little role in the public sphere. Community leadership and decision-making was restricted to men, often from those families with longer histories of residence in the community, more property, or resources. Diana, 42, is a mother of six, long-time health promoter and a member of the *Gabinete de Poder Ciudadano* (GPC). "Before," she said, "we women did not participate. When there was a meeting, or an assembly, we were hardly there, just men, the organized men." Yolanda, 42, a single mother of three and elementary school teacher, concurred. "Before, women hardly went to meetings, or even to school, because the man said, what are you going to do? Don't go. I will go, because it's the man that belongs there."

These longstanding beliefs about the "proper place" for women and men have played a significant role in the daily experiences of women in Loma Verde for most of their lives. However, this began to change in the 1980s with the Sandinista government's national efforts at increasing women's participation; the trend continued—albeit via different structures—in the 1990s with the entrance of various NGOs in the community, as well as concomitant actions taken by community leaders. Miguel, the current GPC coordinator, explained:

> When ADP first entered four years ago, we [the elected leaders] held separate assemblies with men and women. We wanted women to feel like they had their

> own space. And we told the men that it's important to value women's participation and contribution to the community.

In a subsequent section, I address some of the implications of NGOs' role in the emergence of different kinds of social and political participation in Loma Verde. Here attention is paid to how women responded to these kinds of opportunities.

In at least two cases, the affirmative responses of women to calls to action appear to have been influenced by unique biographical factors. Liza and Regina were both active as teenagers in church youth groups where they say they "lost their timidity" and grew comfortable interacting in group settings. Liza, a mother of three, has now been a health promoter for eight years, while Regina, a college student studying social development, has been a leader in a health education program and the youth representative within the GPC for the last two years. Regina, whose upright posture and direct eye contact communicate an air of confidence, attributed her long history of involvement to the support and encouragement of her parents, both long-time political and religious leaders in the community. Her father Arturo is a member of the GPC and the pastor of a local church, and her mother Alicia was a health promoter in the community in the 1980s. As we sat under a shady tree, Regina explained what their support meant to her:

> I think my parents' confidence in me has made a difference, and their influence too, because I liked to participate and I have been going to different trainings since I was 12 years old. And they gave me permission to leave the community, two or three days, it doesn't matter.

Compared with her peers, Regina has had an unusually wide range of opportunities to become active in the community, thanks to the latitude and trust granted her by her parents.

Although biography and personality do contribute to underlying motivations for activism, the substantial rise in women's participation in Loma Verde, I suggest, is less a product of these kinds of individual experiences and more a result of those common to all members of the community.[50] In the interviews I conducted, all the women referred back to a request or invitation from an NGO (Save the Children, *Asociación para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos* (ADP), or *Evangelismo Comunitario de Salud* (ECS) to explain their current activities. In most cases, the women said they wanted to learn new skills or acquire new information to become better mothers and address the pressing needs of themselves, their children, and/or the community as a whole.

> So I decided I'm not just going to ask for things [*pedir*], I'm going to give. I can do something here even if it's just weighing children, which I know is community work because now the moms won't have to go to Jiñocuao [nearby town] just for that. We can do it here. (Raquel)
>
> What motivated me was my daughter, I had to bring my daughter, so that she could have a better development. Also, the support I could give to other children and mothers that needed help, and to become more integrated in the community…so that I could teach my children, my family, and in my house have more knowledge as a mother. (Maria)
>
> [I got involved] to learn. And to help and give advice to other mothers. (Carolina)

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[50] This argument is based on interviews with women who accepted opportunities to participate in community activities. Accounting for variance in women's levels of activism would require a comparative analysis of negative cases, that is, women who have avoided such involvement.

These women's remarks contain three major cross-cutting themes: (1) their identity as mothers, (2) working for the community by caring for others[51] and (3) the importance of the acquisition and imparting of knowledge. Each woman expresses a sense of responsibility not only for their own families, but for other women and children in the community as well. While it is difficult to tease out retrospectively to what extent this collectivist orientation existed prior to their involvement, these activist women now see the community as an extension of themselves—one even going so far as to describe it as part of their own body: "Just like this body is my body, I have to take care of it. The same with the community—it's mine and I have to take care of it, make it beautiful." This language reflects a different narrative of "politics" in the traditional sense of political parties or electoral campaigns. Leonor told me frankly, "Politicians are liars. They promise things but don't deliver." Negatively assessing this kind of self-interested behavior by past leaders who sought benefits solely for themselves, the women instead equate "good politics" with "*trabajo comunitario*." In other words, "good politics" means considering the needs of the whole, taking collective responsibility, and involving and nurturing others.[52] "The benefits have to be for everyone," Leonor concluded, "because we are all hungry."

The women who initially signed up to be health promoters and volunteer mothers in 2001 with Save the Children attended a series of workshops and trainings on topics like illness prevention and treatment, breast feeding, child nutrition, and family planning,

[51] For more on aspects of women's caregiving, see Gerstel (2000).

[52] A similar paradigm of women's community activism has been found among some groups of minority women in the United States. See Naples (1998b).

which they subsequently replicated to others in the community. In the beginning, a large portion of the work was door-to-door house visits, but when ADP entered in 2006, the group expanded to almost 30 "organized" families, and the women's activities began to involve higher numbers of planning meetings, workshops, events, and reporting.

Today women perform an ever-expanding range of tasks, not only as volunteers for NGOs, but also as local coordinators for new government initiatives related to early childhood development, clean water, and pregnant women's health. On any given day, the most common sight outside Liza's brick house in the sunny dirt patio known as the *plaza* is a circle of brightly colored plastic chairs filled by women. During five weeks alone in the summer of 2010, there was an average of one three-hour meeting (including training workshops or planning meetings) every three days, plus five major community events (an inauguration ceremony for two recent construction projects, a soy fair, a community clean-up, a community assembly to prioritize projects for next year's municipal budget, and a short-term team visit). Carolina, 35, a soft-spoken woman who has been serving as a health promoter for eight years, described the many varied tasks that she has taken on over the last several years.

> Another thing I am doing is working with [Agua Segura], I go house to house, I have to document whether 10 families are putting chlorine in their water, how much water they consume daily…if they say, I drink 20 liters of water a day, I have to do the math, how much do they drink in a month, and then fill out the paperwork and send it to the hospital. [It's part of] Agua Segura. Through MINSA (Ministry of Health)…I make *cloro* to give the community. There are talks [in Somotillo], where they give me sueril, acetometaphin, gloves, liquids to clean wounds, to help the community…we go to meetings every month, and since

> we also work with *Plan Parto*, we walk with all the pregnant women, giving them these cards, because every pregnant woman has to have one.[53]

The opportunity to become volunteer mothers and health promoters opened the door for unprecedented levels of women's participation in Loma Verde. How did the assumption of these new roles affect women's daily lives? What changes occurred in their routines and relationships as a result of their community activities? I explore these questions next by focusing specifically on the connections between women's involvement in the public sphere and private household dynamics.

"Era un pleito": Activism and Daily Life

"La mujer es la primerita que se levanta
y la última que cena" -David, resident

In interviews and informal conversations, men and women alike credited much of the improved quality of life in Loma Verde to women's efforts. Thanks to monthly community clean-ups organized by women, both the dirt path that runs through the village, and the water ditch that diverts the creek that formerly divided the community in two, are clean and free of debris. Education and outreach by women health promoters have made disease outbreaks and infant deaths increasingly rare. Gardens planted with

[53] It is worthwhile to note in passing that both NGOs and the state have relied on these women to engage in all of the aforementioned tasks on a voluntary basis, without any kind of compensation. This is due at least in part to the smaller and more decentralized state which places greater authority for development with local and regional governments, and depends on NGOS to perform many social welfare functions.

vegetables and/or herbs tended by women organized through ADP now adorn formerly bare patios in front of many houses.

The examples above reflect some of the public, observable changes that women's participation has brought to Loma Verde. Less visible but equally important are how women's new roles in community development have impacted their own daily lives, schedules, and relationships. In order to analyze these dynamics, in this section I examine individual women's routines and descriptions of their husband's responses to their newfound involvement. Relying on both interview and participant observation data, I suggest that in many cases, activism has generated additional burdens for women due to the lack of changes in the traditional distribution of domestic responsibilities.

Routines and responsibilities

The typical day for the Loma Verde woman begins early.

> *Clap-clap-clap. I wake up to the sound of the "palmada"—the sound of tortillas being made. Before dawn's first light (5am) the girls were up and at it. Eva swept debris off the front patio, Jenny rinsed grain to prepare to take it to the grinder, and Regina went to get water from the well, while their mother Alicia took several logs from against the wall and placed them in the stove to start the fire. Arturo lounged in the hammock in the kitchen talking to his wife, who stood by the stove carefully monitoring the burning wood. After drinking his coffee and eating a piece of sweet bread, Arturo left to work. Alicia swept the chicken coop, while Jenny cooked rice, beans, and plantains. A few hours later Jenny walked up the hill to the other side of the community to bring her dad his breakfast.* (Fieldnotes, June 20, 2010)

No sooner is breakfast over does Alicia move on to hand-washing the laundry in the outdoor *lavadero* (sink) while her daughters prepare lunch. Arturo comes home from the

fields in early afternoon to eat and rest. Suffocating heat or unpredictable downpours make working the fields in the afternoons difficult. Organizational meetings and events are mainly held in the early afternoons for this reason. If weather permits, a robust game of soccer takes place in the late afternoon in the *plaza* among the younger men. At dusk, the men return to their homes for the supper their wives have prepared. The physically demanding work required of both women and men means that evening activities are few.

Besides a few hours in the afternoon between lunch and dinner, women were rarely *"desocupada*" during the time I spent in Loma Verde. In addition to their duties within the household, women also contributed to their families' livelihoods by picking beans, gathering firewood, milking cows, making *cuajada* (cheese), selling eggs, and creating pottery, among other things. Given women's already extremely busy lives, it seemed logical that their assumption of additional roles and responsibilities in the community would produce some kind of change in household dynamics—whether in their relationships with their partners and children, their daily use of time, or their prioritization of tasks.

"Whether you like it or not, I'm going."

One of the first changes that women's participation created was various kinds of tension between themselves and their *maridos.*[54] During their interviews, most women indicated that their *maridos* were vocally opposed, unsupportive or at best ambivalent

[54] Since many of the women in Loma Verde are not legally married, I refer to their partners using the word *marido*, the term most commonly used in the community.

about their decision to get involved in community development projects and activities. The interview excerpts below concretely illustrate how these conflicts initially arose.

> When I began to participate, it was a fight. I'm going to be honest. It was a fight…my companion did not want me to go with [my daughter] to the program. And I went, I said, I want to be a volunteer mother to help. And when I came back I talked to him. He told me he didn't want me to go with the girl, or me alone either, because it would be a waste of time. So I told him, I'm not going to not go just because you say so. One, because I have a right as a woman. Also, I told him, I have to go because it's my responsibility to take the girl there, so that she can develop better—which is your responsibility too. You don't have the right to tell me not to go. Whether you like it or not, I'm going. (Maria)

> In the beginning, when I went to the trainings, I had to go with [my son]. [Husband] said, you just like to go out with the child, he's going to get sick. But I told him, no he won't. They give him lunch there. But later, leaving so much, to go weigh [babies], to give talks, [he saw] I wasn't fooling around. At that time I was living with my mom. Then I became part of ADP, and twice, sometimes three times a week in meetings. Later I accepted the position on the funds committee and I have to go do paperwork and everything. So he said, you're not kidding [*no fregués*]. Now that you live in [your own] house, you don't take care of it. You just want to go to meetings. We argued a lot about this. [He said] you just want to go to meetings, not do anything. (Raquel)

> Before, since this is how men are, when you begin to leave your house alone, leave your family alone, he said to me, "and us here, with me working, what are we going to do?" But I said to him, if you don't go other places to learn what you don't know, you never get ahead [*sale adelante*] like you want to. (Carolina)

Maria, Raquel, and Carolina's stories are representative of most of the women I interviewed, who argued extensively with their *maridos* at the early stages of their community involvement.[55] According to the women's accounts, their *maridos* posed two primary objections—first, that their wives should not leave the house, and secondly, that their attendance at meetings was a "waste of time." At the root of these concerns appears

[55] Marital conflict has been associated with many kinds of women's activism. See, for example, Krauss (1998).

to be a fear that women's absence from the home would adversely affect their ability to complete their domestic responsibilities—understood as cooking, cleaning, and caring for the children and her *marido* himself: "*Now you live in this house, you don't take care of it." "The child is going to get sick." "With me working, what are we going to do?"* The women's accounts above also show that their decisions to become activists had an immediate and direct effect not only on their relationship with their husbands but also on their children, who they often had to bring along with them to meetings and trainings.

Relational networks, role negotiation and the 'third shift'

Over time, women's persistence and counter arguments regarding the positive benefits of their involvement for the community as a whole and their own families began to lessen their *maridos*' opposition. Perhaps just as importantly, women assuaged their *maridos*' fears by continuing to cook, clean, and look after their children to the same extent they had in the past. When women were (are) gone for large portions of the day, they relied (rely) on their mothers and older daughters to help with the many time-consuming tasks of daily life in the *campo:* grinding corn, making tortillas, carrying water, gathering firewood, cooking rice and beans, sweeping the house, bathing younger children, and hand-washing clothes. Several men also attested to this dynamic: "When [wife] is gone, the kids go hang out with their grandmother." "I have a 17-year-old daughter, she takes care of the house when [wife] is at meetings."

Kinship networks and the exchange systems developed within them have been shown to be a critical "tool for survival" among the poor in various contexts (Lomnitz

1977; Stack 1974); here I extend on this concept by arguing that these kinds of networks also provide the means by which women are able to participate in community life. In particular, the informal "cooperation of a cluster of adult females" (Stack 1974: 94) who willingly assume responsibility for their mother's, daughter's, sister's, or cousin's young children at a moment's notice (in this case, without any clear system of exchange in play) gives these women activists much needed flexibility to attend meetings, conduct trainings, or even leave the community. Women without these networks find themselves at a disadvantage in terms of their ability to be involved. For example, Paola used to be part of the organized ADP group but told me that she couldn't continue because she had small children and she had no one nearby to help her take care of them while she went to meetings. "If you miss the meetings, you're no longer a *socio*," she explained.[56]

The social solidarity that kinship networks provide, however, does not eliminate all of the costs of women's grassroots activities. Liza, whose mother lives in another community and has only a 13-year-old daughter to rely on to help with her two younger sons (8 and 3), articulated a profound sense of guilt over neglecting her family.

> The only thing is, yes, I neglect [*descuido*] my children, I neglect my family because going to workshops sometimes we go 3-4 days in a row to Somotillo, we leave at 6am in the morning and return at 4:30pm. So, I neglect my animals, my children, my house, everything. But I know it's to learn (…) sometimes Jacob hasn't had a bath, when Tamara goes to class on Tuesdays also, and sometimes [the workshops] fall Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, sometimes Jacob hasn't bathed, or Mateo either, the chickens sometimes haven't had water, but when

[56] The extent to which women view the lack of support from family members as an obstacle to community activism seems to vary. There also does not seem to be any firm rule regarding the presence of children at ADP meetings or any other kind held within the community. Two other women repeatedly brought nursing babies with them. The larger obstacle appears to come with roles which require women to leave the community entirely.

> [*marido*] is here, he takes care of it (…) Tamara is bigger now, so I tell her, do this and this and this (…) before she didn't help me with anything **(…)** and this is what happens to all of us. Sometimes there was a dead chicken, what do I do, you know, but now that she's bigger, I tell her, when I'm not here, you're going to do this and this and this, but no [*mentira*], she always forgets, so one neglects her children. There are workshops where they let us bring the children but you can't concentrate with children around. Because the mother gets really distracted, and maybe there's no budget for food, and so both the mother and the child go hungry [*aguanta hambre*] …we've been to workshops where there's not even a snack.

Liza's story reveals some of the complex meanings of activism for some poor, rural women. In order to attend meetings or trainings, she and her children may go hungry, or find her animals (a source of both food and income) injured or dead upon their return home. Her personal sacrifices of time and energy are compounded by additional pressures to maintain her household alone. Though Liza's told me "with him I've never had problems," her partner's absence in her narrative of how she tries to cope with her many responsibilities implies a different reality.

Some women explained their partners' limited support as a result of the men's work away from the home. Because most families in Loma Verde do not own land adjacent to their homes, they typically must leave early in the morning (6:30am) and travel long distances (1.5km-3km) on foot to work the rented fields where they grow their crops. Thus, the explanation goes, they are simply not present to help with household tasks like cooking or cleaning. Meanwhile, the men that I talked to admitted difficulty in initially accepting women's increased public role, but claimed to now accept their wives' community activities and/or recognize their equal position in the home.

> It's wonderful that women work for the community. I was angry at first but now, everything is fine (*no pasa nada*)…she [wife] has changed a lot, she's really capable (*capacitada*) now. (Camilo)

> There are men who think that since they're the boss, they have the right to give orders, and that the woman ought to bring him food, water, etc. But there are two leaders in every house, two people who run things. (David)

> I feel good when my wife is called to a meeting. When she has to go to Somotillo, I give her the time. She doesn't have to worry about anything. (Edwin)

> When my wife is gone, I take care of things at home. (Juan)

Despite men's expressions of appreciation and claims of support for their wives' activities in our conversations, their behavior tells a different story. During my time living in the community, most men came home from working in the fields between 11am-12pm and spent the rest of the day in the community, resting, watching television, playing soccer, and/or engaged in small house improvement projects. Even when special events (planned by women) occurred, such as a combined *feria de soya* and community clean-up in July, most men sat nearby watching the "action" in the plaza and talking amongst themselves. This seeming contradiction between women's justifications, men's verbal claims, and my observations of men's actions points to an underlying role negotiation that may be at play; men do not impede their wives from assuming active public roles as long as women do not challenge established routines "*en la casa.*"

Raquel, 27, and mother to two young children (9 and 2), is a volunteer mother and treasurer for ADP. Her story exemplifies the aforementioned dynamic:

> I always go [to meetings]. He hardly likes it. But we talk, and I tell him, one is poor [*uno es pobre*]. Maybe there is enough to buy food, but not a latrine. Not to buy a chicken coop, because that's expensive. So now, he doesn't get that angry. I have to get up, make the tortillas, leave the food made, and when I come back,

> even if it's cold, then we eat. Since we get out late from the meetings, I leave the food ready so that they can eat, and I go…Beforehand I do half, and when I come back, I finish…So I feel free to go wherever, there's no problem, as long as I leave the food made, when we have it, and when we don't, oh well [*ni modo*].

In the interview excerpt above, Raquel explains how she tried to convince her husband of the value of her work based on tangible benefits they would receive that they would otherwise not have access to, such as a latrine or a chicken coop. Though she claims her husband does not "get that angry" anymore, what is most noteworthy is her later comment that "there's no problem, *as long as I leave the food made*." In other words, her arguments about the positive changes in their life made possible by her activism were not as important as her completion of domestic duties, which is what has and continues to "keep the peace."

While Raquel's story is emblematic of the women I interviewed, one woman's story stands out for its apparent differences with the others. Flora, 26, did not grow up in Loma Verde, but a small neighboring community; "unfortunately my father couldn't afford to pay for school, so I only went through 5th grade," she told me. Flora recalled that her parents communicated little and lived largely separate lives until her mother decided to leave her father due to an abusive situation. When Flora was 15, her mother took Flora and her siblings with her to live with her grandmother in Loma Verde. At 17, Flora got involved in the community as a volunteer mother through Save the Children. During this time, she made other organizational connections that allowed her to travel outside Loma Verde and as far as Managua to participate in youth trainings. Three years later, she met her *marido* Alejandro and they had their first child, who is now five years

old. Even while pregnant and in the early years of motherhood, Flora told me that she continued to work: “I liked it. I was pregnant, and I worked. I carried my son and my bag with me, and I went out.” She is now the director of a women’s cooperative that manages a revolving credit fund, the women’s representative on the GPC, and the local coordinator for the government-sponsored early childhood development program, *Programa Amor*.[57]

In the midst of these myriad activities, Flora emphasized how she felt her *marido* supported her.

> When we met, he [*marido*] was young and working for the Red Cross as a volunteer also. And I was working, and he saw me, that I was working, and when we finally got together, he felt that this was mine (*era lo mío*). Since this is where I grew up, where I was born, and it was mine, it was my life. He never told me, don’t work. He never told me anything (…) Sometimes I think that if I had been with another kind of person, a *machista* man, then yes, I would have had problems. But he, in this case, doesn’t have problems. When I go to meetings and come back…I come home tired, and he says, “I made dinner, do you want some?” If he had been a different kind of person, I think my work would have gotten stuck [*estancado*], but no, he’s not that way.

Flora contrasts the typical “machista” man with her own partner, with whom she claims to have a different kind of relationship than other women do with their *maridos*. One of the key observable differences in her case is that her community involvement began prior to her relationship with her *marido*. For all other women (excluding the previously

[57] Begun in 2008, *Programa Amor* is part of Nicaragua’s National System of Social Welfare overseen at the national level by the Secretary of Communication and Citizenry for Social Development (presided over by first Lady Rosario Murillo), which involves the cooperation of six government ministries, municipal governments, and local councils of citizen power (GPCs). Its stated objective is to restore the rights of children to health, safety, education, and overall well-being (Ministerio de la Familia; *El Nuevo Diario* 2008).

mentioned case of Regina), activism was preceded by the establishment of a household, with its related routines and expectations. In her narrative, Flora says her partner helps her with the cooking, yet I also observed that she too relies on her mother, grandmother, and mother-in-law to take care of her son when she has meetings or projects to do. Thus, the close-knit web of familial solidarity that activist women in Loma Verde rely upon extends to Flora as well. While clearly beneficial, these informal reciprocity networks also serve to veil some of the actual costs of women's work in the community. Still, women like Flora who can call upon their mothers or older daughters for help with childcare tend to bear a relatively smaller burden than those who cannot.

In summary, although their experiences differ slightly, the common thread tying these women's stories together is how their community-level participation creates what others have termed a 'triple burden' (Craske 1999) or 'third shift' (Gerstel 2000). Like their urban counterparts in other parts of Latin America (Rodriguez 1994), these rural women are now engaged in income-generation activities, household duties, and voluntary activism. As Cosgrove (2010) has noted, however, the theoretical division of women's activities into separate categories is an artificial one that tends to overlook the practicalities of how women must juggle these triple roles simultaneously on a day-to-day basis. The characteristics and substance of women's activism "out there" are in fact inseparable from facets of daily household life.

Despite the clear personal costs they incur (lack of free time, uphill battles at home), these women—some of whose involvement spans almost nine years—remain undeterred in their work on behalf of the community. To the contrary, most have become

increasingly active over time. In the following section I examine the various kinds of benefits women have experienced that have contributed to their continued participation.

THE BENEFITS OF "TRABAJO COMUNITARIO"

"Si uno no está organizado,
no hay beneficios." *Leonor*

It's 2pm on Wednesday. After scaling a steep hill planted with corn, I reach Maria's adobe house. The inside is bare, with the exception of a few plastic chairs, a table, some blocks, balls, and tree leaves on the floor. "We don't have a lot of resources," she said ruefully, "but we try to make the most of what we do have." Maria, a light-skinned round woman wearing a blue skirt with her black hair tied back in a pony-tail, stands by the table as we make small talk and wait for the other women. A pale pink paper flower is taped to the far left wall, with the name of a woman carefully printed on each petal. In the center reads: "rol de cocina" (cooking schedule). Next to it is a small chart featuring pictures of the four food groups. As the women arrive with their children in tow, Maria welcomes everyone and explains the day's activities. She kneels down on the dirt floor and invites one of the boys to play with her, encouraging him to kick over a tower of blocks. Over and over again until he gets it. Maria never seems to lose her patience, energetically and playfully interacting with each of the kids and encouraging the other mothers to follow her example. Later Maria carefully lays a cloth over the table before placing a tiny 2-month old baby on top of it. She alternates between flexing and stretching each of the baby's tiny legs and arms while loudly cooing at the child, who happily assents to the exercise motions. After the games, Maria gives a short lesson on nutrition for babies; "We might not have much," she says, "but with just one peso you can buy an egg, and that's better than sweets." An hour later, Maria's two daughters help her distribute the day's snack, rice and soy-based chorizo and milk, which everyone eats before departing. (Fieldnotes, July 7, 2010)

For the last year, Maria has been one of the coordinators of *Programa Amor,* an early childhood stimulation program begun by the government that relies on volunteer social workers like Maria.[58] Raised by a single mom, she initially got involved in the community nine years ago as a volunteer mother through Save the Children, a role which

[58] Maria told me that the government did not actually train her, but recruited her due to her previous experiences as a volunteer mother.

she has maintained informally ever since. As previously noted, Maria experienced a great deal of resistance from her *marido* when she first began to volunteer. “I knew there was going to be a sermon when I came home,” she told me, “but I went anyway.” Why have women like Maria continued to give their time and energy to the community? In this section I attempt to answer this question by examining the personal changes these women have undergone as well as other kinds of benefits they have obtained through various kinds of community activism.

Personal efficacy and collective solidarity

> I used to be really timid when I was a girl. I was even embarrassed to say my name; when they told us we had to introduce ourselves, I would tremble. But not anymore. Now I can introduce myself anywhere, and I feel normal. Serious questions too, I can answer, if I know about the topic. I can participate in a meeting. If I have a workshop, I can do it. So it has served me a lot to have gotten involved in the development of the community. (Maria)

> Before I felt like my self-esteem was low. Today my self-esteem is higher. I don’t feel the same as before. We see that we as women have rights.We can work in the community, do something for the community so that it develops. (Diana)

> I was scared when I received the training and they told me, you have to go give it there [in Loma Verde]. I said, I’m never going to get up in front and give a talk, I’m embarrassed. I won’t be able to talk. You do it, I said to Flora….I’m going to faint from nerves. But later we rotated, and she said, it’s one day for each of us. Okay, I said, if I started this, I’m going to figure out how to do it. So I learned how to give a workshop for the women, and (*laughing*) I didn’t faint like I thought I would. (Raquel)

Echoes of Maria, Diana, and Raquel’s narratives are found in many of the stories of women activists in Loma Verde. A seemingly insurmountable fear of public speaking and participation is gradually overcome through a series of small opportunities for self-

expression and skill development, slowly increasing women's confidence in themselves, their ideas, and their abilities. Leonor put it this way: "I began, above all, to see my worth. And that people valued me." Economic benefits seem to pale in comparison to the growing sense of empowerment women articulate as a consequence of the knowledge they gain via their community participation, as Raquel's and Flora's comments indicate.

> I have worked for the community without any benefits—at least not economic ones. But in learning and skills [*capacidad*], yes. (Flora)
>
> If I am in the house all the time, no one will come to tell me anything, to give me a talk. If I had never gotten involved, maybe I would never know how to take care of a child, what to do when a child is sick, how to know my child is sick. If I hadn't gone, I wouldn't know. I wouldn't have learned anything…. (Raquel)

There is an implicit nexus between knowledge and power[59] in Raquel's narrative; knowing how to care for her children gave her increased agency over her own personal life circumstances while also spurring her interest in further social engagement. Despite her partner's opposition, she assumed her role as a volunteer mother and began sharing her knowledge and skills with other women. Later she took on additional responsibilities as the *cajera* for ADP, expanding her skills into the area of accounting; now, she says, "I don't need anyone to tell me now what buttons [on the calculator] to press, or how to do the conversion…I can do it myself." She is proud to have proven herself a competent, contributing member of the organization: "I have taken good care of the money from the credit fund and I know the people trust me, because I have never given a bad accounting of the money I am in charge of."

[59] Here I follow Foucault (1980), acknowledging power's fluid and relational nature, and its connection to discourse/knowledge.

The knowledge that Raquel and others gained were not for them alone, though; as the women emphasized, it was meant to be shared with other mothers for the betterment of their children's lives.

> The knowledge I gained I shared with other people, and I have seen that the other mothers are interested. (Raquel)
>
> [This knowledge] is not just for me here in my head, it's for the other women and children too…so they can develop better. (Maria)

An awareness of how their social participation would benefit not only themselves but also the next generation ["*son el futuro de nuestra creación*"] is a key element influencing women's continued work for the community. In a sense, it could be argued that their interest in and pursuit of collective (rather than solely individual) benefits is driven in part by this long-term vision of the future.

At times, the women of Loma Verde described an additional benefit associated with their work: positive recognition from other mothers and male leaders in the community.

> [It's encouraging]…when you see that the men support you, celebrate you, [saying] Flora is a good leader, she works hard, and when the moms come to me with their children who are sick, [it shows] the trust within the community…that mothers have toward me. (Flora)
>
> So maybe it hasn't been my desire to be one of the best, but when I am no longer here, [I hope] that they would say, "she too worked for the community." (Regina)

The women's descriptions of recognition are congruent with their wider narrative about working *"para la comunidad."* They do not seem to value recognition for its own sake,

but only insofar as it results from their community efforts. In that same vein, projects or activities that contribute to the overall quality of life in the community are referred to frequently and proudly, while those benefiting one individual or even a small group receive little public attention. Leonor, whose community participation began as a volunteer elementary school teacher, says "the truth is that if you are not organized, there are no benefits….but [we] look for things that benefit the whole community, not just one person." Here we find echoes of an observation made by Nancy Naples (1998: 153) in her study of poor urban women activists in the United States vis-à-vis the difficulty of "detaching individual processes of empowerment from collective empowerment strategies." In other words, women derive their sense of increased efficacy not just from what they have achieved for themselves, but from what their efforts have yielded for the community.

While it is difficult to pinpoint the origins of this collectivist mentality regarding participation and benefits on the part of Loma Verde women, some of its roots may be traced back to Sandinista policies, such as the health campaigns and the cooperative approach to land reform. Another contributing factor is some leaders' formative experiences within the *comunidades de base*, a Catholic grassroots movement grounded in liberation theology that was present in the community during the 1980s. A third aspect, as mentioned in a previous section, is the collaboration between the community's political and religious leaders, whose recent discourse has centered around the need for the people (including women) to "work together" to overcome local challenges.

Women's predisposition toward collectivist action has been reinforced by the kinds of participatory structures in which they are currently engaged. For example, as Leonor mentioned, tangible individual or familial benefits (such as latrines, seedling trees, chicken coops, or agricultural loans) are available, but acquiring them requires "being organized,"—the community's shorthand for membership in a cooperative, or volunteering with one of the various NGO or government programs operating in Loma Verde.

> If we hadn't been organized with ADP, they wouldn't have given me a chicken coop. They wouldn't have given us a latrine. So you have to be organized so that the NGO helps you. **Because the people who aren't organized don't have anything**. (Carolina, emphasis mine)

Though not required for most government benefits[60], being part of an organized group is still the surest way of receiving material aid, a fact which is also not lost on the men of the community when considering the value of women's participation.

> My *compañera* is part of this credit fund group, so now I don't have to be thinking about going to a bank where the interest rates are higher. So I think to myself, this was worth it, that my *compañera* has gotten involved…it's women's contribution toward the development of the family—and not just the family, but the community. (Miguel)

> Thanks to the actions of women, there are a lot of programs here. If the women hadn't adopted…maybe they would have left. But the women got involved, and we have seen positive results. (Roger)

[60] The government's *Hambre Cero* program, for example, does not require being part of any pre-established group, but family nominations to the municipal government are made by the GPC, whose recommendations tend to favor those with a proven track record of participation and responsible use of credit.

Miguel and Roger's comments reveal how, in their view, the most important benefits resulting from women's participation are material in nature (credit, for example). However, the actual distribution of material goods (whether by the government or NGOs) is sporadic and uneven. In fact, when pressed to identify benefits she had personally received, Leonor admitted that "in my house, there haven't been many." She quickly added, though, that she has benefitted immensely from two recent community-wide projects: (1) the new ditch—a joint endeavor between the community and the municipal government—that now keeps her son from having to walk through a river on his way to school, thereby making him less prone to illness, and (2) the nine new rainwater storage tanks (constructed by the community with funding from various NGOs), which address the general problem of water scarcity during the five-month-long dry season. Women consistently referenced these kinds of communal improvements and their relevance to their daily lives, much more than any specific individual benefits they received from their social participation.

Sustaining social capital

To focus on material rewards—whether individual or collective—is to capture only part of the picture, however. One of the most important benefits for the women activists themselves has been the opportunity to develop relationships with other women. What some men call a "*pérdida de tiempo*," for these women represents a vital social space, a unique opportunity to laugh, cry, vent, share experiences, and "*salir de la rutina.*" As Flora put it: "When [we] are in a circle of women, there is trust to share

among each other. I live like this, this is what has happened to me …we women understand each other and the life of another is an example to me." Two brief fieldnotes excerpts—one from a meeting and another about a community activity—illustrates the dynamic that Flora describes, and provide a glimpse in real time and space of women's experiences with social participation and activism.

> *By 9:30am, the 12 women of the ceramics cooperative were assembled outside Liza's house waiting for a woman (Elena) coming from Managua to do a workshop…When Elena finally arrives, the women form a circle in the patio shade. Elena apologizes for missing last month's meeting. "Since I missed being here for Mother's Day, maybe we could sing a Mother's Day song to start," she suggested. The women agreed, and as they sang, Elena got up and walked over to Juana who was covering her eyes and crying (her mom had died this year) and hugged her. After the song, Elena asked them to share their thoughts about the situation of the cooperative. Woman after woman spoke about the obstacles they were facing—the lack of land, titles, access to funds to invest in a new oven—in different words, some on the verge of tears, "sueños que no van a realizar" [dreams that will never be realized].* (Fieldnotes, June 25, 2010)

> *Around 10am I joined 10 women (and Marcos from the Baptist church) who had gathered to accompany the two health promoters (Diana and Carolina) for their monthly community walk-through. Diana and Carolina held clipboards with a spreadsheet checklist of different things to look at in each house, including: cleanliness of patios and latrines, chlorination of water, use of chicken coops, possession and use of medicinal plants. As the 13 of us meandered up and down the steep and muddy footpaths to reach the increasingly remote houses, animated chatter and laughter filled the air. At each home, Diana and Carolina asked the woman present a series of questions guided by their checklist; meanwhile Liza, Maria, and Marcos walked around the property to check out the latrine and what plants they had. The other women stood or sat in small clusters on rocks or benches outside (or chairs, if invited inside) and made small talk while waiting for the others to finish. At 1pm it started to drizzle. No one had an umbrella, but we all kept going. Two women passed selling bread, which I bought some of to share with the group. Three hours had passed. When we finished, we sat down in Liza's patio to do a quick evaluation of what we had seen. One house was deemed "incorrect", two "regular" and the rest satisfactory.* (Fieldnotes, July 6th, 2010)

In the first snapshot, a safe space is created for openness about both personal trauma (the loss of a mother) as well as the expression of doubts and fears about the collective enterprise itself (the pottery cooperative). In the second, a large group of women show up to be part of a task whose completion technically requires only a few. In different ways, both excerpts hint at the true meaning of the encounters among these women, which is not to be found in examining the tasks at hand but rather how the very act of being together facilitates a kind of relational intimacy, vulnerability, and solidarity that sustains their continued activism.

While a specific reason, no matter how small, is always articulated to convene a meeting, whether of the pottery, agricultural, or health-related groups, the purpose of the gathering is not merely to "get something done", but to be together for the "doing". This is reflected in small but important ways, such as in the standard practice of waiting for every woman to arrive before beginning a discussion (often a 30-45 minute process), spending an hour deciding what refreshments to make for an event, or cooking in groups for community functions. Given how busy the lives of these women are, such a use of time might be labeled by some observers as "inefficient" or "unproductive." In fact, other women who are not involved in the community described the seemingly endless meetings in just such terms, calling them a "headache" and "a waste of time," saying "*ni entiendo lo que está pasando*". For the women activists, though, this is the place where they acquire the strength to withstand the pressure of their ambivalent and sometimes hostile

partners and propel their participation forward. It is the place where, following Bourdieu (1985), the relational networks that produce social capital are formed and consolidated.[61]

The other face of participation

Such high levels of cooperation and relational solidarity do not eliminate the possibility for moments of frustration, boredom, disagreement, or conflict, however. During a five week period, women complained to me on several occasions about the number of meetings they had to attend and/or their relevance, expressed resentment when someone else in the group was not doing their share during a community clean-up, and disagreed openly with one another about event logistics and resource allocations. One particularly noteworthy incident occurred during the preparations for a community-wide event inaugurating the recently completed ditch and water tanks to which representatives from the municipal government and NGOs had been invited.

> *We finished chopping the chicken, went back into the house, and threw it into big pots to cook. Carolina and Liza left to check on the set-up area, leaving me alone in the kitchen cutting up carrots, peppers, and tomatoes. Soon the women return (along with two teachers who live outside the community), and the kitchen is bustling with chopping and laughter. At one point someone asks, "Where's Diana" and the group complains about her absence. "I'm going to bring this up when we [the committee] do the evaluation," someone says.* (Fieldnotes, June 22nd, 2010)

[61] Portes (1998:7) wrote: "Whereas economic capital is in people's bank accounts and human capital is inside their heads, social capital inheres in the structure of their relationships. To possess social capital, a person must be related to others, and it is those others, not himself, who are the actual source of his or her advantage."

Though no obvious "hierarchy" emerged, there is a clear recognition among the women that the distribution of work, even among them, is not equal, and the burdens of convening and coordinating activities fall more heavily on some than others. Once, when the women of two different organizations met together to plan a "*feria de soya*" and community clean-up, a disagreement arose over how to fairly involve everyone and document participation, leading to long periods of silence. "*Mujeres, ¿qué vamos a hacer?* ¡*Hay que hablar*!" exclaimed Liza frustratedly. On another occasion, when Carolina and Diana had organized a workshop on family planning, Liza told me, "I already know all about this [topic], but I have to go anyway." Though infrequently expressed aloud to me, these kinds of comments reveal how experiences of social participation can at times provoke feelings of solidarity and obligation, enjoyment or irritation.

PUBLIC PLACES, CONTESTED SPACES

"Space is permeated with
social relations." *Henri Lefebvre*

Despite the periodic tensions described above, what is most noteworthy is how women make their collective physical presence felt in public spaces, holding meetings in the plaza, walking the paths of the community, doing clean-ups, conducting surveys, gathering information, checking on the health and welfare of other families. In doing so, they regularly remind themselves and the entire community that these spaces and roles

belong to them, and that as women, they have a right to be listened to and that their opinions should be respected.

> We have the same rights as a man. The right to voice and vote, the same as a man. (Leonor)
>
> We see that women have rights too, and that we can. We can work for the community, and do something so that it develops. (Diana)
>
> As leaders, we (women) are taken into account in decisions that are made in the community. (Maria)

As these women's comments suggest, their participation has given them an increased awareness, not only of their own capacities, but also a strong conviction about their rights and equal status with men. In fact, several women specifically mentioned the *Ley de Igualdad y Oportunidades* (passed by the National Assembly in 2008) to me as an example of equal rights enshrined in the law which they expected to protect them.

These women's articulation of their equality with men and their right to participate in the public sphere subtly points to the important connection between the physical appropriation of public space and the exercise of citizenship. Through "people's social exchanges…and daily use of the material setting", "scenes and actions that convey symbolic meaning" emerge (Low 1999: 112). In this case, women's presence and actions (often related to their formerly 'private' role as mothers) in public spaces where they were not allowed or welcomed before are a way of "elevat[ing] domesticity" (Brusco 1995) by making aspects of the domestic, public, and formerly invisible issues, visible.[62]

[62] As Stephen (1997: 273) put it, "Women's presence within…what is culturally labeled a public space makes visible the fact that mothering has always been both public and private."

By no means has this process been fully realized, however, As we have seen, though public community spaces are increasingly egalitarian, paradoxically, private spaces still seem to be governed by the same dominant gender norms and roles. Nevertheless, while the distribution of some tasks within the sexual division of labor (e.g. cooking, cleaning, childcare) remain visibly unchanged, other so-called "private" issues are indeed becoming visible. This emerging contestation of the old public/private divide most clearly manifested itself through a public workshop on family planning which took place during my fieldwork. As part of the meeting, the men (including several pastors and the GPC coordinator) and women in attendance openly discussed the importance of "couples dialoging" about decisions concerning the number and spacing of children, as well as issues related to labor and delivery that merited community support, like monitoring pregnant women's health and helping them get to the hospital in Somotillo if needed.

The existence of this open forum does not imply that reproductive issues are resolved or no longer contested by men. In fact, though women told me that the use of birth control is now fairly common, it is still a very contentious matter. As Flora told me, "I've been asking Miguel (the GPC coordinator) to start a men's club to talk about the issue, because the women really want it." Nevertheless, the fact that it is now acceptable for these issues to be discussed publicly demonstrates how what is defined as "common concern" in a community can be influenced by discursive contestation by "subaltern

counterpublics,"[63] in this instance, women (Fraser 1992). Like the case of the U.S. women's movement which Fraser analyzed, the women of Loma Verde have also employed "the heretofore quintessentially "private" idioms of domesticity and motherhood…as springboards for public activity" (1992: 115) in a way that has begun to expand notions of the common (public) good.[64]

Initially motivated by their identity and interests as mothers to participate in the community, these women have raised public awareness about the importance of the roles they used to perform only privately and individually, caring for their own family in their home. The seemingly insignificant collectivization of tasks like cooking and cleaning has not only had a personal empowering function in the lives of the women—important in itself—but has also recently opened the door for public discussions about some of the specific needs of women once considered matters to be addressed only "*entre pareja*." Open forums about family planning (like the one I witnessed) suggests that women's reproductive health and children's well-being are beginning to be perceived as collective (public) responsibilities, an essential component of ensuring the entire community's well-being and positive future development.

This blurring or merging of what are considered "public" or "private" matters is often set forth as a necessary condition for ending both the historical systemic exclusion of women and their interests, and the gendered hierarchical division of labor. In the case

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[63] Fraser defines a subaltern counterpublics as "parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs (1992: 123)

[64] Women have used their identity as mothers for political and social action in a variety of contexts; see for example Bouvard (1994); Stephen (1997); Ray and Korteweg (1999), Bayard de Volo (2001).

of Loma Verde, the mobilization of women has indeed given them an increased public role, yet there is no evidence of a change in domestic responsibilities resulting from women's social participation. To the contrary, as previously noted, women have taken on a "third shift" in order to perform their community activist roles. Given how frequently the public exclusion of women and the sexual division of labor are theoretically (Harstock 1983; Ferguson 1984; Pateman 1988; Huiskamp 2000) and empirically (Gerstel and Gallagher 1994; Pardo 1998; Khor 1999; Bryson, McPhillips, and Robinson 2001) linked, how might the findings of the present study be interpreted in this regard? What accounts for the apparent paradox between women's increasing prominence in public roles and their continued performance of traditional gender roles at home? It is to these questions that I now turn.

HEGEMONY AND VULNERABILITY

Understanding how the social inclusion of women's voices and interests in the public sphere has transpired without any discussion of the need for change in established patterns of domestic responsibilities must begin by examining the specific localized opportunities and constraints the women of Loma Verde have faced in their journeys as community activists. As a point of departure, it is important to recall that these women are embedded in a highly precarious social and economic context, in which their survival depends to large extent on men's agricultural labor. Another significant element of the panorama is the role that NGO and government interventions have played in encouraging

women's participation.[65] These organizations have introduced valuable resources, knowledge, and participatory structures which have been subsequently appropriated by the women of the village. As Leonor put it, "The NGOs come and do trainings, trainings, trainings. But they do not tell me what I need. I say what I need." The programmatic priorities of the NGOs in Loma Verde reflected a concern for resolving critical practical issues (e.g. health, agriculture, credit access), and were obviously targeted at women, but did not make challenging gender hierarchies an explicit part of their agenda.

Still, as other scholars have pointed out (Safa 1990), in the daily lives of women, 'practical' and 'strategic' gender interests are not so easily separated—what begins, for example, as a group activity to improve mother's health can become the springboard by which women start to voice their opinions or collectively organize around other potentially more controversial issues. The very process of moving domestic concerns into the public arena is a step toward "redefining the meaning associated with domesticity to include participation and struggle rather than obedience and passivity" (ibid: 362). Thus, unlike Pardo (1998: 276), who argues that "women's community activism can either change the traditional domestic division of labor or reinforce "traditional" gender expectations," I suggest that the processes by which transformations in gender relations occur are much more nuanced than what such a dichotomous assessment permits one to see. In other words, while the direct contestation of the sexual division of labor would theoretically enhance women's inclusion in the public sphere, the lack thereof should not

[65] For a critique of the model of NGO-driven community participation, see Dagnino (2008).

be automatically interpreted as a "reinforcement" of traditional roles or indicative of a kind of fatalistic passivity on the part of women.

Rather, the dynamic observed in Loma Verde points to how hegemonic norms (Gramsci 1971) can and do operate simultaneously alongside expressions of women's agency. In other words, women may choose to contest certain aspects of their reality based on an assessment of their own resources and potential gains—but also based on their own awareness (consciousness) of the ways in which they experience marginalization or oppression in a felt (or material) way. Hegemonic norms governing power relationships go unchallenged in areas where such awareness is absent. Even when consciousness around these issues exists, however, confrontation is not inevitable. For example, while discussing firewood collection (a task mainly carried out by women) with Yolanda, a young boy overheard our conversation and commented, "My mom always goes to get the wood." Yolanda immediately replied, "Tell her not to do that. That's a man's job, men are stronger." This kind of awareness was articulated by several women, but only one of them (Sara) has directly confronted her *marido* on the matter.[66]

Anecdotal evidence of this type suggests that the socialization process in which activist women are engaged is impacting both their individual self-concept and attitudes towards their daily life circumstances. Articulating and sharing their personal problems with one another has enabled them to form new (expanded) identities and develop a commitment to collective organization, two important steps toward confronting "the

[66] Sara left her husband Elvin for a period of time to work in another community but eventually got back together with him. When I spoke with Elvin, he told me (partly in jest), "Women are in charge now. Sara says whether I eat or not."

naturalness of their oppression" (Rodriguez 1994: 42; Naples 1998). Given the nascent quality of these dynamics, however, it would be premature to attempt to predict how or even whether the sexual division of labor will become a topic of public (or private) debate in Loma Verde.

In the meantime, the alternately purposeful and unintentional challenges that these women have made to longstanding gender roles by entering the public sphere represent the kind of indirect strategy common to groups whose vulnerable position may not permit them the "luxury of direct confrontation" (Scott 1990). Given the highly dependent economic position of women in Loma Verde, pursuing a shift in gender relations through the established modicums of motherhood and community welfare (as they have done up to this point) has arguably constituted a "safer" path (though not without risk or conflict, as we have seen) than opting for direct confrontations with their partners over domestic responsibilities. Furthermore, the former course of action is consistent with women's own oft-articulated priority of securing the material welfare of themselves and their families, which differs from the typical (western) "feminist perception of the family as an arena of conflict between men and women" (Jaquette 1989: 193).[67] Ultimately, then, the ways women participate politically and socially in order to combat forms of gender inequality may depend, as other authors (Craske 1999) have argued, not only on an awareness of oppression but also a reduction in their level of economic vulnerability.[68]

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[67] Brusco (1995:3) goes further, writing: "What is clear is that for Third World women the family cannot be discounted. If we are going to exclude women from feminism because they value the roles of mother and wife and because they see the family as their source of strength, if we accuse them of false consciousness, we are committing a grave error."
[68] For a treatment of women's economic vulnerability in Latin America, see Gonzalez de la Rocha (2001).

CONCLUSIONS

"Todo es político." *Gioconda Belli*

The preceding analysis has explored the pathways by which women have become social and political actors in the rural village of Loma Verde, the personal costs and benefits of participation in their daily lives and relationships, and the community-level changes that have resulted from their work. The women's ways of articulating their own contribution to the community in terms of "*trabajo comunitario*" rather than the traditional language of "politics" reflects not only the historical legacy of Sandinista policies but also the influence of recent NGO interventions, which have altered the predominant forms of social and political participation in the community. Interestingly, the numerous interactions and intersections between the spaces dedicated to "*trabajo comunitario*" and "community politics" have made it more difficult to distinguish between what is considered social or political action.

Women's increasing levels of participation in both of these aforementioned arenas point to qualitative changes that seem to be occurring in the ways of *doing politics* in Loma Verde. Yet there is also a certain continuity—like so many poor and working class women before them, these women's collective activities have been largely dedicated to a politics of immediate needs rather than "conscious challenges to gender subordination" (Safa 1990: 361; see also Eckstein and Wickham-Crowley 2003). Although these forms of participation have been historically criticized by some feminists (Sternback, et al

1992) for being less 'political', the importance of organization and struggle around practical gender needs should not be underestimated.

As the case of Loma Verde shows, community-level projects or mobilizations to improve specific material conditions often respond to forms of gender oppression particular to the quotidian experiences of poor, rural women. While some patriarchal norms remain highly entrenched in this community, women's participation in seemingly mundane collective struggles related to their felt needs as mothers has enabled them to gain ground in the public sphere, incrementally increasing both their awareness of their political and legal rights and their willingness to challenge certain aspects of existing social relations (witnessed through their insistence on participating against their partner's will, for example). As Sen and Grown (1987: 18) noted, "The struggle against subordination and exclusion is waged on many fronts, but not in equal measure nor at the same time."

In the end, neither the participatory structures in which women are engaged nor the discourse they utilize to describe their community work *ipso facto* negate the political content of their acts. Rather, adopting an ethnographic stance that is attentive to the undercurrents of discourse and practice—the "symbolic dimensions of social action" (Geertz 1973)—, brings the full meaning of women's activism in Loma Verde into focus.[69] Three specific aspects of their participation are salient to such an understanding: its real (and often costly) consequences for women's most intimate relationships and daily routines (via spousal opposition and the creation of a 'third shift'), the platform it

[69] For the articulation of this particular idea, I am indebted to Pablo Lapegna.

creates for advocacy and resource acquisition (from both the state and private entities), and its capacity to bring new issues of direct concern to women into public view (e.g. reproductive health). As suggested in the introduction, a full analysis of these dynamics requires a broad conceptualization of politics which encompasses not only traditional claim-making of the state or related institutions, but also women's daily efforts to improve material conditions. In the case of Loma Verde, it is suggested that these kinds of struggles ultimately reflect women's quest not simply for new skills or information, but for the power (respect, rights, resources) necessary to improve the lives of their families and community.

This study has focused on some of the ways that women's participation affects social relations at the household and community level. Given the long-term nature of these processes, and the ways their trajectories are influenced by myriad social, economic, and political factors, however, a more longitudinal approach would offer greater insight into the intricate linkages between women's collective action in the public sphere and private forms of resistance and role negotiation. Long-term immersion would also contribute to an enhanced understanding of a variety of important related issues, including the changes that occur in the daily lives of activist women over time, the process by which other women do or do not become activists (and why), and how different participatory structures affect women's capacity to organize and mobilize on behalf of themselves and their communities.

There is a tendency among feminists to emphasize how the patriarchal structures of society severely constrain women's opportunities for social and political participation

(and inclusion). While acknowledging these limitations, this study has sought to draw attention to the ways in which the women of Loma Verde nevertheless exercise their agency as they negotiate their multiple roles as wives, mothers, and community activists. This ethnographic account thus offers a brief but tangible glimpse into the ongoing, highly nuanced contestatory processes by which women enter the public sphere, collectively organize, and begin to challenge various gendered aspects of their society.

Appendix: Interview Questions

Note: Following standard practice for semi-structured interviews, questions varied slightly from interview to interview depending on responses received.

Questions for women

What are your memories of your community growing up? *¿Cuáles son sus recuerdos de su comunidad cuando era más joven?*

How did you first get involved in your community? *¿Cómo comenzó a involucrarse con su comunidad?*

What are some of the specific projects or activities you have been involved in? *¿Cuáles son algunos de los proyectos o actividades en los que ha participado?*

How do you feel you have changed since becoming active in these projects? *¿Cómo siente que ha cambiado usted desde que comenzó a involucrarse en estos proyectos?*

How do you think your community involvement has affected your family, your relationship with your husband, etc? *¿Cómo cree usted que su involucramiento con la comunidad ha afectado a su familia, la relación con su esposo y sus hijos, etc.?*

How do you think the community has changed since women like you got more involved? *¿Cómo cree usted que ha cambiado la comunidad desde que mujeres como usted se involucraron con la comunidad?*

What kinds of obstacles did you encounter to getting involved? Have you ever wanted to quit? Why? *¿Qué tipos de obstáculos encontró cuando empezó a involucrarse en la comunidad? ¿En algún momento quería dejar de participar? ¿Por qué?*

Questions for men

What are your memories of your community growing up? *¿Cuáles son sus recuerdos de su comunidad cuando era más joven?*

How would you describe the participation of women in community projects over the last several years? *¿Cómo describiría usted la participación de las mujeres en proyectos de desarrollo comunitario durante los últimos 3-5 años?*

Why do you think women's participation has increased? *¿Por qué piensa usted que la participación de las mujeres ha aumentado?*

How do you feel about your wife's/women in general's increased role in these projects?

¿Qué opinión le merece el incremento en la participación de las mujeres en estos proyectos?

What kinds of changes have you observed in the women who are involved in community initiatives? *¿Qué cambios ha observado en las mujeres involucradas en iniciativas de la comunidad?*

What kind of changes have you seen in the community since women got more involved? *¿Qué cambios ha visto en la comunidad desde que las mujeres se involucraran más en las iniciativas de la comunidad?*

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