

HOUSE, STREET, COLLECTIVE: Revolutionary Geographies and Gender Transformation in Nicaragua, 1979–99*

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Abstract: This article examines gender struggles surrounding two women's collectives in a Sandinista village as a way to illuminate microprocesses of gender transformation during the Sandinista period and its aftermath. It argues for an analytical approach sensitive to the specificity of gender relations in particular contexts and the ways these were affected by state policies. It demonstrates that men's opposition to women's participation was enabled by ambiguities in Sandinista gender ideology that allowed men to interpret the meanings of revolutionary masculinity in their own terms. By examining these ambiguities, the article shows that, while the revolution failed to dismantle structures of gender inequality, as critics have pointed out, its incorporation of women as class and national subjects into the nation-building project could destabilize local patriarchies.

EXPLAINING REVOLUTIONARY GENDER TRANSFORMATION

Soon after the FSLN (Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional) came to power in Nicaragua in July 1979, El Tule, in the department of Rivas, emerged as a vanguard Sandinista community. By 1982, the community had spearheaded cultural and economic organizations of various kinds, and begun their most novel project to date: a women's horticultural collective. For the women participants, Sandinista village activists, and

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organizers from outside the community, the collective's importance was twofold: it would assist household economies by procuring foodstuffs that villagers could not afford to buy regularly in the market; and it would foster class unity among peasant women through working together and sharing the products of their labor. It was thought that the women's collective, along with the concurrent participation of men in agricultural cooperatives, would lead to the development of a politically conscious and organized community of class among the peasantry. Thus, these organizations would strengthen the movement for popular organization and national unity upon which the consolidation of the Sandinista state depended.

Despite most villagers' support for the collective, an underlying ambivalence about the organization quickly began to surface and work against its consolidation. In particular, the collective was plagued by men's relentless attacks on women members as *vagas*, or vagrants, a term of moral evaluation that connotes avoidance of work and, in some contexts, sexual availability. Thus, most male villagers—including many Sandinista militants—accused women of neglecting their domestic responsibilities in order to go to the collective “to look for men,” some even beating and threatening to leave their wives for participating. Over time, most women tired of these assaults and capitulated to their husbands' demands. Others, however, fought to remain in the collective while continuing to bear the brunt of men's harassment throughout their tenure as collective members.

The story of El Tule's women's collective is paradigmatic of a widespread reaction of Nicaraguan men toward the integration of women into the organizations of the revolution. In communities less concerned than El Tule about their image as Sandinistas, men not only echoed Tuleños' fears of women's potential sexual transgressions but also adduced a host of additional reasons for opposing women's participation. These reasons ranged from unapologetic arguments about women's proper place in the home, to claims regarding their presumed inability to make decisions, exercise leadership, and carry out strenuous agricultural work.¹ Clearly, the revolution's efforts to open new roles for women as class and national subjects had challenged men's notions of women's proper place and threatened their own position in ways unexpected by project planners.

In this article, I analyze events surrounding two women's collectives in El Tule to shed light on the micropolitics of gender transformation in

1. See Collinson et al. 1990, 51; Deere, 1983, 1046; Fernández Poncela 1997; Herrera 1989; Olivera et al. 1992; Padilla et al. 1987; Pérez Alemán 1990, chapters 3, 4. Literacy workers participating in the 1980 Literacy Crusade and women guerrillas who fought against Somoza were also labeled prostitutes (author interviews and see, for example, Benigna Mendiola's testimony in Pérez Alemán, 34). See also Wessel 1991, 541. For a comparative case in revolutionary Cuba, see Fox 1973.

Sandinista Nicaragua and its complex relationship to state-building. In particular, I examine Tuleño men's opposition to women's participation to elucidate gender struggles set in motion in the village by state policies. An examination of the issues contested and what was at stake in those contestations will illuminate the effects of Sandinista policy on preexisting gender relations and ideology. Focusing on the contestations unleashed by the women's collective will also underscore the role played by negotiations around men's and women's conflicting interests in processes of gender transformation during the Sandinista period and its aftermath.

Existing interpretations of the relationship between gender and the Sandinista state have been offered primarily by feminist researchers studying how women fared in the revolution's various economic and political organizations. These researchers have found that women encountered many obstacles in their efforts to join these organizations, including men's opposition to their participation. To account for these obstacles, they point to the persistence of two related factors: a "machista" or "patriarchal" ideology that associates women with domestic roles, especially mothering; and a sexual division of labor that burdens women with sole responsibility for child care and domestic tasks.² Those scholars interested in women's position more generally under Sandinismo similarly credit the persistence of these two factors with the limited improvement in women's status despite a measure of political mobilization and important gains in their general welfare.³ Both bodies of research argue that the Sandinistas' lukewarm efforts to combat prevailing gender ideologies and transform the sexual division of labor rendered difficult, if not vacuous, their stated goal of improving women's status by incorporating them into the revolution on an equal footing with men. In particular, they claim, Sandinista reticence neutralized the transformative potential of important legal measures introduced under their government whose implementation would have gone a long way toward dismantling structures of gender inequality in the country.

While bringing to light key obstacles to women's increased participation and status under Sandinismo, these explanations of the obstacles women faced in terms of structural features of gender inequality and the state's failure to dismantle them overlook more subtle processes of gender transformation at play. In particular, by overlooking the specific conditions and patriarchal ideologies that motivated people's actions, they foreclose an analysis of how Sandinista policies were interpreted and negotiated by people positioned differently—socially and situationally—and the effects that these negotiations had on existing

2. See Collinson 1990; Herrera 1989; Olivera et al. 1992; Padilla et al. 1987; Pérez Alemán 1990.

3. Molyneux 1985a; de Montís 1996; Fernández Poncela 1997.

gender relations. With a notable exception,⁴ the result has been an overly monolithic picture of state policies as unrepresentative of women's interests and a tendency to overlook or underplay transformations that did take place in gender relations. Finally, the focus on general features of Nicaraguan gender relations renders these works unable to convey the variability in gender arrangements and experiences of gender transformation in the country. Where these general features are glossed over as a nationwide "patriarchal system,"⁵ the importance of understanding variability is downplayed as well.

This article takes an approach toward the case of El Tule's women's collectives that can capture change in a more nuanced fashion, sensitive to the specificity of particular experiences. First, rather than attributing male opposition to general features of male domination, I attend to the specific gender contexts shaping these stances. This means widening my analytic lens from a focus on women and their position within the sexual division of labor to an examination of the culturally and historically specific gender arrangements within which men's and women's negotiations take place. In doing so, I avoid a key pitfall of much existing work: encouraging readers to assume that the reasons behind men's stances, and what is at stake in their fight against women's changing roles, is the same across distinct contexts of male opposition. Such an assumption not only takes masculinity (and femininity) for granted, assuming it as a norm, but also encourages readers to view masculinity, gender ideologies, and forms of patriarchy,⁶ as static and uniform across Nicaragua.⁷ While the approach I take necessarily limits the applicability of my findings to other locales, it has the merit of more accurately

4. See Molyneux 1985a. Molyneux warns readers (1985b, 230 and notes 11, 13) against characterizing socialist states as unrepresentative of women's interests based solely on the leadership's reticence in promoting changes that advance what she terms women's strategic gender interests. Her much-discussed framework for analyzing women's interests offers a way to give due weight to both positive aspects and shortcomings of Sandinista policy toward women and provides a useful lens for assessing the possibility for gender transformation. (See Molyneux 1985b, and her response to critics in Molyneux 1998.)

5. Olivera et al. 1992; Padilla et al. 1987; Fernández Poncela 1997; de Montís 1996. In some of these works, "the patriarchal system" (which as Molyneux [1985b, 230] notes, is in many works on women under socialism, an "analytically elusive entity") is also seen to encompass the state and its policies.

6. In this work, I will use the term "patriarchy" to refer to a hierarchical system of unequal age and gender relations based on the domination and authority of the father.

7. This problem is pervasive in the literature on Latin American women more generally. To cite one example: Fisher (1993, 3–6), argues that there is a pan-Latin American "machismo" that accounts for "much of the uniformity in the lives" (3) of the women she studied. Clearly such uniformity exists only at a very general level; and if social analysis is to inform effective intervention toward social change, we must strive for analytic tools that facilitate greater specificity.

diagnosing distinct forms of patriarchy and suggesting how each of these forms can provide distinct opportunities for social change. Second, my approach stresses the role of people as agents whose quotidian practices make and unmake societal structures. This requires examining the subjectivities that motivate people's actions by theorizing the relationship between their ideological stances and their social positions within structures of power. The case of El Tule—and Nicaragua more generally—requires attending to revolutionary ideology as an important factor shaping people's subjectivities (a point often neglected in existent analyses of gender in the Nicaraguan revolution).⁸

The case of El Tule is particularly useful for such an analysis. Since the 1970s, the village had been tightly integrated into the revolutionary process, earning a place as a "model" or showcase Sandinista community visited by hundreds of revolutionary tourists. An examination of Tuleños' struggles over women's participation will reveal not simply that the Sandinista revolution retained structures of gender inequality, a fact that has been amply established in the literature;⁹ more importantly, it will show how Sandinista gender ideology, that is, the language and other practices sustaining relations of gender domination, allowed men to claim revolutionary identities while maintaining particular kinds of patriarchal stances. By examining men's stances as constituted by Sandinista ideology, we will gain an understanding of both revolutionary masculinities and gender ideology.

My analysis is based on materials collected through ethnographic and oral historical research carried out in the 1990s and 2000.¹⁰ I also employed a range of sources from institutions that worked with the villagers on

8. Notable exceptions are the articles in Gonzáles and Kampwirth 2001; Lancaster 1992; Pérez Alemán 1990; and Rodríguez 1994, 1996.

9. These critiques range widely in their assessment of what the Sandinistas could have accomplished with regard to women's status given the constraints under which they operated. See references in footnotes 1 and 3. Other key texts include Murguialday 1990, Molyneux 1988, and Randall 1992, 1994.

10. I conducted ethnographic fieldwork and oral historical research in El Tule from June 1992 to August 1993, in March 1995, in July 1997 and in September and October 2000. Many of the sources on which I have drawn for this study emerged in the course of this research and thus can never be freed from that context or my interpretations. These sources were part of a broader set of fieldwork materials, including a survey on political opinions and class, familial, and gender ideologies, and another on love and gender relations with over 70 percent of village adults; hundreds of hours of taped and untaped interviews with men and women of a range of ages on these and other topics; oral historical and life history interviews; and participant-observation materials recorded in my fieldnotes. Interviews were for the most part conducted in El Tule in the privacy of people's own homes. Since the community's political sympathies are well known in the region, only the few village dissenters (most of whom I knew well) had any reservations about expressing their opinions publicly. They confided their doubts to me in private.

development projects and community organization throughout the 1980s and 1990s. These sources consisted of visual media from a peasant cultural organization (MECATE-Movimiento de Expresión Campesina Artística y Teatral) and archival records and published sources from the Centro de Estudios y Publicaciones-Alforja (part of Alforja's Programa Coordinado de Educación Popular) in San José, Costa Rica; and the Centro Nicaragüense de Educación y Comunicación Popular (CANTERA), in Managua. The evidence employed included published and unpublished accounts of workshops designed to facilitate community organization, including accounts of problems Tuleño men and women encountered in their organizational efforts.

My argument, then, is that Tuleño men's reactions were neither inevitable products of a transhistorical Nicaraguan male chauvinism nor of a monolithically "patriarchal" revolutionary state. Rather, their reactions were enabled by ambiguities in Sandinismo's gender ideology that allowed men to interpret the meanings of revolutionary masculinity in their own terms. This, in turn, permitted them to insist on maintaining a form of patriarchal power in which they held legitimate control over women's sexuality and their economic and social standing. By attending to the ambiguities of Sandinista gender ideology, this article will also show that, while the revolution failed to confront structures of gender inequality head-on, as critics have pointed out, its concern with integrating women as class and national subjects into their nation-building project could destabilize some forms of local patriarchy. As the case of El Tule demonstrates, the clash between men and women unleashed by the revolution's gender politics unwittingly opened avenues for women to fight against male oppression. This struggle strengthened, and in some cases created anew, deeply transforming forms of gender consciousness and practice among Tuleño women.

THE HOUSE AND THE STREET

El Tule is spread along ten square kilometers in northwestern Rivas, some five kilometers inland from the Pan-American highway. Between the early 1980s and 2000, the village's population grew from less than 300 to over 400 people distributed between seventy-odd primarily male-

Women's critiques of their husband's behavior were similarly discussed with me in private. Research was conducted during a period of self-critique within the Sandinista movement which likely facilitated the more candid expression of opinions. While people's memories are always shaped by the present moment, both Alforja's printed materials, interviews with former activists, and common village consensus confirm the views expressed in the interviews.

headed nuclear and two-generation extended family households.¹¹ Community lands include private family parcels and cooperative land that villagers received during the Sandinista revolution (1979–90). The settlement pattern is scattered, although extended families sometimes cluster together. In the 1980s and 1990s, most men worked in the fields in their own (and/or their wives') land, supplemented by occasional wage labor. With few exceptions, women worked at home at domestic tasks, including raising domestic animals and small amounts of cash for family expenses through the sale of baked goods. In accordance with patriarchal prerogatives and obligations, only in times of scarce male employment did women seek waged work, usually as domestic servants in nearby towns or cities.

Under the Sandinista and neoliberal governments of the 1990s, as in the past, most Tuleños' daily lives transpired within the bounds of their village and neighboring villages. But the Sandinista revolution changed the gendered contours of El Tule's social topography in significant ways, particularly for women. Tuleño men were and had always been unencumbered by social limits on their movements across space. Not so with women, who even in the 1990s continued to be subject to social restrictions on their movements. With few exceptions, on a daily basis most women left their houses only to go to the well, situated at close distance from their homes, and this only if their daughters were too young to haul water.

Changes wrought by the Sandinista revolution—the building of a school, a health center, and a road running through the village and connecting it to the Pan-American highway—expanded women's range of movement to include occasional visits to these facilities and, in emergencies, to the hospital in the provincial capital. The construction of the road, in particular, brought opportunities for greater mobility on a regular basis, as the new ease of travel in full view of the community enabled women to run errands to other homes without spousal conflict. Membership in the Sandinista women's organization (AMNLAE-Asociación de Mujeres Nicaragüenses Luisa Amanda Espinoza), although primarily involving mobilizations to public events, also increased women's mobility outside the home. Finally, with electrification in 1989, entertainment opportunities, which in the past were limited to occasional celebrations in people's homes, had also expanded. For unattached women, these included regular nightly gatherings in homes with televi-

11. In 1992, 35.6% of Nicaraguan families were female-headed (Valdéz and Gomáriz, 1995). El Tule's landed economic base accounted for its exceptionality, with less than 4 percent of female-headed families, where the mother is the sole support of the family. Usually, single mothers could count on their fathers or brothers for help in supporting themselves and their children.

sions. Women more generally enjoyed community and children's events and dance parties held at the schoolhouse using electrical music systems. Despite these opportunities for increased mobility, women knew that, to protect their reputations, they must leave their houses sparingly, and with proper justification.

The confinement of women's movements to sanctioned times and places can be seen as a form of what Poovey calls the ideological work of gender.¹² This work was ideological in that it entailed mobilizing gendered representations and practices in ways that naturalized asymmetrical relations of power between men and women. A key medium for this ideological work was the language Tuleños used to delineate the various statuses within village society, identify practices appropriate to each status, and to locate these practices in particular spaces. For women, the two available statuses established by the dominant ideology were those of "good" and "bad" women, terms which corresponded to the spatialized designations of "woman of the house" and "woman of the street." These terms differentiated women primarily by how they exercised their sexuality and evaluated them in both normative and moral terms. According to Tuleños, the domains of house and street were discrete, mutually exclusive, and highly gendered.

These ideological constructions of place shaped women's goals in ways that subordinated them to men under the terms of a specific sexual/moral economy between husband and wife. Becoming a "woman of the house" entailed a public recognition that one was now a woman with a man's backing—a protected woman—and therefore one who must be respected. As Tuleños would say, "*El hombre hace valer a la mujer*"—men give women value. Ideally, this position conferred economic stability as well as status. For, as Tuleños explained, when a man took a woman "under his charge" (*a su cargo*), he was demonstrating his regard for her as a worthy beneficiary of his labor. Women's roles in the house, then, were cast within the terms of what Kandiyoti describes as a classic patriarchal "bargain:"¹³ in return for protection, respect, and economic stability, the wife was to uphold the respectability of the house by keeping to a set of clearly prescribed practices. Most importantly, Tuleños would say, she should work hard and serve her husband graciously; bear children, using contraceptives only with his permission; stay out of his doings outside the home; and be sexually available and faithful to him, as men's honor hinged on their wives' sexual fidelity.

Judging by the elderly's stories about widespread male infidelity and polygamy, as well as my own research on gender relations among the generations coming of age since the 1950s, the value placed on becom-

12. Poovey 1988, 2–3.

13. Kandiyoti 1991, 14.

ing women of the house historically had compelled Tuleño women to engage in sexual competition.¹⁴ Such competition both reinforced and was reinforced by patterns in the distribution of space and spatial practices, that tended to isolate women from one another. More generally, competition and divisions among women were embedded in the logic of Tuleños' gender ideology. For while Tuleños defined the status of woman of the house by a set of activities appropriate to that domain, these activities acquired their meaning in contrast to those activities deemed appropriate to the domain of "the street"—a highly sexualized place where only men and "bad women" (women unsuitable for a respectable social position) were supposed to venture. Like the concept of "the house," "the street" was more than a geographic location; it was a culturally constructed concept that stood for all practices related to sexual conquest. Hence husbands' concerns to protect their honor via their wives' restriction to "the house." From the perspective of women of the house, then, the street functioned as a disciplinary technology for keeping them in their place, with place referring to both a particular physical location and a set of appropriate practices.

During my fieldwork, most of the time women (and men) invoked dominant sexual/moral norms to assess their own and other people's actions. This did not mean, however, that everyone at all times "believed" in these norms unambiguously or that people adhered to them in their practice. For example, for reasons I have elaborated elsewhere,¹⁵ during the 1980s and 1990s, sexual transgressions were extremely common among all women, whether in conjugal unions or single. Given the constraints on women's movements, women utilized ingenious methods to create opportunities to see their lovers, including arranging meetings with them through intermediaries, sending them messages as to when they would be alone in their own or confidant's houses, briefly slipping away from sanctioned places such as the village road, and inventing reasons to run errands or travel to Rivas. Despite their breaches of dominant sexual/moral norms, Tuleño women invoked these norms because they provided the only publicly accepted moral standards and criteria for conferring gender value. They thus structured both the constraints under which women (and men) operated and their motivations for seeking prized statuses during most of their lives.

That these norms were dominant in El Tule did not mean that villagers were unaware of other ways of organizing sexual life. On the contrary, Tuleños were familiar with a range of sexual cultures through their relationships with urban and middle-class people during and after the revolution and through their exposure to the radio and television. None-

14. For examples of this competition, see Montoya 2002.

15. Montoya 2002.

theless, well into the 1990s they generally continued to invoke and apply local sexual norms as if these were the only conceivable option.¹⁶ Usually, they explained this through a relativist comment such as Emilio's: "For us, it looks much more horrible when a woman cheats on a man (*se las pega*) than when a man does it." As I will show, men's insistence on the community's observation of dominant sexual/moral norms had less to do with small-town parochialism than with men's constant policing of the mechanisms by which they retained their dominance and control over women.

Notwithstanding the dominance of the ideology of house and street, the categories upon which it was based were not so clearly separable in practice. First, as mentioned, women's sexual transgressions were a common occurrence in El Tule. These transgressions could take place because, despite the continued prevalence of the ideology of house and street and men's insistent concern with upholding their legitimacy, they did become infatuated with and establish serious relationships with "bad" women. Once positioned as wives, these women were not only treated with all the respect due to "good" women, but their past seemed to become less worthy of comment than when they were uncoupled. There was, then, an unusually large gap between normative gender relations as expressed through the idiom of house and street and most people's practices at various points in their lives. Moreover, because the language on house and street was deployed in relation to people's actions in the present, in effect ignoring their past—including, as mentioned, "dubious" sexual pasts—it made possible, and indeed encouraged, practices that contradicted the dominant ideology. In particular, they encouraged women's movements between social statuses that were supposed to be impermeable to one another. Hence the dominant meanings of house and street were always being threatened. Women's transgressions, then, worked to continually destabilize female gender categories upon which gender relations in El Tule were based. For instance, Felipe demonstrated the impossibility of unambiguously separating good from bad women when he fell in love with Juanita just a few months after proclaiming that "there is not a single woman of value [*que sirva*] in this community." The blurred boundaries between good and bad women in turn fueled men's fears of women's uncontrollability and compelled them to ever more tightly police their movements.

Within the dominant ideology, men's control of women was represented by their control of "the house," which symbolized men's achievement of patriarchal status. As Justino, the village leader, once told me in

16. An important exception was women's occasional empathetic statements about other women's transgressions and their refusal to morally judge these women. See Montoya n.d. "Ambivalent Revolutionaries."

a conversation, "I'd rather lose anything but not my house; I'd rather not eat than lose my house because then I'll really be finished!" Men's perspective on the house, in contradistinction to that of women, emerged from a view of the world from the outside—the street and the house's exteriority were their purview, and the house's continuity with the street and the outside world, and its potential porousness to these realms, was their concern. Hence men insisted on an orderly household, one in which everyone kept to their place by behaving in ways appropriate to their position.

Men who successfully managed the house from this vantage point were able to constitute the most valued male position within El Tule's sexual/moral economy, one which simultaneously brought together the form of masculinity associated with the responsible patriarch, referred to locally as *el hombre obligado*, the "good man," and that of the philanderer, the man who was "very much a man." The constitution of these dichotomous masculinities—like the dichotomous femininities that women were supposed to invest in—rested on the ideological separation of house and street. This meant that, in practice, men's achievement of the coveted male position depended on their ability to maintain the distinction between women of the house and women of the street through the former's spatial restriction. Ultimately, it depended on men's capacity to control the community's entire social and geographical universe. Thus, when Tuleños stated that "women belong in the house and men belong in the street," they were not simply suggesting a sexual distribution of spaces. Rather, speaking from a panoptic position, they were claiming men's authority to situate women in a space that, along with all other spaces in the community, belonged to men. Likewise, they were affirming men's right to demand and assess female practices that might appear contradictory, but were necessary to the constitution of a valued male position. This system, already precarious, is what the women's collective unwittingly challenged.

COLLECTIVES, COMMUNITY, NATION

The idea of establishing a women's horticultural collective was suggested early in the revolutionary decade by a Sandinista cadre named Jerónimo. A decade later, Doña Miranda remembered:

Jerónimo was very much of the idea of eating vegetables. He would tell us we should plant vegetables. [He would say] that why should we pay so much for vegetables in the market, that it was not as if we had no hands. . . . It was he who suggested that we organize as a collective. He would say: "There is nothing that a woman cannot do. You [women] are perfectly capable of working [the land]."¹⁷

17. Interview with Miranda Rivera, September 12, 1992.

In 1982, Tuleño women established the first women's collective with organizational and economic assistance from feminist activists from MECATE (with whom Jerónimo worked), the Rural Workers' Association (ATC), and AMNLAE, all of whom were involved in similar projects elsewhere. This first, horticultural, collective operated for five years with a membership of between eleven and fifteen women. In 1987, participants dismantled this collective in order to form a larger pig-raising collective. By 1992, the number of members had diminished from twenty-two to six. Nonetheless, the pig-raising collective operated until 1999, at which point the male cooperative on whose lands the collective had been established demanded the return of their lands and the collective disbanded.

In interviews with then current and former collective members, they almost without exception claimed to have joined the collectives because they were a source of economic benefit—or “help” (*una ayuda*)—for the household. For the women who joined the pig-raising collective, a more ambitious and better funded project than the first, the possibility of generating income independently of their husbands provided an additional incentive. Some women mentioned that this was particularly important given their husbands' tendencies to squander household resources on alcohol and women. Others mentioned their husbands' poverty and, borrowing from Sandinista feminist language that advocated women's right to work outside the home, asserted that they had a right to contribute to their household, even if their husbands were employed. Finally, some women claimed revolutionary pride in being organized and supporting the revolution.

Early in the Sandinista decade, the government's support for cooperatives and, to a lesser extent, women's collectives was motivated by the need to supply inexpensive foodstuffs to the urban population and promote class consciousness through socialized work organizations. By the time the second women's collective was organized in 1987, the need for women's labor in agriculture had become even more urgent as they were called to fill the vacuum in men's labor created by the escalation of the U.S.-Contra war.¹⁸ To further women's integration into production, the government promoted images of revolutionary women in a variety of economic roles. Women's emancipation, to the extent that it was prefigured in these policies, was to be furthered through their integration into production as class and national subjects.¹⁹

18. Pérez Alemán 1990, 54; Chamorro 1989, 187; Murguialday 1990, 105; Padilla et al. 1987, 128–131.

19. Nicaraguan women had for a long time been “integrated into production” since a large proportion were single mothers (see footnote 11). The revolution, however, opened new employment opportunities for women, formalized their work, and legitimized their roles as workers by establishing legal measures against their discrimination in the workplace.

The government's effort to recruit women into agriculture and its challenge to women's exclusion from the public arena was, however, countervailed by a rural development agenda framed in terms of patriarchal models that implicitly cast men in the role of breadwinners and women in a variety of supportive, primarily domestic, roles. As we shall see, the use of patriarchal models in the revolution resulted partly from the Sandinista leadership's (and, arguably, the population's) naturalization of a male-headed family as the metaphor for solidary relationships in social units ranging from the nuclear family to the community and nation. But this orientation was also consistent with the leadership's tendency, particularly in the face of a war of aggression, to not pursue (or pursue only piecemeal) policies that could divide men and women or weaken male support for the revolution.²⁰

As feminist scholars have pointed out,²¹ the persistence of traditional conceptions of male and female roles in both government program designs and locally, led women to experience opposition to their integration as well as practical problems balancing work in and outside the home. In El Tule, traditional conceptions among both government planners and villagers created similar problems with participation.²² As in other parts of the country, these conceptions overdetermined the segregation of men and women into cooperatives and collectives respectively, despite women's legal right to cooperative membership.²³ Underlying this process was a gendered distinction in the roles that these organizations were to play locally and at the national level: while cooperatives were conceived by local and national-level actors as the principal family resource and were therefore devoted to the production of basic grain staples, collectives were, at least in theory, devoted to horticulture, small animal husbandry, and other "female" productive activities regarded as secondary to the sustenance of the family. This segregation had a host of symbolic and material effects that confirmed and further strengthened patriarchal households.

20. Molyneux 1985a, 155.

21. See Deere 1983; Fernández Poncela 1997; Olivera et al. 1992; Padilla et al. 1987; Pérez Alemán 1990. In an interview (July 3, 1997) with Guillermina Morales, Director of the Women's Section of UNAG (National Union of Agriculturalists and Cattle Ranchers) in Rivas, she noted similar problems in women's collectives throughout the department of Rivas.

22. It is remarkable that Sandinista activists who worked with Tuleño women, some of them feminists, did not raise the issue of the gendered inequalities implicit in the segregation of men and women into distinct production organizations. For a discussion of practical problems experienced by collective members, see Montoya, n.d. "Ambivalent Revolutionaries." There, I also discuss the role of enmities between women of different factional groups in undermining the unity of the collective.

23. For discussion of the difficulties experienced by the few women who became members of cooperatives in various parts of the country, see Deere 1983 and Padilla et al. 1987.

First, because government planners saw cooperatives as the essential organizations to both households and nation, only they (and individually owned property) figured in the government's agrarian reform program. Indeed, although the government supported the movement for women's collectives in theory, it delegated its design and management to AMNLAE and the women's sections of other organizations. As a result, the collectives were excluded from the lifeline of production organizations, namely, the state's sustained economic and technical support. Instead, through the years, the collectives had to depend for survival on donations and loans from European non-governmental organizations. Second, and following from this, the government allocated cooperatives vastly larger parcels of land—in El Tule anywhere from 60 *manzanas* (1 mnz. = 1.7 acres) to 800 mnz., versus the collectives' 1 mnz. and 17 mnz. Third, and most important, because men were conceived of as family heads, only they received legal title to cooperative land. Indeed, even the collectives' lands were owned by men. From their inception, the organizations had to rely first on lands borrowed from an elderly village patriarch, then on an unofficial donation from an all-male cooperative. As we shall see, over the years cooperative members used their legal right over these lands to harass the women at every turn. Land titling practices thus excluded women from independent access to a crucial resource and strengthened patriarchal power.

The gender hierarchies implicit in Sandinismo's rural development agenda were embedded in the spatial reorganization of the village that took place during the revolutionary process. From a bird's-eye view, a landscape dotted with a collection of scattered houses and fields was converted to one in which large male cooperatives predominated, but which made a small space for female collectives. The state's gender politics—requiring women's political and economic participation in the public arena, while keeping them subordinated to male household heads—could thus be quite literally read from the geography of El Tule's rural development during these years.

Just as local transformations made clear that men were to be the owners of the revolution at the household and village levels, so translocal processes conveyed the message that they were to be so at the national level. Rather than review the revolution's male dominant character, which has been amply documented elsewhere, I want to focus on a more proximate context that affected how villagers constructed women's (and men's) place in the revolution—Sandinista representations of the collectives' place in the national project. Since the early 1980s, this project had been overwhelmingly concentrated on the defense of the revolution and nation. Within this context, the Sandinista government mobilized several gendered constructs of national space to assign activities and obligations to the population. One of these, which circulated at both national

and local levels, posited a gendered distinction between a home front associated with women and a battleground associated primarily with men.²⁴ Accordingly, Sandinista activists in El Tule hailed women's integration into the collective as important to the survival of the revolution, yet secondary to the essential (male) task of battling the enemy in the warfront. Echoing this Sandinista language, a 1985 printed statement by Tuleño women committing to greater revolutionary participation was prefaced by the declaration that "[we women are] proud that our sons, fathers and brothers are participating [in the war] and we have to support them by keeping up the spirit, working in production, and preparing ourselves better."²⁵ In rendering women's contributions to the war effort as ancillary to men's, revolutionary language conveyed men's ostensibly greater contribution to the national project.

If one effect of gendering women's activities in the collective as female was to construct their contributions as secondary to men's, this effect was also accomplished through a kind of reverse corollary: assigning greater value to women's work once it was gendered male. This ideological maneuver, readily apparent in Alforja's publications based on their work in El Tule, posited the entire national terrain as a (male) space of war apportioned into distinct fronts, each with its own forms of mobilization. At the internal front, people were to mobilize for production to counteract underdevelopment and imperialism's sabotage and economic embargo. Following this logic, in one of the collective's printed statements, the women referred to themselves as soldiers in the battlefield of production, using military language to describe their production plans and accomplishments.²⁶ In deploying a quintessentially male-coded language to describe cultivation, an activity already defined as male in Nicaraguan peasant culture, collective members implicitly constructed women's agricultural labor as doubly male in the context of war. Thus, those tasks regarded as essential to the survival of the revolution—even if performed by women—were coded male. The implicit message, once again, was that men were the primary protagonists—and rightful owners—of revolutionary nation-building.

While I have stressed the men's privileged position in the village and the revolution, I must underline once again that El Tule's revolutionary geographies were not simply a template of preexisting socio-spatial configurations. For despite the reproduction, and even strengthening, of

24. Many studies have demonstrated the operation of this ideological mechanism in various war-torn contexts as a means to render invisible women's domestic and military contribution to the war effort and reinstate "normal" gender roles for women in the post-war period. For Nicaragua, see references listed in note 9.

25. Cited in *Mujeres de Cantimplora y San Marcos* 1985, 2.

26. *Comunidad de Cantimplora* 1983, 34–36.

men's power that came with Sandinista agrarian policies, men's monopoly over the house and its outside was broken by the women's collective. The revolution's integration of women into production may not have restructured the preexisting division of labor, but—contradictions and all—it did challenge women's exclusive identification with the home, a fact that, as we shall see, men found very threatening.

MEN, WOMEN, AND CLASHES OVER REVOLUTIONARY GEOGRAPHIES

Tuleños' struggles over the collective were played out on a conflicted terrain between partially overlapping gender ideologies. In theory, revolutionary gender ideology was distinct from prerevolutionary ones, as the national leadership took pains to claim a critical stance with respect to existing gender norms and relations. In practice, however, Sandinista languages and practices emanating from state apparatuses were as diverse as militants' positions and together accurately reflected the revolution's uneven record with respect to gender policies.

Sandinismo's uneven record was also shaped by a distinct trajectory in gender politics through time. In the early years of the revolution, authoritarian and egalitarian representations of family and nation-building competed for dominance in the political field. But with the escalation of the U.S.-Contra war and the leadership's increasing concern to secure its (male) social base, the authoritarian strands within Sandinismo gained dominance, if not in the leadership's political discourse, certainly in their diminished resolve to ratify and enforce progressive policies toward women and the family. In the end, the early Sandinista emphasis on transforming the unstable, authoritarian family units that prevailed under Somocismo into organic but egalitarian social units gave way to an increasing emphasis on consolidating the Nicaraguan family as an organic, stable, and hierarchical social unit.

This trajectory in national gender politics was reflected in Tuleños' struggles around the women's collectives, as they informed villagers' notions of what it meant to be a revolutionary. Although such representations undoubtedly shaped many Nicaraguans' self-constructions, in El Tule this was particularly the case given most villagers' explicit adherence to Sandinista values and their self-conscious and purposive fashioning of revolutionary selves. What, then, were the images available to Tuleños for revolutionary self-fashioning?

For men, by far the most esteemed image was the New Man—or, in the state's more common lexicon, "the revolutionary [man]"—supreme icon of class consciousness in revolutionary mythology.²⁷ This image,

27. For an examination of the New Man construct in revolutionary Nicaragua's literary texts, see Rodríguez 1996.

particularly in the guise of revolutionary patriot, was deployed by the state and the Sandinista movement to mobilize the population during Sandinismo's gestation in the war front and subsequently in the state's formative years. Sandinista exhortations to defend the homeland through participation in the military or mass organizations were thus rendered through languages of both class solidarity and nationalism.²⁸

In El Tule, where the New Man image had been promoted by Sandinista guerrillas and activists since the 1970s, village men invoked it to describe the ideological transformations they underwent through their participation in the revolutionary process. Cecilio, for instance, referred to Omar Cabezas's *La montaña es algo más que una inmensa estepa verde* to discuss his transformation into the New Man in quasi-religious terms. He posited "the mountain," a hallowed space of war rubricating class consciousness, as the place where class divisions were erased to give way to male bonding, male solidarity, and the birth of the New Man:

[That book says . . .] that the mountain is a school, and I think that it is; I assure you that it's true, because in the mountain, the war, is where you have the greatest suffering . . . that develops your consciousness; that experience . . . helped me to understand things, have a goal of brotherhood, of humanity . . ."

[In the mountain] we all go around with great necessities. If one has a candy, we each lick it once, and each one swallows the saliva of the other. [There], people of the city and people of the countryside go through the same suffering and therefore they become closer. [The mountain] taught us that we are all the same Christians, the same people, the same person, even if they are from the city and we are from the countryside, we are the same, because when we are suffering [*ya en el sufrimiento*] we are all the same . . . This is how I began transforming into a New Man.²⁹

Tuleños' narratives about their transformation into New Men placed special emphasis on their efforts at exemplarity, both in the war and home fronts. "If we had to climb a hill, [we'd say] 'ok, let's go for it, we have to try to reach that New Man,'" Cecilio observed of his experiences in the U.S.-Contra war. While Tuleños' narratives of exemplarity in the war front recalled their experiences in the mountain as the site of their gestation into New Men, the cooperatives occupied this place in their narratives about the home front (see Montoya n.d. "Dilemmas of Revolutionary Nation-Building in Sandinista Nicaragua"). Tuleños' interpretation of their organization into cooperatives as central to their process

28. The images used by the Sandinistas, which included the New Man, the revolutionary patriot, and the revolutionary Christ, often blended into each other, for they were defined by similar characteristics: the sharing ethic of socialism exemplified by Che Guevara; the sacrifice of Christianity exemplified by Christ himself; and the patriotism of nationalism exemplified by Sandino. See Palmer 1988, Hodges 1986, ch. 8. For popular religious renditions of some of these relationships, see Montoya 1995 and Lancaster 1988.

29. Interview with Cecilio Hurtado, October 30, 1992.

of transformation largely followed pronouncements by Alforja and Sandinista cadres about the revolutionary consciousness that came with participating in mass organizations, particularly production cooperatives in the case of peasants. The formative role of cooperatives both for revolutionaries and revolutionary nation-building was also implicit in Alforja's structuring of its work in the village around the cooperative, which it referred to as "the central organism of the community."³⁰ In accordance with this perspective, in multiple ways—from poetry and stories to everyday conversation—throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Tuleño men expressed pride in being the legal recipients of cooperative land, and in making it produce for their community and their nation (as seen, for example, in Justino's testimony on page 80).

In addition to this rendition of the New Man, Tuleños spoke of another dimension of this figure that has not been addressed in the scholarly literature, and which I learned about through men's discussions of their training in schools for Sandinista party militants. Such dissemination of this face of the New Man was clearly aimed at harnessing the family to the state and nation-building project; hence, it was promoted in tandem with the passage of legal reforms aimed at stabilizing the Nicaraguan family.³¹ In this representation, the New Man was offered as a gentleman, a benevolent patriarch, a responsible family man without such excesses of machismo as drunkenness, womanizing, and wife abuse. Like the family legislation of which this representation was emblematic, the Sandinista gentleman came about with the demobilization of the feminist movement within the FSLN that accompanied the escalation of the U.S.-Contra war. This figure thus appears to have been the state's answer to their de-emphasis upon the more gender-egalitarian images of the New Man that circulated at the inception of the revolutionary decade.

Tuleño men and women's persistent invocation of the gentlemanly New Man suggests that this figure represented an ideal of social behavior considered as central to the exemplary Sandinista militant as the selfless class subject. That many village men internalized this image was reflected in such references as Cecilio's admission to me in a letter confessing his sexual infidelity, "I am still in search of that New Man."³² In conversations with Tuleño men and women, I observed that this representation enjoyed wide acceptance in the village because it resonated, for them, with the traditional image of "the responsible man," so central to men's identity within the prevailing order. Their assimilation of this

30. Comunidad de Cantimplora, 1984, 27. On the formative role of cooperatives, see pp. 73–4.

31. Discussions on Sandinista state family and personal policies can be found in Kampwirth 1998; Molyneux 1985a, 1985b, 1989. For an analysis of socialist state family policies, see Molyneux 1982.

32. Letter written to me by Cecilio Hurtado, dated 16 April 1995.

image to the *hombre obligado* was made possible, in part, by using its silences and ambiguities—for example, with respect to whether or not women should participate in birth-control decisions—to bypass feminist concerns. This, in turn, was facilitated by the fact that many of the issues that this figure spoke to—responsibility to one’s family, avoiding domestic violence, womanizing, or excessive drinking—overlapped with concerns of the feminist movement, but were framed in a patriarchal mold. Benito, for example, reprimanded Diógenes for insisting on talking to me while very inebriated, telling him that, as a Sandinista militant, he should not be behaving in that manner. Cecilio made similar comments about Chepe’s boasting about his many women. Another telling example was José’s likening of his gentle but patriarchal father to the gentlemanly New Man because “He never beat my mother, he would even cuddle with her (*hasta la chineaba*)—and they still do, when no one is looking.”³³ Yet while Tuleños often invoked Sandinista exemplarity and even Sandinista party statutes to either praise or criticize men’s treatment of women, few men did so when expressing their disapproval of women’s attempts to control their sexuality and reproductive capacity. This suggests that most men did not see a relationship, even less a contradiction, between their position as Sandinistas and their conservative views about women’s rights over their bodies.

The female images promoted by the Sandinistas were quite diverse. These included such traditional representations as that of self-abnegating revolutionary mother/*compañera* as well as new images such as that of the New Woman as guerrilla fighter and activist, also often represented as mothers.³⁴ These images exemplified the FSLN’s stress on furthering women’s equality with men through their integration into the revolution, while keeping their domestic roles for the most part unchanged. During the post-triumph period, the Sandinista state aggressively promoted the image of the New Woman, often rendered simply as the “revolutionary [woman],” as tireless activist, present in production and in politics through participation in the revolution’s mass organizations. In El Tule, this image of the New Woman, complementing the image of revolutionary mother/*compañera*, gained currency mainly through Sandinista organizers who worked with the villagers on various projects, particularly popular educators from Alforja and activists from AMNLAE involved in the formation of the women’s collective. In the spirit of the Latin American New Left and its emphasis on revolutionary self-fashioning, these people suggested that Tuleños were

33. Interview, March 12, 1993.

34. See Bayard de Volo 2001 for a discussion of the role of mother images and mothers’ organizing in the Sandinista revolution. For an analysis of images of women in Cuba, see Bell 1990.

sufficiently politically “advanced,” as one Alforja worker put it,³⁵ to be able to foster the creation of New Sandinista Women, just as they had been fostering the creation of New Sandinista Men.

What did becoming New Sandinista Men and Women mean in practice? For men, the position of New Man entailed being responsible family men and committed patriots, integrated into the organizations of the revolution. In a testimony published in 1988, Justino, El Tule’s political leader, explained the link between being organized and the consciousness required to be a good patriot:

In production, [people] produce to feed their stomach and that of their family, but not due to consciousness [*conciencia*], but rather to the need to survive. But [when one] understands better the situation or the process one is living, one begins to develop consciousness faster . . . [one] no longer thinks at the individual level, but rather that one has to produce for other people: one has to produce for the workers, one has to produce for the teachers, one has to produce for the technicians.³⁶

According to Justino, being responsible to the home and the homeland was not a task only for New Men, but also for New Women:

The consciousness of women can [also] be seen in organization. She is organizing out of consciousness and is producing out of consciousness, not out of obligation. [Before the revolution] labor was divided: women were only used to give birth to children, to cook. Now that has changed in Nicaragua: women become integrated into [agricultural] work out of consciousness.³⁷

Crucial to Justino’s revolutionary language is an understanding that to organize is to take the construction of the country-nation into one’s own hands and become the beneficiary of its fruits. In this sense, the revolution transformed the territory within the country’s borders into a single national space. The local and the national became one, as it were:

It is time to speak about things as they are, [to state] the truth: we are all interested in the betterment of the community and it is us who have to bring our needs before the organizations. Because we are the base [*las bases*]. When people say “the base,” they are talking about us. The UNAG [National Union of Agriculturalists and Cattle Ranchers] is made up of the bases and it is us who will make the organization . . . When we speak of organization it is with the goal of responding to our problems, because if there were no problems it would make no sense to organize. The objective of organizing is to be more solid, provide answers to the problems that present themselves, to try to make people understand that depending on the level of organization that we have, we are going to succeed, because by organizing, the revolution moves forward, and we are the revolution.³⁸

35. Interview with Cecilia Díaz, July 20, 1993.

36. Peña Baldelomar et al. 1988, 56.

37. Peña Baldelomar et al., 57.

38. Peña Baldelomar et al., 71.

Justino's words in this testimony echoed notions expressed in interviews and a survey on political and gender/class ideologies and political opinions that I conducted in 1992–93 with over 70 percent of village adults. Thus it is clear that, at one level, most villagers embraced these ideals. With respect to the women's collective specifically, both Alforja's and Cantera's publications and my interviews and survey results indicate that, throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the vast majority of villagers regarded the women's collective as "good" for village family economies. Moreover, the most politicized sectors of the village expressed respect for collective members as organized and "conscious" women.

Nonetheless, male villagers' approval was blunted by the continuities between the image of the Sandinista gentleman and preexisting notions of manhood that held traditional patriarchal assumptions in place. This led men to attempt to undermine the collective throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Men's attacks against the collective primarily took two forms: attempts to deprive the organization of its lands or its control, and criticism of women's organizational capabilities and their presumed failures as respectable women and proper wives. During the horticultural collective's first year of existence, husbands and brothers of collective members intimated to Don Justino (the elderly patriarch owner of the collective's land) that the women were planning to take over his land once the collective had established a solid foundation. His fears became serious enough that Panchito, a Spanish man who was then working in support of the women's collective, had to convince him that no such takeover had been planned.³⁹ Other malicious gossip the men spread was that Panchito was the lover of some of the women in the organization and that collective members were *vagas* and neglected their household work.⁴⁰

As mentioned, men's harassment of their wives and other women in the collective persisted throughout the tenure of both women's collectives, severely diminishing membership in these organizations. While this effectively circumscribed recurring conflicts about women's participation to the women who remained in the collective and their spouses, criticisms by men other than their husbands—and the repercussions of these criticisms—continued throughout their tenure in the organization. Alina, for example, believed that Javier occasionally mistreated and even beat her so "they wouldn't say that he let me go to the collective willingly (*gustoso*)."⁴¹

39. Interview with Miranda Rivera, July 27, 1993.

40. This came up in most of my interviews with collective members. It is also a prominent theme in Alforja's popular education materials. See *Mujeres de Cantimplora y Mata de Caña* 1986.

41. Interview, July 25, 1992.

During the 1990s, in addition to these conflicts, the women's collective faced a serious threat to its land. Pressured by Alforja's popular educators, during the Sandinista decade one of the male cooperatives had donated seventeen *manzanas* of land to the collective. Several times, the collective discussed requesting legal ownership of collective lands from the cooperative. However, some members, wanting to avoid problems with their male relatives in the cooperative, dissuaded the others from pressing these claims. In 1994, when the Chamorro government was in power, the insecurity of land tenure for peasants in the country finally convinced the women that the time had come to solve the problem once and for all. When the women presented their request to the cooperative, however, cooperative members refused it, claiming that they had only donated seven *manzanas* to the collective and that the remaining ten *manzanas* had been given to them in usufruct only.

When I spoke to some of the male cooperative members about this matter in March 1995, it became clear that the men were uncomfortable bringing up claims they had reportedly made to others that women were *vagas* or incapable of working the land. Instead, the self-proclaimed Sandinistas from the cooperative devised an argument against the collective proposed as a critique from within a Sandinista stance. This argument centered on the organization's internal problems, claiming that the women were not well organized because they fought too much among themselves. Daniel, for instance, claimed that "They only live fighting amongst themselves, so if they get [legal] titles [to their land], the first thing they're going to do is parcel their lands and sell them," and "before we know it, the former owners will again be the owners of those lands."⁴² Women, in sum, were too preoccupied with bickering to be truly class conscious Sandinistas. If women could not be faithful to the interests of the peasant class, then men had the obligation to do so for them.

Such accusations did not go unchallenged. As Chepa, one of the collective members told me,

They claim that we will sell the lands, but everyone knows that there are some in the cooperative who want to sell their lands. Our lands are not that much, but their lands can bring them good money, and there is the temptation to sell.⁴³

A second common response from collective members exposed the vacuousness of men's critique while articulating women's difficulties in representing their perspective within El Tule's patriarchal society. As put by Yamilet,

it is the same with [men] because they also fight, but people notice it more when it is women who fight . . . When a man fights, they hit each other, they bite each

42. Interview, March 18, 1995.

43. Interview, March 18, 1995.

other, and people forget . . . but if Yamilet and the other one grab each other, then the comments start that they grabbed each other, that this one gave her a good one, that she is a great whore, that here, that—well, and then one loses prestige.⁴⁴

As Yamilet's words indicate, the women's understanding that similar actions by men and women would be perceived differently in El Tule also made them aware that what was at issue in men's complaints was something other than women's capacity for class-conscious organizing.

To understand why men so insistently opposed the women's collective, it is necessary to look more closely at the effects of power that women's participation in the organization brought to El Tule's gender relations. However, to produce a locally and historically specific explanation, one that cannot travel unproblematically to other contexts of patriarchal domination or male opposition, it is necessary, first, to examine these effects in their specific historical context. Secondly, we must examine male opposition in terms of Tuleños' cultural construction, looking carefully at the ideologies that mediated their actions. This means taking seriously Tuleños' investment in revolutionary ideology, while attending to how they negotiated this ideology with the preexisting ideology of house and street.

As noted earlier, women's work in horticultural and small-animal raising activities were traditionally female tasks. Nonetheless, particularly in the second women's collective, the organization's commercial purpose and institutional context lent their food production a visibility and import that threatened men's status as sole providers for their households. For although villagers recognized that women had to work outside the home in situations of economic necessity, it was regarded as a last recourse taken only when men had exhausted all options for finding work. As mentioned, this was not the case during the revolution, as most village men easily found employment in a nearby sugar mill. By joining the collective without "true" necessity, women were forcing men to accept them in provider roles that until then had been attributed exclusively to men. This undermined men's claim to sole authority in the household. Unlike what has been reported elsewhere in Latin America,⁴⁵ it was not women's actually contributing to the household that undermined male authority, as Tuleño women had always contributed to their households, especially in times of male unemployment. Nonetheless, the domestic and temporary nature of women's contribution had allowed it to be construed as secondary to men's. Instead, it was women's decision to work in an organization with important economic potential,

44. Interview March 21, 1995.

45. See, for example, Fisher 1993, 181.

and to do so when it was not deemed necessary, that threatened men's household authority. Hence Don Elvin's contradictory statement that "It is good that women help [the household economy], but those women don't have the need [*necesidad*], they just go because they are *vagas*,⁴⁶ they don't like to be in their house."⁴⁷

Such statements about collective members' taste for *vagancia* makes clear that in order to grasp, in Tuleños' own terms, the ways in which Tuleño masculinity was affected by women's participation, we must go beyond an economic explanation of male authority. For the threatening implications of women's activities for male authority—and those that most men alluded to in their complaints—were not economic per se, but sexual-moral. This is because the idioms of house and street in which men's complaints were framed did not refer primarily to economic concerns. Rather, they referred to the terms of the classic patriarchal bargain which wed economics with sexuality and the ways in which its morality was to be evaluated. A particularly telling example of men's sexual/moral concerns was the parallel they often made between collective members and single mothers. In José's words, "They walk about like those single women who lack a man's rein [*les falta rienda de hombre*]."⁴⁸ Invoking a parallel between collective members and single mothers implicitly also invoked a parallel between the work of the collective and that of single mothers who worked outside the home to support themselves and their children. Given the link established in the patriarchal bargain between economic and sexual independence, this had threatening implications for male authority. For while men often disparaged these single mothers as "bad women," they grudgingly accepted that they had the right to do as they pleased with their sexuality. Evidently, in suggesting this image, the activities of collective members represented an abiding threat to men, especially husbands, whose prestige and status were predicated on the real or putative economic dependency and chastity of their wives.

Women's work in the collective also constituted an affront to male status in that it made men vulnerable to gossip about their presumed inability to keep "their" women in their place. By implication, these comments put into question men's capacity as guardians and protectors. In my interviews, complaints by many men and a few elderly women about men's inability to control their wives were usually couched in a critique of

46. I would like to thank Roger Rouse for pointing out the spatial dimension that accompanies the moral aspect of this term *vagar*, to wander, simultaneously makes reference to loitering and to the street as the place where this kind of unproductive or carefree activity takes place.

47. Interview, August 13, 1992.

48. Fieldnotes August 27, 1992.

collective members themselves. As Don Julio once noted, "What happens is that those women like to be in the street, and since their husbands don't say anything to them . . ." To bolster such accusations, men often cited the sole case in which a collective member, Gloria, had left her husband for a man she would see on her daily walks to the organization. That Gloria might have left her husband due to problems stemming from his advanced alcoholism never figured in these stories. Another way in which men's supposed failure to control their wives was criticized was by ridiculing men whose wives worked in the collective.⁴⁹

In sum, it was not women working outside the home per se that constituted a problem for men but rather that the location and timing of women's work allowed their activities to be construed as "of the street," as discussed further below. Nor could men's opposition be explained by their unwillingness to do domestic chores, as some scholars have found to be true elsewhere in Latin America.⁵⁰ Several collective members had available female help to substitute for them in the house. Yet this did not stop men from accusing them of neglecting their chores in order to go to the organization in search of men.

If the collective threatened individual men's status by undermining key premises on which it was based, more dangerous still were its effects on male control over definitions of womanhood that governed relations between women. For in coming together in a joint purpose, and doing so in a space outside the home that men insisted on construing as "the street," collective members blurred key boundaries of and challenged gender arrangements that were sustained, in large measure, by keeping women physically and socially isolated from one another and divided by categories of "good" and "bad" woman. Indeed, part of the definition of a "good" woman was one who did not gossip or become involved in other households' affairs. The threat posed by women's collective organization explains men's incessant surveillance of women's relationships and their harassment of women whenever they gathered outside of ritual contexts or celebrations. Don Julio's comment about Luisa's visits to her cousin echoed a common accusation in these cases: "*Esa mujer es desocupada . . . sólo va a donde la otra a agarrar malas costumbres*" ("That woman doesn't like to work . . . she only goes to [her cousin's house] to catch bad habits.").⁵¹ In local parlance, *desocupada* meant a woman unconcerned with her house and therefore *vaga*, while "bad habits" meant sexually/morally questionable practices. Another common claim among men about which several women complained to me

49. Interviews with Dora Morales, August 12, 1992 and Carmen Jiménez, August 28, 1992.

50. Stephen 1997, 271.

51. Fieldnotes February 12, 1993.

was that women's motivation for getting together was to help each other arrange secret meetings with lovers. While women indeed sometimes did so, men's accusations were often baseless. For example, on one occasion in which Justino Jr. saw two of his cousins chatting on the road, he turned to me and said: "There is the *razonera* (messenger in illicit love affairs) bringing news to that girl (*chavala*)."⁵² When I asked for an explanation, he shrugged my question off: "I bet you that that's what they're talking about—just look at her ways! [*su modito*]."⁵²

The extent to which collective organization was a threat to men's domination is demonstrated by men's strategy not only to isolate women from one another but, whenever possible, to transform women's spatial and social isolation into division and conflict by fomenting sexual competition and rivalry. For example, Leandro brought his new conjugal partner to live in his brother's house, only a few meters away from his parent's house where he still lived with his first wife. Similarly, Alejandro danced provocatively with his lover, with whom he had a child, at a party held at his parents' house where he lived with his wife and their children. When the two women engaged in physical battle, he did not defend his wife, and spent the evening with his lover, thus encouraging her attendance at such parties. More generally, women's spatial and social separation and conflict was reproduced in the minutiae of everyday life and custom. For example, although women were secluded within the space of their homes, the households' pigs were allowed to freely roam around in search of food, a custom that historically embroiled women, as caretakers of their homes and domestic animals, in conflicts with each other over their pigs' damage to other families' crops.

In bringing women together in cooperative practice in a space outside the home, the collectives not only threatened men's capacity to control their own wives but also undermined male ownership of the "outside" and their monopoly over control of the people and spaces in the village. It was not that before the establishment of the collectives women did not break normative gender principles and thus threaten men's status, which we have seen they did. Rather, the collectives added fire to this conflict by legitimizing and institutionalizing female activities that subverted key premises of the existing patriarchal system. At stake in the reconfiguration of the spatial apportionment of the village, then, was much more than what was articulated in male discourses about women's potential infidelity and lack of class consciousness.

I argue that it was the ambiguities in the revolution's gender constructions that allowed village men to both justify their opposition to the collective in terms of revolutionary and house-street ideologies and

52. Fieldnotes January 17, 1993.

strategically claim an ostensibly revolutionary masculinity on the basis of prerevolutionary notions of manhood. Men's positions, that is, cannot be attributed simply to essentialized "machista" reactions, as do explanations that fail to theorize and historicize men's positions. Instead, they must be seen as a result of men's selective appropriation of elements of Sandinista gender ideology that allowed them to recreate a revolutionary masculinity consistent with a male monopoly of power. In particular, Tuleños' use of the gentlemanly image of the New Man to confirm their authority over their wives made possible a series of rationalizations about what wives of proper family men should and should not do. Leticia's husband for example, "didn't mind if I went to the soybean cooking classes imparted by Doña Belqui Martínez [an AMNLAE collaborator from Rivas]. But if I had to go to the collective, and if he came to the house and I wasn't there, there was the crime. He would get very angry, he would tell me that I was a *vaga*."⁵³

This does not mean that men did not have to struggle with contradictions for taking this stance, which clearly went against the Sandinista call for everyone's participation in revolutionary organizations. This could be observed in a conversation with Don Nacho, for example, in which I asked why men opposed women's regular participation in activities outside the home during the Sandinista period. Trying to counteract my perception, Don Nacho answered that women were indeed involved more regularly. In fact, he said, "Women in the CDS (Sandinista Defense Committees) carried out revolutionary patrol [*vigilancia revolucionaria*] from their houses. From there they watched for strangers and if there was counterrevolutionary activity." In some cases, men's emphasis on the most conservative elements of Sandinista gender ideology and their own selective constructions of the New Man based on these elements enabled them to unabashedly claim the priority of family relations over the nation's need for popular mobilization. Don Julián, for example, argued that "How was it possible for the country to move forward if everyone in the family was going about in different directions? [*cada uno agarraba por su lado*]" Other men simply stated that women had work to do in the house so they had no time for participating. Clearly, the gender hierarchies implicit in Sandinista agrarian policies fed into men's interpretations and further facilitated their ability to rationalize their opposition to women's participation.

These reactions and women's responses to them must be understood in the context of house-street ideology as well. While it is clear that women joined the collectives in response to economic and political incentives, we still must ask why "women of the house" would opt to occupy a space on the "outside."

53. Interview, August 2, 1992.

This question takes us to the heart of the struggles that arose as a result of the collectives, namely, the struggle to establish the meanings of and control over spaces, in this case, over the “outside.” Culturally, the “outside” was conceptually undetermined, and referred to alternatively as “the street,” “going to run an errand,” “going to work,” and a host of other activities. The meanings of the “outside,” then, could be—and were—hotly contested. Here it is useful to recall Massey’s insight that, because places are bundles of situated social relations, their meanings are shaped by the practices that unfold in those spaces and the meanings attributed to them rather than by attributes inherent in the spaces themselves.⁵⁴ In El Tule, the meanings of the outside were conditioned by patriarchal prerogatives as expressed in house-street ideology. As we have seen, this ideology worked to prevent women from legitimately occupying spaces outside their houses by inflecting unsanctioned practices outside the home with the meanings of sexual transgression.

But just as the outside/street gained its meanings from the practices that ostensibly transpired in that space, so these practices gained their meanings by their association with the outside/street. The relationship between the established meanings of the street and sexual practices was, then, mutually constitutive. However, the shaping effects of meanings and practices was not symmetrical. As sites constituted by situated social relations, the meanings of places differed for people positioned differently within Tuleño society, and were therefore as unstable as the degree of struggle between dominant and counterdominant meanings and practices. In El Tule, the women’s collectives and the political exigencies of the revolution more generally created opportunities through which women could pry open new spaces and redefine the limits of their legitimate sphere of action. That is, rather than allowing the dominant meanings of place to define their practices, women themselves attempted to define the meaning of their practices and, consequently, of the collectives as a place.

In this struggle over the collectives’ meanings, men predictably clung to the association of the outside with “the street,” while women argued that they were not in the street but rather working. “To look for a man I don’t need to go to the collective,” Licha commented on more than one occasion, reiterating an argument I heard frequently in El Tule; “I am going to work because it is a help for the house, and even more because my husband likes to drink and have women.”

Collective members, as Licha explained, invested in the activist aspect of the New Woman because it benefited them. However, they could and did not stop investing in pre-existing femininities; hence their

54. Massey 1994, 2–5.

efforts to interpret their new activities as an extension of their nurturing roles in "the house." It is important to note, nonetheless, that their conception of the collectives as an extension of the house and of their membership in the organizations as a form of nurturing practice did not simply reproduce existing cultural forms. In contrast to their homes where, at least in theory, they submitted to the patriarch in exchange for a valued social standing and economic support, in the collectives women were forging a non-patriarchal set of relationships in which women were in charge and their position was valued and legitimated within revolutionary culture.⁵⁵ Indeed, unlike cooperativized men who were expected to turn over part of their production to the state, women were true owners of their organization and its products. However, given the already existing fragility of gender arrangements and the loss of power over women that was entailed in women's participation, men could not accommodate these interpretations. From their perspective, women's new positions undermined the male image and economic/moral basis on which men's value and power over both women and community had been historically grounded, namely, the distinction between "bad women" outside the home and "good women" untainted by the street.

IRONIES OF REVOLUTIONARY GEOGRAPHIES

Speaking about the dominant testimonial language of the revolution, Nicaraguan literary critic Ileana Rodríguez has observed that "nation was [the reclaiming of] land and territory together with the transformation of man."⁵⁶ But as this article has shown, the transformation into the New Man—and New Woman—that was to come about through integration into the revolutionary process did not, in the end, come to fruition, at least for men. It is ironic that the Sandinista Revolution—a project with profound social commitments in other aspects—reproduced so acritically gendered characteristics of the social formation it repudiated. As we have seen, in El Tule the revolution's male-dominant character figured at many levels: in the gendering of the primary subject of the revolution as the New Man; in the segregation of men and women into separate production organizations of which male-owned cooperatives were regarded as the principal family resource; and in the confirmation of patriarchal household structures through a conservative turn in the leadership's stance toward household politics. The Sandinistas, then,

55. The extent to which the politicization of Latin American women's traditional roles, especially as mothers, can be the basis for empowerment and gender transformation has been a subject of debate among feminists studying Latin America. For a useful review and discussion, see Craske 1999. For a dissenting argument based on mothers' organizing during the Sandinista and post-Sandinista periods, see Bayard de Volo 2001.

56. Ileana Rodríguez 1994, 37–38.

naturalized critical features of preexisting gender hierarchies and carried them into an attempt to organize class-based organizations. The result was the opening of spaces for the reproduction of preexisting masculinities within the new structures of the state.

This being said, it should be clear that inasmuch as Sandinista state policies made room for women in the public arena, they did not simply replicate existing gender relations. As Molyneux has noted, the Sandinistas did promote policies that furthered women's interests so long as these contributed to the overall revolutionary project.⁵⁷ For this reason, Sandinista policies clashed with men's strategic interpretation of the New Man figure in places like El Tule. Indeed, stances based on local forms of patriarchy conflicted with the political demands of Sandinista state formation, which required women's integration into the polity as class and national actors in their own right. Where the Sandinistas erred was in attempting to integrate women into the public life of the nation while at the same time keeping them subordinated to male household heads. As the experience of the women's collectives demonstrates, it became impossible, in practice, to separate class from gender. Because of their insistence in reducing gender to class, the Sandinistas failed to see that without confronting patriarchal structures, even their modest efforts to open spaces for women as class subjects would run up against formidable male opposition. For men had nothing to gain by distancing themselves from patriarchal stances; on the contrary, they had much to lose. It is for this reason that many self-identified revolutionary men unwittingly found themselves in positions that in principle they opposed.

Feminist scholars studying the Sandinista revolution have identified the government's failure to transform the gender division of labor as a key limitation to gender transformation in the country. This article, by employing an analysis sensitive to the effects of Sandinista policy in local communities, has shown that these policies did in fact affect gender relations and ideologies. Notwithstanding the conservatism of state policies that foregrounded women's integration into the formal economy as a means toward their emancipation, the unintended consequences of these policies, as seen in the case of El Tule's women's collectives, could and did strike at the heart of peasant patriarchies in the country. Indeed, the mutual constitution of gender and space overdetermined that any redrawing of conceptual and spatial boundaries that tampered with prevalent gender categories would pose a threat to entrenched gender hierarchies at the local level. If the result of El Tule's gender clashes was less than revolutionary, such clashes did bring about a change with

57. Molyneux 1985a, 1985b.

potentially significant repercussions: women's construction of a consciousness of gender particularly suited to the opportunities offered by a revolutionary state in formation. As in the cases of Yamilet and Licha, many women who confronted and resisted male opposition to their participation taught themselves in the process to articulate the ways in which their interests conflicted with those of men. The varied outcomes of women's heightened consciousness over time remains to be seen. Yet it is already possible to trace some changes in women's stances regarding their rights as mothers, wives, and lovers in the establishment in 2000 of a small horticultural women's collective near the site of the first collective (see Montoya n.d. "Ambivalent Revolutionaries"). Most importantly, these changes indicate that more than ever before, Tuleño women's world maps—as lived, and as imagined in a better future—are at odds with the dominant model of house and street.

The irony in the Sandinista leadership's gender conservatism, then, was made doubly so given the collectives' unintentional ignition of clashes in El Tule's gender relations. For although the state clearly attempted to open new possibilities for peasant women, their much criticized reticence in supporting women's feminist demands aimed precisely to avoid the political consequences of challenging existing patriarchal structures. If state policies posed any threat to local gender arrangements, they did so unwittingly, and with effects the leadership could not foresee, or control.

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