Friends of the ATC Solidarity Network

Report on Friends of the ATC’s Food Sovereignty and Agroecology in Nicaragua Delegation
January 3 - 13, 2019

Organized in partnership with Asociación de Trabajadores del Campo (ATC), La Via Campesina Nicaragua, Fundación Entre Mujeres (FEM), Alliance for Global Justice, and Compas de Nicaragua (Friends of Nicaragua)
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Introduction

From January 3 to January 13, 2019, Friends of the ATC — a solidarity network that supports Nicaragua’s Asociación de Trabajadores del Campo (Rural Workers’ Association) — hosted its “Food Sovereignty & Agroecology in Nicaragua” delegation. 25 people from the United States, Canada, and Germany convened to learn first-hand how peasants in Nicaragua are building a society based on food sovereignty, agroecology, feminism, socialism, and anti-imperialism. The ATC has been at the forefront of these fights for decades, organizing in Nicaragua since before the triumph of the Sandinista Revolution and also helping found La Via Campesina, an international peasant movement which now exists in 82 countries around the world.

Eight Nicaraguan and Dominican students from the CLOC - La Via Campesina’s IALA (Latin American Institute of Agroecology), located in Chontales, Nicaragua, accompanied our delegation. These students are training to become practitioners of agroecology, a form of politicized, low-input, and sustainable food production based upon a set of principles that value traditional knowledge and peer-to-peer education. Their expertise deeply enhanced our understanding of what agroecology means for life in the countryside, for our grassroots organizations, and for the transformation of society.

The other main theme covered during the delegation was Nicaragua’s historic battle for national sovereignty in the context of a recent failed attempt to overthrow its democratically elected government. While international media, hostile governments, and even many of the progressive organizations we might work with wage a disinformation campaign against Nicaragua and its sovereignty, we wanted delegates to see with their own eyes what Nicaragua is like and speak with regular Nicaraguans about their experiences during the 2018 coup attempt. We emphasized, in particular, the need to build a class-based, anti-imperialist perspective on these events.

Our time as a delegation was divided up into three main “moments” or parts, summarized in the following schedule of the delegation program:

1. **Gathering and orientation in the ATC’s International Francisco Morazán Peasant Worker School.** There, we got an introduction into the Nicaragua-based processes that we would experience and observe during the delegation, as well as a crash course in the history and current context of Nicaragua. As we came to Nicaragua with a range of experiences and from different contexts, we used this stage to unite as a group and get on the same page.

2. **Dividing our large group into 4 different smaller groups to travel to different rural community homestays, allowing us to get to know what life in the Nicaraguan countryside is like.** Half of the delegation went to the mountainous department of Estelí, where ATC - Estelí and the Fundación Entre Mujeres (FEM) — a feminist organization that organizes women producers, fights gender-based violence, and offers members health and educational services — hosted delegates. The other two groups went to Carazo, a department located on Nicaragua’s Pacific Coast. ATC - Carazo and Compas de Nicaragua — a U.S.-Nicaraguan non-profit that promotes cultural exchange through service trips and supports different health, educational, and environmental initiatives — coordinated our visits there.

3. **Coming back together as a large group in Santa Julia, Crucero, Managua, a community organized by the ATC.** Together in Santa Julia we exchanged about our experiences in the other 4 communities, built two biogas systems, heard testimonies from the ATC leaders in the Gloria Quintanilla Women’s Cooperative, and discussed actions for when we returned home.

The planning and execution of the delegation was a very collective process, with many organizations and individuals involved. The Friends of the ATC solidarity network, in consultation with the ATC, was in charge
of coordinating the delegation. US-based organizations including delegation co-sponsor Alliance for Global Justice advertised the trip and recruited delegates. The Nicaragua-based organizations (the ATC, the Fundación Entre Mujeres, and Compas de Nicaragua), oriented by the delegation’s interests and goals, designed the programs for their respective parts of the delegation.

Friends of the ATC built into the overall program important spaces for group reflection, exchange, evaluation, and discussion of solidarity-building proposals. These sessions were always co-facilitated by women and men representing both the Friends of the ATC delegates and the IALA student/facilitator group that accompanied us. The delegation program summary that follows this introduction shows which organization, community, or individual coordinated each piece of the delegation.

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On January 3, the first night of the delegation, Edgardo Garcia, founder and Secretary-General of the ATC, gathered delegates around him on the patio of Francisco Morazán School and welcomed us with a call for internationalism. Edgardo said, “We need a class analysis, a nationalist and internationalist perspective against imperialism.”

Edgardo underlined the ATC’s defense of the Sandinista Revolution, “now in the second stage” (marked by the the election of Daniel Ortega in 2006 and successive re-elections in 2011 and 2016). He outlined the opposition strategy against the FSLN and the social reforms achieved through the Sandinista government. Edgardo said, “First, they want to take away our joy - to kill us by sadness. Then, they aim to destroy the economy. Next, they attempt to divide us, to make us fight each other.” He added, “That is fascism.” Edgardo framed agroecology as a popular means of historical struggle. He stressed the need to fortify grassroots organizations and advance policies that support smallholder and medium-scale farming families, cooperatives, and worker syndicates.

Friends of the ATC is committed to fulfilling Edgaro’s appeal for internationalist, anti-imperialist struggle. As part of our solidarity network organizing, Friends of the ATC created proposals for delegation follow-up. These proposals are collective projects and tasks that will allow us to continue building anti-imperialist, internationalist solidarity with the ATC and with Nicaragua. We are putting these proposals into practice now, including through the creation and sharing of this delegation report, which we hope can be a useful resource for internationalists.

The report itself is a systematization of some of the key topics we covered during the delegation. It is not meant to be a comprehensive account of all the organizations involved, the activities and exchanges we experienced, nor the attempted 2018 coup. Rather, we compiled this report to share with the international community some of the most important information that we learned while together in Nicaragua. We believe that this report can be used by those in the United States and Europe to lobby against our governments’ investment in regime change and help build movements that resist the logic of imperialism.

Following a brief section on the history of anti-imperialist struggle in Nicaragua, the report adheres to the delegation’s program by highlighting different experiences from each of the three “moments.” The first section of the report details talks we had in Managua with ATC leaders and IALA students about the history and purposes of their organizations as well as the current political context in Nicaragua. The second section compiles our community report backs from our visits to Esteli and Carazo. The third section summarizes the testimonies of the ATC leaders in the Gloria Quintanilla Women’s Cooperative who described for us their decades of struggle to organize themselves and improve the conditions in their community.

We are extraordinarily thankful for the time, resources, love and militancy that the ATC and all of our partner organizations committed to making this delegation possible. Solidarity is the tenderness of the peoples!
# Food Sovereignty and Agroecology in Nicaragua Delegation Program

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<td>Thursday January 03</td>
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<td>• Welcome – Edgardo García and Erika Takeo</td>
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<td>• Introductions and icebreaker – Avery Raimondo and Blanca Ruiz</td>
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<td><strong>Day 2 and 3:</strong></td>
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<td>Introduction to the central themes of the delegation</td>
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<td>• What is the ATC, CLOC and La Via Campesina – Fausto Torrez</td>
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<td>• Tour of the Plaza of the Revolution, the National Palace, the Luis Alfonso Velásquez Park and the Salvador Allende Port in Managua with Ivonne</td>
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<td>• Presentation on the IALAs – Marlen Sánchez and IALA students</td>
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<td><strong>Days 4 – 6:</strong></td>
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<td>Sunday 06 – Tuesday 08</td>
<td>Delegates go to four separate rural communities to exchange with families and participate in agricultural work.</td>
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<td>• Marlon Alvarado Community, Santa Teresa municipality – coordinated by the ATC Carazo</td>
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<td>• El Rosario and El Colorado Communities – coordinated by the FEM</td>
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<td><strong>Days 7 – 9:</strong></td>
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<td>Wednesday 09 – Friday 11</td>
<td>Delegates reconvene at the Gloria Quintanilla Cooperative in Santa Julia to exchange with families, listen to women’s testimonies, participate in agricultural work, and propose ideas for solidarity work.</td>
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<td>• Installation of biogas systems and agricultural work</td>
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<td>• Exchange of experiences from the four communities in Estelí and Carazo – Patti Naylor &amp; Pierre Leblanc</td>
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Figure 1: Nicaragua in Central America

Figure 2: Key locations during the delegation
Nicaraguan Historical Context

Nicaragua has a history of struggle against imperialism and for national sovereignty that goes back centuries. In order to provide readers with some context for understanding Nicaragua’s current political moment, this account blends together notes from our tours of historical sites in Managua and Masaya as well as a few other exchanges that took place during the delegation.

In 1895, in the village of Niquinohomo, Augusto Sandino was born as the illegitimate son to a poor washerwoman. As a boy, Augusto (Calderon then, his mother’s last name) stopped his rich father on the street and asked if he was, in fact, his father. When the man answered “yes,” Augusto asked why he wasn’t receiving an education like his half-brother Socrates. His father agreed to take him into his home and give him both his last name Sandino and an education.

In 1912, when Sandino was 17 years old, the United States occupied Nicaragua in order to put down the insurrection of General Luis Mena against the puppet government of President Adolfo Díaz. National Hero of Nicaragua General Benjamín Zeledón died near Masaya during the Battle of Coyotepe Hill. Zeledón had defended his country against another U.S. invasion, refusing to surrender despite the certainty of his own death in battle. Sandino witnessed the transport of Zeledón’s body by the U.S. Marines to Catarina. Zeledón’s sacrifice profoundly influenced Sandino’s leadership in the guerilla struggle against U.S. occupation during Díaz’s second term as President. Anastasio Somoza García assassinated Sandino in 1934 when the general traveled to Managua to sign a peace agreement. The National Guard then massacred a community of the Sandino’s soldiers and their families based in a cooperative near Wiwili.

With the backing of the United States, Somoza and his sons constructed a dictatorship that would last 45 years and mired Nicaragua in conditions of extreme underdevelopment. In the second half of the 20th century, young Nicaraguans took up the name of Sandino in their vision for a free Nicaragua, founding the Sandinista Front for National Liberation, or FSLN. Childhood friends Carlos Fonseca and Tomás Borge, along with Silvio Mayorga, co-founded the FSLN. Inspired by Sandino, they wanted national sovereignty, not U.S. domination over Nicaragua.

As a delegation we visited the eternal flames for Fonseca, Borge, and General Santos López in front of the old Cathedral of Managua and the Plaza of the Revolution. General Santos López is considered the link between Sandino and the FSLN as he fought for Sandino during the struggle to oust the U.S. Marines in the early 1930s. In Honduras, López met with Fonseca, the architect of the FSLN’s political philosophy, and their relationship would play an important role in rescuing Sandino’s legacy, which Somoza had hoped to bury. Sandino’s name and thinking was incorporated into their struggle to overthrow Anastasio Somoza Debayle (“Tachito,” the third and final Somoza to rule Nicaragua).

Just a few hundred meters from the eternal flames of Fonseca, Borge and López is the National Palace, known today as the National Palace of Culture. On August 22, 1978, “Comandante Cero” Eden Pastora and 25 Sandinistas, dressed as elite guards, entered the building and captured a number of congressmen. The Sandinistas contacted Somoza and demanded, in exchange for hostages, a speech on national radio, $500,000, the release of Sandinista prisoners, and safe passage to fly out of the country. Borge was among the 59 prisoners released. The daring exploit further delegitimized the Somoza dictatorship. Within a year, the Sandinistas liberated Nicaragua, officially triumphant on July 19, 1979.

Upon coming to power, the FSLN soon began implementing a massive literacy campaign, agrarian reform, and other social programs to rebuild the country following decades of dictatorship. However, the Sandinistas’ efforts were met with immediate resistance: the U.S. financed and reorganized the National Guard, fomenting the counter-revolution and bloody civil war that killed up to 50,000 Nicaraguans. At this time, there were many
internationalists that accompanied and defended the revolution. In the ATC’s office, there is a poster of the internationalists that were killed in the 1980s during the Contra War. These martyrs include Ben Linder, an artist from Portland, Oregon who worked in a campesino community during the war, installing motors to generate electricity in rural areas before being assasinated in a Contra attack.

The Contra War came to an end in 1990 with the election of Violeta Chamorro, a member of the oligarchy, who led the United National Opposition or UNO. The fall of the FSLN brought a period of 16 years of neoliberal policies to Nicaragua. Under the presidencies of Chamorro, Arnoldo Alemán and Enrique Bolaños, agrarian reform was reversed, schools were privatized, extreme poverty increased, and there were long periods of blackouts.

The FSLN returned to power once again through the 2006 elections as part of a continental trend that saw the left rule in Honduras, El Salvador, Paraguay, Brazil, Bolivia, Ecuador, Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, Peru, and Venezuela. The FSLN, under the presidential leadership of Daniel Ortega, began to invest in social programs for the people of Nicaragua. Within a decade, Nicaragua became one of the safest countries in the Americas and its economy boomed as the FSLN’s social investments improved the quality of life for much of the population, not just a select few. Some of these programs that were seen first-hand on the delegation include:

- The bono productivo, which gives women pregnant cows, pigs, chicken, and plants as a way to improve self-sufficiency and gender equality in the countryside
- Bonos of construction materials like roofing and cement to improve housing conditions
- School snack & lunch programs
- Infrastructure for popular, family-friendly and safe recreation such as the well-known Luis Alfonso Velasquez Park, named after a young boy killed by Somoza’s National Guard. This park has a skate park and is well-lit and guarded by police at night. We also ate dinner at nearby Salvador Allende Port on Lake Managua, which contains restaurants, a boardwalk, a water park, a go-kart track, and a miniature city of old Managua.
- Investments in basic infrastructure including electricity and access to potable water
- Free trainings to learn various trades, from motorcycle mechanics to making piñatas and fruit jams
- The promotion of farmers markets and technical support for small farmers and small businesses

By successfully showing an alternative to neoliberal politics and U.S. puppet governments, Nicaragua became ideologically a “bad example,” according to Fausto Torrez, the ATC’s Coordinator of International Relations. Thus, Nicaragua, like other “Pink Tide” countries ruled by progressive governments, also became a target for U.S. interference. As we discussed with ATC leaders and our delegation, the current context we live in has seen a turn toward the right across the Americas. Right-wing, fascist, and misogynist leaders have already come to power (Trump, Bolsonaro in Brazil, Macri in Argentina) while imperialism continues to threaten socialist governments in not just Nicaragua but also Bolivia and Venezuela. During the process of writing this report, the U.S.-supported candidate Nayib Bukele defeated the FMLN’s Hug Martínez to win El Salvador’s presidential election and Juan Guaidó, the U.S.-trained pretender, has declared himself president of Venezuela.

The struggles of the ATC and Nicaragua overall to build agroecology, food sovereignty, and socialism are in contradiction with imperialism’s current efforts to regain control over Latin America, the context in which the attempted coup was carried out.

That attempted coup, however, was defeated, demonstrated in part by the clear return to peace that the delegation experienced in January 2019.
Moment 1
Escuela Campesina Francisco Morazán (La Escampi)
Ticuantepe, Managua
Jan. 3 - Jan. 6

“Chávez, Fidel, and Che. Now that we’re all here together, women and men; Now that they can see us; Down with capitalism! It’s going to fall! And the united people rise, to win the struggle!”

IALA students opening our second day at the Escuela Campesina Francisco Morazán with a mística
During the delegation’s first days in Managua, Fausto Torrez, the ATC’s Coordinator of International Relations, gave overviews of the ATC, CLOC, and La Via Campesina. Marlen Sánchez, National Coordinator of Agroecology for the ATC, and some students from IALA - Mesoamerica explained the purpose and practices of agroecology and IALAs. We’ve condensed these talks into summaries and added a few points of clarification.

ATC, CLOC, and La Via Campesina

Founded in 1978, the Asociación de Trabajadores del Campo (Rural Workers Association) or ATC is an organization representing rural workers, landless peasants, and small farmers that strives to improve the quality of life in Nicaragua’s countryside.

The ATC played an instrumental role during the first phase of the Popular Sandinista Revolution organizing workers in the literacy campaign and agrarian reform. Afterwards, the ATC became an active part of the civil society opposition during the neoliberal period in Nicaragua from 1990 to 2006. Today, the ATC organizes workers into unions and small farmers into cooperatives (currently there are 134 labor unions and 254 cooperatives under the organizational umbrella of the ATC). Many of the labor unions are in the primarily export-focused industries of coffee, bananas, oil crops, and sugar. The small farmers make a large contribution to Nicaragua’s national economy and food sovereignty, growing corn, beans, tropical fruits, medicinal plants, animals for meat and dairy products.

As an organization representing these forces responsible for the country’s food production, the ATC participates in a dialogue with Nicaragua’s business sector and government to improve living and working conditions for rural peoples and small farmers. Another crucial aspect of the ATC and affiliated organizations is political, ideological, and technical training; the ATC coordinates different schools and processes in order to form cadre for these organizations. ATC-directed schools include the IALA (see below) for Central American and Caribbean students in Chontales, Nicaragua; one regional school for political & ideological training in Managua; and there are plans to create a national IALA school for Nicaraguans at its facility in Matagalpa.

The ATC is an autonomous organization, receiving zero funding from the Nicaraguan government. Most of its membership is of the Sandinista tendency. Fausto emphasized that the ATC “will continue to exist regardless of a left or right government because we represent the rights of people who produce the food in Nicaragua.”

In the 1990s, the ATC helped found the Coordinadora Latinoamericana de Organizaciones del Campo (CLOC) at the continental level and La Via Campesina (LVC) at the international level. Both articulations came out of the Continental Campaign of 500 Years of Indigenous, Black, Peasant and Popular Resistance which was organized in Latin America — encounters took place in Colombia (1989), Guatemala (1991), and Nicaragua (1992) — in response to the proposal from a group of Latin American presidents to celebrate the 500th anniversary of the “discovery” of the continent in 1992.

Fausto emphasized that CLOC and LVC are social movements made up of grassroots, mass-based organizations — not NGOs — which fight against the model of agribusiness promoted by the WTO and large governments and for a model of food sovereignty. Peasants produce 70% of the world’s food on just 25% of the land. CLOC and LVC defend this model of food production as well as the rights of peoples and nations to define and control their own food and agricultural systems.

CLOC and LVC have similar organizational structures with regions, political coordination (for CLOC, the Political Commission, and for LVC, the International Coordinating Committee), membership assembles approximately every 4 years, work collectives, and campaigns. Women and Youth articulations are both fundamental to the movements. The ATC currently holds the regional coordination for the CLOC-Via Campesina Central American region and in June of 2019 will receive the Operating Secretariat for the CLOC.
Solidarity and peasant-to-peasant cooperation are central to both the CLOC and LVC. They mobilize on notable days of struggle and perform direct actions around the world, including International Women's Day (Mar. 8), World Day of Peasant Struggle for Agrarian Reform (Apr. 17), International Day of Struggle against the WTO (Sept. 10), Days of Food Sovereignty and Struggle Against Multinational Corporations (Oct. 12-16), and the Day of Migrants (Dec. 10).

A major victory, led by LVC over a 17 years long struggle and with the support of Nicaraguan Father Miguel D'Escoto while he was General Secretary to the UN, was the recent adoption by the UN of the Declaration of the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas. Now a central task of LVC will be to ensure the declaration’s implementation.

As one of the fundamental pillars to building food sovereignty, the “massification” of agroecology has been an important movement strategy in the recent decades. Agroecology is about rescuing a peasant way of life and method of growing food based on ancestral knowledge in response to the dramatic loss of biological and cultural diversity caused by the Green Revolution. The IALAs focus on training in agroecology and are a central strategy in CLOC-VC to train cadre.

**Instituto Agroecológico Latinoamericano (IALA)**

One key process of *formación* (training) pushed by CLOC-VC in Latin America have been the IALAs – Instituto Agroecológico Latinoamericano. Currently, 9 IALAs exist throughout Latin America, the first of which was founded nearly 11 years ago in Venezuela with support from the Bolivarian government led by Hugo Chávez. All IALAs share the principles of LVC and popular educational methodology, but the programs vary according to each’s structure and base of support.

IALA schools promote agroecology as a way of *buenvivir* or “well-being” and a political platform for overcoming decades of Green Revolution technologies and neoliberal policies that have exhausted lands, displaced peoples, destroyed local markets, and indebted smallholders, some to the point of bankruptcy and suicide. Guided by a common social ethic, not the profit motive, youth have a distinct vision for the countryside, the city, and social relations in general. In order to cool the planet and free people from all forms of oppression, IALAs aim to address the root causes of migration out of rural areas. **IALAs train young people to be militants in their organizations**, make life in the countryside enjoyable and attractive, practice agroecology, and establish the pillars of communitarian society by fulfilling a social purpose through meaningful work in cooperation with others. IALA graduates are leaders; students tend to become less timid, more socially-conscious, and energetic to work together in order to solve intersecting problems in the countryside, such as degraded land, poverty, hunger, and educational disparities.

Students at the IALA in Nicaragua — the first in Mesoamerica — complete their training by combining 45 days of intensive classroom study with 30 days in their host community. The system involves about 70% practice and 30% theory. IALA students become familiar with biointensive production, raised beds, vermiculture, seed saving, and many more techniques. They grow staple grains, legumes, vegetables, fruits, and livestock, depending on the context of their community work and study term. Additionally, the curriculum includes time to understand the political context of each students’ country. Graduates, prepared to work the land in their territories, continue the popular educational process by sharing their knowledge and skills of agroecology, peasant-to-peasant.

LVC organizations largely fund IALAs through their own budgets, but also receive some money from international funding & solidarity organizations. Friends of the ATC is an important source of funding to IALA because it is unrestricted and thus can be used as IALA needs and wishes: [afgi.salsalabs.org/friendsoftheatec/](http://afgi.salsalabs.org/friendsoftheatec/).
During our travels together, the IALA students and teachers described for delegates different perspectives, practices, and techniques that they’ve learned while studying together in Chontales. For example, we opened the second full day of the delegation with a mística led by the IALA students. Blanca Ruiz, a IALA student from the Dominican Republic, explained the purpose and meaning of this practice: “The mística is an ancestral way of invoking energy and placing the elements and fruits that we have by giving a message. We do it daily in the morning to start the day of fieldwork with a reflection, and in this way we strengthen ourselves to continue in the struggle.”

One by one, the IALA students walked up the stairs, performed an action, and stood inside the circle of delegates. Actions ranged from sowing seeds and pretending to water them to motioning, crouched, with a machete as if they were weeding or harvesting. Music started playing through the speakers once they all assembled in a row. The youth began to sing a Spanish version of L’Internationale (a French socialist anthem written in 1871). Next, they recited a series of consignas (revolutionary chants). The IALA students led delegates in one chant which honored Hugo Chávez, Fidel Castro, and Che Guevara: “Chávez, Fidel, and Che. Now that we’re all here together, women and men; Now that they can see us; Down with capitalism! It’s going to fall! And the united people rise, to win the struggle!”

“Today the mística had the theme of food sovereignty and we simulated a path with boots, a path to work,” said Blanca. “There were the tools [in the display] and along that path we showed the resulting fruits that were the things we set there. The fruits that were all the things that we put. Likewise, there were the flags of all the organizations that support us; as if they were an umbrella, an umbrella that covers us, and the books and the texts that we used to symbolize our education.”

At the Francisco Morazán School, the IALA students also directed two projects — preparing plant starts, such as citrus, avocado, and vegetables, for the school garden and creating a compost pile — that illustrated for delegates examples of agroecology in practice. The IALA students explained what the compost system entails, including the materials needed, how to build one, and the science behind how it functions. As simple as a compost may be, it’s a critical aspect of agroecology. A compost closes the loop of having to import nutrients to your farm, reduces the need to throw food into landfill, and increases soil organic matter.
The Current Nicaraguan Context and the Failed Coup Attempt of 2018

Along with recounting the history of the ATC, CLOC, and La Via Campesina, Fausto Torrez provided invaluable explanations of 2018’s failed coup attempt which has been heavily misrepresented within and outside of Nicaragua. According to international media, nonviolent protests surrounding proposed social security reforms escalated to a full-on uprising in response to repression by the police and the FSLN government. Fausto’s account cuts through this disinformation, explaining why and how imperialism targeted Nicaragua. In this summary, we’ve combined Fausto’s class in Managua with a more informal conversation he had with delegates while accompanying the group that went to Esteli.

Before detailing any of the actual events that transpired during 2018, Fausto contextualized the attempted coup within the return over the last few years of reactionary regimes across Latin America. The FSLN’s victory in 2006 marked the beginning of a leftward shift in Central America. During the 12 years of Sandinista rule since Daniel Ortega won the presidency in 2006, Nicaragua has had the “best economy in the country’s history,” while also being the “safest country in Central America.” These successes turned Nicaragua into a “bad example” for Central America and a blow to the extreme right.

In the following years, the FMLN, El Salvador’s leftist party, came to power and Mel Zelaya, the president of Honduras, began pursuing more progressive policies. Of the trio, Honduras was “the weakest link” and thus in 2009 the United States and the Honduran right coordinated a coup d’etat against the government of Zelaya. Fausto noted that El Salvador and Nicaragua as the current targets of imperialism. He remarked upon the importance of El Salvador’s then upcoming presidential election, which the FMLN lost.

From this analysis of Central America, Fausto zoomed out to cover all of Latin America. During the first decade of the 2000s, progressive governments were in power in Paraguay, Brazil, Bolivia, Ecuador, Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, and Venezuela. However, imperialism has halted this progressive momentum as right-wing parties in almost all of these countries have been able to come to power and roll back the advances made by left governments. Fausto pinpointed the election of Jair Bolsonaro, “a misogynist and a fascist,” in Brazil as a particularly frightening moment in this trend.

After giving us this background on the current political climate in Latin America, Fausto then proceeded to shed light on “how the imperialists act in Nicaragua.” Fausto cited William S. Lind, a former high-ranking military officer and graduate of West Point, and Gene Sharp, founder of the Albert Einstein Institution, as two key political theorists and proponents of strategies employed by the armed opposition during the coup attempt last year. In his writings, Lind has advocated for the practice of “fourth-generation warfare,” which incorporates the use of print media and telecommunications technology to manufacture disinformation, public outrage, and ultimately topple a ruling party. Sharp studied non-violence while imprisoned for resisting the Korean War and then “used the theories of Gandhi for the CIA,” according to Fausto. Drawing attention to the use of deception by the Nazis, Fausto paraphrased an adage of the German propagandist Joseph Goebbels, “A lie told a thousand times becomes the truth.”

Referencing the “color revolutions” in Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan, and other areas around the former Soviet Union as well as the Arab Spring, Fausto argued that a disinformation campaign devised by the United States, international media corporations, and the Nicaraguan opposition is “what confused everyone” about the failed coup attempt. Fourth-generation warfare “is a coup d’etat that didn’t need a war tank. Just an iPhone, Samsungs…”

One example of how fourth-generation warfare functioned in Nicaragua was through the circulation of pictures and videos of student-led, nonviolent protests — “the image broadcasted to the rest of the world of a young man using a slingshot against a dictator’s army,” said Fausto — while the opposition began to set up roadblocks
(tranques) along Nicaragua’s main roads and highways. These tranques, which paralyzed the country’s economy and prohibited the free movement of people, were spaces of violence and crime. Many tranques were loaded with paid workers, thugs, or members of the Mara Salvatrucha gang from El Salvador who were given drugs, alcohol, and AK47s and M16s. Car windows were broken by tranquistas refusing to allow passage. Women were raped at the tranque in Jinotepe. In Masaya, a police officer was tortured and killed and burned alive at a roadblock. Hundreds of Central American trucks drivers were stuck with their vehicles for weeks just outside Jinotepe, unable to continue their journeys on the Panamerican highway.

On the final day of the delegation, we conducted an interview with one of our bus drivers who explained the experience of crossing the tranques. He shared the story of a sick man who died inside his bus while they were stopped at a roadblock:

“There in Jinotepe they called me to a community called La Manzana, near a church I used to attend. They said, ‘Brother, could you please come give a ride to my dad who is really sick, to take him to the hospital?’

‘I’m coming,’ I said. I came to give a ride to the man, and he was in bad shape. I put him in my car and took him, and every time I came to a roadblock I’d say, ‘Brother, let me pass because I have a sick passenger,’ but they said ‘No, no’ all the time. I couldn’t, even though they let me pass several roadblocks, but not all of them. And the man died in my car, for lack of medical attention. And that was just in Jinotepe, where other cases occurred. Imagine trying to take him to Managua! I went back to where I saw a nurse and asked her ‘Can you check him to see how he is?’ She answered, ‘He doesn’t have a pulse…he already died.’ I didn’t even take him to the hospital, because I couldn’t get through. They don’t let you by until you have a casket. This was all a product of the roadblocks. He didn’t get medical attention in time, that’s true. His daughter is a Christian and it’s true, he died in my car.’

Another key component of fourth-generation warfare during the attempted coup was the appropriation by the opposition of historical revolutionary symbolism to deceive people and gain support for their cause. This tactic has included the use of Nicaragua’s national flag, music from Latin America’s radical traditions, and famous phrases from the Sandinista Revolution, like that of young Sandinista poet Leonel Rugama, who when killed by the Somoza National Guard cried out, “Que se rinde tu madre!” On our delegation, we passed through Monimbó, a neighborhood in Masaya which had been a bastion of Sandinista struggle and refuge during the fight against Somoza. In 2018, the opposition used traditional indigenous masks from Monimbó that Sandinistas had worn to protect their identities in 1979 and successfully set up one of the most violent tranques in the country. Another tactic was the false comparison between Ortega and the Somoza family. All of these tactics were especially effective for fooling younger Nicaraguans, who did not experience the stark differences between Nicaraguan life today and Nicaraguan during the Somoza dictatorship or the neoliberal period.

Beyond the subversion of Sandinista symbols, the United States and the Nicaraguan opposition have also confused the international community by boosting the perspectives of prominent former Sandinistas whose credibility outside of Nicaragua provides conservative forces with a progressive facade. After the FSLN lost the elections in the 1990s, members of the historic Nicaraguan oligarchy that had participated in the Revolution broke off from the FSLN and created their own political party – the MRS, or Sandinista Renovation Movement. Many of them found refuge in the NGO sector and continued to cultivate friendships with the international community that had been developed through solidarity work during the Revolution. The MRS has become increasingly reactionary over time, even meeting with US politicians like Marco Rubio and Ileana Ros-Lehtinen to push forward the NICA Act.
The opposition have also weaponized “human rights organizations” in order to misrepresent the actual events and conditions in Nicaragua. The National Endowment for Democracy (founded in the 1980s to overthrow the contras), USAID, and the International Republican Institute all provided funding to NGOs that were heavily involved in the coup attempt. Some of these organizations referenced during the delegation were the Nicaraguan Center for Human Rights (CENIDH), which is directed by Vilma Nuñez, a former presidential candidate that lost to Ortega. The U.S.-founded Asociación Nicaragüense Pro Derechos Humanos (ANPDH) is a human rights organization funded by the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), and in the 1980s ANPDH distorted the reality of the Contra War by covering-up the human rights abuses and war crimes committed by the right-wing death squads that the U.S. trained and financed. These human rights organizations have been cited as credible sources by international media outlets.

The Catholic Church, which has largely opposed the FSLN since its founding, also played an important role in the opposition. Silvio Baez, the Bishop of Managua, has bragged that the Church set up tranques. Weapons and money were found stored in churches and Jinotepe’s San Jose School, a headquarters of opposition violence. A priest in Estelí oversaw the torture of a Sandinista. When the police officer in Masaya was killed, priests instructed tranquilistas to hide his body.

According to Fausto, even as these gangs committed acts of terorristic violence and property destruction, Ortega ordered the army to stay off the streets and the police to remain in their barracks. After the protests and tranques had brought the country to a standstill for 3 months, Nicaragua “had to bring out the police and work with historic combatants” to restore order and safety. “Now, it’s not all normal, but there aren’t golpistas in the streets,” said Fausto. Nicaraguans can move freely again, but tourists are still not visiting, as people in the U.S. and Europe believe what they see on the internet and media outlets like CNN and Telemundo. Meanwhile, these news corporations ignore the abuses perpetrated by states like Honduras and Colombia, which are allies of the U.S.

Nicaragua still faces a battle at the international level as the country prepares for the potential impact of the Nicaragua Investment Conditionality Act (NICA Act), signed into law by Donald Trump on December 20, 2018. This sanctionary law asks the U.S. to vote “no” against Nicaragua’s applications of for international credit from places like the International Monetary Fund. This will of course have some negative effects for the people of Nicaragua, but there is also confidence that much of Nicaragua’s economy will continue to move as normal because it does not operate within the international financing framework. The main effect of something like the NICA Act, though, is that it is a clear sign that Nicaragua poses an ideological threat to imperialism, an alternative way to organize society that imperils the status quo. “We need to educate about the danger of the implementation of this law and the problems that can be created by the international media campaign,” said Fausto. He also called for a new “logic of politics” and greater political education.

“Nicaragua is now working on peace and reconciliation,” said Fausto. “We are also trying to heal our wounds. And we need international solidarity so that our people can recover. I think it can be done.” Fausto presented a “very basic principle” of internationalism to the delegation: “I might be against Rafael Correa, Bachelet, Lula, Mel Zelaya, or Daniel Ortega but I can’t applaud the actions of (imperialism).” This is an international solidarity that must stand firm. He also noted the need for U.S. citizens to visit Nicaragua in order to understand what is really happening in the country and praised the millions of people, including North Americans Brian Wilson and Benjamin Linder, who’ve worked in solidarity with Nicaragua. One task of the Friends of the ATC and the true solidarity community is to recover this history of internationalism and strengthen solidarity with Nicaragua and other peoples that continue to struggle against imperialism and for self-determination.
Moment 2
Community Homestays in Carazo and Estelí
Jan 6. - Jan. 9

Denis, a IALA student, with one of our host fathers from the Marlon Alvarado community in Carazo

Delegates with members of La Fundación Entre Mujeres in El Colorado, Estelí
After spending three days at the Francisco Morazán School in Managua, we headed for our community homestays. Half the group went south to Carazo, the other half north to Esteli. In Carazo, the department-level office of the ATC and Compas de Nicaragua received delegates. In Esteli, the department-level office of the ATC and Fundación Entre Mujeres hosted us. While visiting these communities, our hosts were fully responsible for designing our programs. Through their coordination, we were able to observe from the base how militant, politically-empowered communities in Nicaragua organize themselves. Within our smaller groups, we assigned specific roles to different delegates in order to put together brief presentations on our experiences for the overall delegation upon coming back together in Santa Julia. Those presentations were used to create the following summaries of our times apart in the countryside.

**ATC - Carazo (Santa Teresa, Carazo)**

The Marlon Alvarado community, located in the municipality of Santa Teresa in the department of Carazo, has been organizing with the ATC since the time of the insurrection. Community leaders recounted how they remember ATC founder and Secretary General, Edgardo Garcia, walking through Marlon Alvarado in the 1970s and having to hide from the Somoza National Guard in the homes of fellow ATC members. In more recent years, the families have participated in ATC-coordinated trainings on cooperatives, agroecology, and trades (making hammocks and jewelry). These trainings have taken place in the community themselves, specifically for women, with the idea that these skills help women to be more self-sufficient and bring in income to purchase items that can’t be grown or made in the community.

The families in the community have access to land, much of which became available through the agrarian reform of the 1980s. **The families that our delegation stayed with grew much of their own food** and we were able to participate in those activities. Many families had farm animals (pigs, cows and chickens) which had been received and then reproduced through the government’s *bono productivo* program. **The activities were intergenerational and leadership varied depending on the situation, but it was always clear that the families of the community were very united and practiced sharing and solidarity with one another.**

On the first day, we learned about the *cama profunda* (deep bed) technique for raising pigs in an enclosed space, a practice that involves spreading a thick layer of rice husks in the pig bed, rather than bare concrete or dirt. The husks absorb moisture from the pig’s manure and urine as well as begin the process of breaking down both the manure and the rice husks. There is no smell, and there are no flies, and there is a significant reduction of maintenance required compared to a conventional pig pen. Using the risk husk manure mixture from the pig bed, we then built a compost pile at the home of one of the families with all of the women from the community and students and facilitators from IALA.

On the second day, we harvested corn using the traditional technique of the “tapisca” on land redistributed during the agrarian reforms. We also toured a diversified parcel, which consisted of livestock, dozens of different types of citrus trees, bananas, plantains, pineapple, root crops, and more. Later, we gathered at another host family’s house to view how they process sugarcane and Taiwan grass for their cows. We then practiced double-digging, a bio-intensive gardening technique to loosen soil for better aeration and drainage, in this case using a shovel and digging bar.

On our final day in Santa Teresa we toured a medium-scale, privately-owned rice mill where our homestay families go to process their rice that they grow and eat throughout the year. Behind the building, we filled sacks of rice husks, which our families use for the deep beds where they keep their pigs. Midday, we threshed sorghum.

We celebrated our time together by making *rosquillas* (Nicaraguan cookies) and having a gathering of all the families together. Emerita Vega shared a testimony of her life in the community. **She highlighted the shift**
from extreme poverty to more equitable social relations resulting from agrarian reform, greater protections for workers, the government’s focus on gender parity, and investment in social services (education and healthcare) and infrastructure (potable water, electricity, and roads). One delegate shared that before they had only read about the Sandinista Revolution but was finally seeing it with their own eyes.

Compas de Nicaragua (La Paz, Carazo)

Compas de Nicaragua (Friends of Nicaragua), an organization that supports a peasant workers’ cooperative and develops sustainable living projects in La Paz, Carazo, hosted a group of delegates. We were divided into four homestays and worked with host families on their land. La Paz currently has around 300 agricultural producers who mainly grow coffee. Through Compas they began exporting to the United States. The families were in the process of creating coffee seedling nurseries to be able to plant or sell coffee plants for the next season.

The producers in La Paz received their land through the agrarian reform of the Sandinista Revolution and initially worked the land together as a cooperative, which has since been divided into parcels for individual families. The community made that decision based on positive experience with collective planting. They agreed on who would produce each crop according to a group plan for mutual access to the harvests as well as a cooperative marketing strategy. Producer autonomy, convenience, and communal harmony were cited as central reasons to divide the land and co-manage production.

What the producers do cooperatively is the process of exporting the coffee, which allows the producers to receive more money for their product. The coffee producers also share a machine that removes the beans from the coffee fruit, and a bean drying space to speed up the process, minimize labor and avoid going through a separate processing person. Another thing that the producers of La Paz do as a cooperative is make fertilizer. They also have a program of reforestation, which is another source of income for farmers. The cooperative gives them seeds of coffee or moringa, which they can use to grow or sell.

Like many formerly rural places in the world, La Paz is becoming more urban. We visited a municipal museum and saw the tools that people of La Paz once used and the animals they would raise as well as an abandoned sugar mill which had been used to process sugar, testaments to La Paz once having been oriented around agriculture. Today, the community of La Paz is quite densely housed. There is a park and cell phone service. Some families make tortillas and have cows, while others, usually younger people, commute to Managua everyday to work or to Jinotepe to study in the university. One woman, for example, was a nurse who had to drive to Managua and then work a 24-hour shift. When she had time, she would also help on her family’s farm. Many people who had a separate job or study remained active on the farm. Young people seem to want these new opportunities away from the countryside, but if they have a farm, they still have the obligation to pay a worker to cover their workload for the family. Older people from La Paz mentioned how the culture of the town is changing, as children are now more self-conscious about what they wear and tech-savvy. It is also common for younger people from La Paz to travel to Costa Rica for work.

In La Paz, the government provides public services, including programs specifically for peasant workers. For example, the government has a recently-founded program that allows farmers to sell at new markets. The government provides medical care and a place to stay for pregnant woman for as long as they need during their pregnancies as well as free daycare for kids whose parents work. The museum is also funded by the Nicaraguan government. In general, people we spoke to support the FSLN government, which they believe favors people of the working class and tries to improve their quality of life.

In terms of food sovereignty observations, we found the experience in La Paz interesting because the farmers were all fairly self-sufficient. When people lacked certain needed goods or foods, there was a lot of exchange within the community. What we noticed was, for example, the ladies were making and selling tortillas so that
people would not have to make them themselves. Another example is that, on the last day we were in La Paz, one of the neighbors was butchering a hog which he got from someone in the community. He didn’t just buy it from some big agribusiness. The man took the hog to his house, cut it up there, got it into the pieces to sell, and then sold them. All of this occurred within the community, not through some big exchange outside of the community.

**ATC - Estelí (La Montañita, Estelí)**

The group that went to La Montañita, Estelí was warmly welcomed by the community as if we were a part of their families. La Montañita consists of 65 families that produce basic grains like corn and beans. While we were in the countryside, we visited the cornfields (currently inactive because we were not visiting during the main growing season), milking the cows, making cheese and baking *rosquillas* with some women of the community. We felt a sense of revolutionary spirit and love in the community.

Some of the challenges shared with us by the community include climate change, land access, drought and how youth can stay in the countryside. Currently, many young people from the community go to the nearby city of Estelí to work in the tobacco industry. Some young people are looking at agriculture again; the hope, as one of our guides from the ATC told us, is that “**with agroecology young people will fall in love with the countryside again and take back the land.**” The community expressed a need for young leaders, especially those trained by IALA.

After our time in La Montañita, we returned to the city center of Estelí where we visited an ATC cooperative tobacco farm. The land was owned by Somoza and is now managed by the ATC. The founding members of the cooperative were guerillas who fought against the Somoza dictatorship. The cooperative guarantees an income for the workers, grows corn and beans, and also produces livestock for cooperative members to eat. What we found great and important was the **cooperative’s emphasis on gender equality and the human rights of the employees**, which which are transparently promoted as the ATC hangs posters in the main area that inform the cooperative members about news, workers’ rights, and the principles of the cooperative. After seeing the production of tobacco, we visited the CubaNica cigar factory which produces Padrón (a company owned by Cubans living in Miami) cigars. This factory has an ATC-organized worker union with a female union president. Workers have 48-hour work weeks.

What our group considered important to take back home was to share the view of local people about the coup attempt, the importance of land ownership, and how we can support women’s and other collectives from back home. It was also important to see that within the Central American region peasant families face similar challenges which can be dealt with together.

**La Fundación Entre Mujeres (Estelí)**

We began our time with the *Fundación Entre Mujeres* (Foundation Between Women) — a grassroots organization and social movement that has been fighting in Estelí for women’s liberation since 1995 — at the Las Diosas Cooperative. Fortunately, many of the founders of the FEM were available to welcome us and explain the history, structure, and purpose of their work. We also toured a fertilizer company and processing center for other agricultural products.

Estelí suffered heavily during the Contra War, both in the loss of human life and in the degradation of agricultural, economic and public service systems. This destruction had long-term impacts on the ability of communities to survive and recover. However, feminist peasants collaborated to develop holistic and women-led solutions. Since its founding, the FEM has focused on the economic and educational empowerment of rural women, the defense of their sexual and reproductive rights, the struggle against gender-based and
environmental violence, the promotion of agroecology, and many other objectives related to the advancement of feminism in Esteli and the rest of Nicaragua.

When the right-wing Chamorro government (1990-1997) rolled back the agrarian reform policies that the Sandinista Revolution had won, the communities of Esteli lost most of the land that their families had acquired. This destructive measure by Chamorro against agrarian reform caused a serious setback in all of Nicaragua and incalculable suffering in rural communities, leaving them in a desperate situation without means of subsistence. The impacts were greater on the women who remained silenced, largely without power in their communities or households. By founding FEM, landless women, illiterate and extremely poor, decided to take matters into their own hands.

The FEM provides organizational support to women, scholarships, and specific training as well as a number of other critical services. It also serves as a fundamental political instrument for feminist campaigns at local, regional, national and international levels. To implement their program, the FEM partners with the ATC, the FSLN government, and international agencies.

Las Diosas, which acquires land and provides ideological training is one example of the FEM’s contributions to Esteli. Founded in 2012, the Central Committee of the Las Diosas Cooperatives supports eight cooperatives based in different communities in Esteli, with specialized training, personnel, and common services such as the processing, marketing and transportation of products.

After our meeting at the Las Diosas Cooperative, the FEM split us into two groups of four. Half of the delegates went to the village of El Rosario while the others traveled to El Colorado. Because the two groups were out of contact with each other during the majority of our time with the FEM, we completed individual report-backs.

**La FEM (El Colorado, Esteli)**

**Over our 3 days in El Colorado and Esteli, we were able to see how the FEM has organized around agroecology and food sovereignty to overcome various forms of violence — imperialist, environmental, gendered.** In order to organize our report-back, our principle was a slogan that we often saw while in El Colorado: *Sovereignty over our bodies, our rights, and our seeds.*

We were impressed by how the FEM has transformed social and environmental relations according to their visions for grassroots feminism and food sovereignty. We were hosted by two founders of the FEM and were able see the intersection between the FEM and Coopemujer, a cooperative which began with 20 members at its start that has grown to include over 50 members. These women produce coffee, sorghum, corn, root vegetables, herbs, rice, and beans. They have pigs and chickens. They harvest eggs and make their own tortillas. It was very inspiring to witness how they sustain themselves and fight collectively as women for control over their land.

Over the years, the women of the FEM have accomplished a lot in El Colorado around agroecology. They have installed a cistern, dug an irrigation well, and designed a biointensive food orchard. They grow seeds that they process into oil and raise bees that help pollinate their plants. The women were particularly proud of their seed improvement program, which uses funds from global agencies to cultivate seeds suited specifically for their environments. The community sells the high-yielding seeds that have proven tolerant to pests and diseases in that area. It usually takes seven growing seasons in order to weed out the weaker seeds. Resilience and food sovereignty are the end results, as they are no longer dependent on agribusiness corporations for their seeds, fertilizer, and other agricultural inputs. The women store the seeds inside a seed reservoir where members of the cooperative can obtain what they need for planting. FEM requires all members to pay interest in seeds to ensure that the reservoir remains stocked for the benefit of the entire community.
Another central component of the FEM’s work is empowering women to have control over their bodies, education, and the right to live free from violence. The cooperative hosts trainings about women’s health as well as general education classes. The majority of the founders didn’t know how to read or write when they started 25 years ago. Eliminating violence in general is extremely important for the women of El Colorado. They want to change the culture of Nicaragua to be less patriarchal and more peaceful. They support victims of domestic abuse with, if necessary, the prosecution of their partners. The FEM also holds marches against femicide in Esteli, including around the case of a 12 year old girl who disappeared and was later found brutally murdered.

While only women can join the FEM and Coopemujer, they have enlisted the help of some of their sons and other progressive men in the struggle against changing Nicaraguan culture into one of nonviolence. On our last night, we had a discussion with members of Miyotl, which means “ray of light.” Created in 2014 with the help of the FEM, this organization started with about 50 young men. Miyotl membership involves trainings on sexism, gender equity, and agroecology. They have their own contingents in the marches against violence against women. Some of the young men’s tangible contributions to El Colorado include the construction of a cistern and biointensive gardens. They follow the leadership of their mothers.

Before leaving El Colorado, the group visited a memorial to the 29 villagers martyred on July 17, 1979 — two days before the triumph of the Revolution and the date on which Somoza fled Nicaragua. That morning Somoza’s National Guard arrived disguised as Sandinistas and urgently sought men willing to fight in another village. Upon rounding up 30 men, women, and children, the National Guard proceeded to massacre all but one, a man who survived multiple bullet wounds. Many of those who died were relatives, including parents, of the women who now struggle as members of Coopemujer and the FEM. One cooperative member, who saw her father for the last time that day, recounted the history to our small group, deepening our understanding of the revolutionary traditions that inspire the work of the cooperative.

La FEM (El Rosario, Estelí)

The community of El Rosario, formerly known as El Sitio del Limay Chiquito, used to be a hacienda with three or four families on it. Today, it has a total of 400 inhabitants. A significant number of women in El Rosario own their land, and they are in the process of forming a cooperative. It will be the ninth cooperative member of the Central de Cooperativas Las Diosas. They mainly grow beans, corn, and sorghum. The cooperative plans to establish a local market or barter economy. We stayed in the community headquarters of the FEM, built and supplied with funding from the Basque government in Spain. This property has a seed reservoir and biointensive beds with cassava, sweet potato, jamaica flower, tomato, and passion fruit.

Formed in 2013 by 10 women, the reservoir organically cures and conserves the creole seeds of the community. Today there are 30 women that conserve corn, beans, and sorghum. The reservoir has a committee (coordinator, treasurer, secretary and manager of production) that ensures that producers return double the amount of seeds that they obtained. If the producer has difficulties and harvests fail, they must pay the interest with money. Surplus reserves are sold to producers in neighboring communities or lent to new members of the cooperative.

While in El Rosario, we learned from Reyna Merlo, a founder of the FEM in the community. She has 5 blocks of land, on which she produces creole (strong varieties typical of the community) and white corn, cows and oxen, hens, quail, guineas, turkeys, and roosters. Reyna’s land also has a solar panel, biointensive beds, and a well used for irrigation. The Merlo family faces a number of challenges with maintaining agroecological systems due to the range of hazards imposed by monoculture production in surrounding areas. Neighboring producers buy GMO seeds from transnational companies, and cross-pollination contaminates native seeds. Wind carries chemicals applied at sites of industrial, export-oriented agriculture to the lands of the Merlo family, affecting the health of their bodies and crops. Residents of El Rosario face problems with water access.
too. A Cuban-American tobacco company (owned by former residents of Cuba's financial class who fled the country after the Revolution) exploits water without authorization. As part of the drying process, the company places its engines in the river. They also installed fences, which is prohibited because the river is a public resource.

The model of the FEM and their partner organizations deeply inspired us. The FEM demonstrates how to realize transformations of socioeconomic and environmental relationships. Their revolutionary practices and theory include the self-empowerment of rural women to take control of their lives and their communities; a sustained system for removing abusive men and identifying, supporting, and sheltering abused women; facilitating the transition of "traditional men" to people who understand the aspirations of peasant feminism and want to develop strong, egalitarian societies; the implementation of a socialist political economy based on peasant agriculture; the development of an agroecological model of food production; support for agroecological specialists who travel between communities and provide trainings; a free healthcare system developed in tandem with the ATC and the FSLN government; the organization of children’s committees and programs to foster the understanding of peasant feminist values.

All of these components interconnect and the result is more than the sum of its parts. The FEM’s approach and on-the-ground impact bring hope to community members, and their framework of peasant feminism has the potential to greatly influence other Nicaraguans and people around the world. Although members of the FEM continue to face economic hardships, their revolutionary political rhetoric, broad social base, strong alliances, and diversified agricultural systems suggest that they have a high degree of preparedness to sustain their community and defend themselves from corporate, right-wing, or imperialist aggression.
“We created a group in the community for both women and men to learn how to produce and reproduce knowledge. We always keep everyone in the consideration of our activities — men, women, youth. We learned over the years not to work just for the women in the co-op but for the entire community and that has really enriched us because we have received knowledge from everywhere. But the most important thing is that the ATC has never abandoned us and we are the daughters of the ATC.” — Lea Moirina Moncado, Gloria Quintanilla Cooperative
After dividing into our small groups, we reconvened in Santa Julia where we were hosted by the Gloria Quintanilla Cooperative, a women-led, ATC-organized cooperative that produces coffee. Through Companas de Nicaragua, we helped construct two biogas projects to provide a cheap and sustainable source of cooking fuel. We also heard the testimonies of cooperative members, learning how women in Santa Julia have struggled for decades to organize themselves and realize a more equitable society. Their narratives shed light on several eras of Nicaraguan history: the Somoza dictatorship, the Sandinista Revolution, the Contra War, the era of neoliberalism, and the second stage of the Revolution, marked by the FSLN’s return to state power.

Day 1 of Testimonies at the Gloria Quintanilla Cooperative

Lola, the first woman who spoke, explained the history of both Santa Julia and Nicaragua from the 1930s until the mid-1940s. During this period, the area was a coffee plantation owned by a German who essentially enslaved his workers, paying men 3 cordobas a day and women 1.5. Families had to share extremely small rooms and people slept on boards as there were no beds. In the lead-up to World War II, Somoza claimed the land and the conditions actually worsened with water being rationed and food given to only workers, not their whole families. Women were treated terribly as they were raped, hit, and forced to stay silent. Many did not go to school and had no medical care.

With the Triumph of the Revolution in 1979, the workers organized, forming a community. Lola described this experience: “From that time on, we were able to organize and we felt like we were free — both women and men. We didn’t have to sleep like animals anymore and we could meet and form a community and that’s how we were able to organize ourselves little by little for health care.”

But there was still much inequality between men and women — e.g. regarding property rights, for which the women still fight for today. There were many single women tired of machismo and the remaining men could either leave or struggle with them. The women often did not think about themselves, but gave everything for the community and they improved their lives.

In 2008, the women founded the Gloria Quintanilla Cooperative. One of the basic rules was that men were not allowed to hurt women. The 35 families have grown to 75 families and today the property is owned in the name of the women. According to Lola, the men who stayed love and respect them because they carry the world on their shoulders and educated themselves.

Lola emphasized the importance of training young people for the community to continue. She said that many different student groups or other organizations have come to the cooperative to support them. One women’s group from a university came and told them that they could make more money by selling coffee instead of just the coffee berries. Lola explained that they call it coffee with love since their product is organic without chemicals and made with love. Before, the women had to roast the coffee over the fire; now, they have a grinder and a label detailing their story. Different women have different coffee bags with the coffee from their property. A certain percentage of the money made goes to their children’s meals, as children from one year old to kindergarten receive food from the community. Some of the older children get food from the government. The cooperative also supports young women from their community who go to Managua to get training. Aside from coffee, each woman grows six to eight different crops and has different roles within the cooperative — e.g. some put on the labels, some roast the coffee. The women are still working on their journey to better themselves, their community, and their children.

The women have also been struggling for land titles and water rights. In March 2017, they finally perforated a well, but the municipal government could not provide enough money. The budget for the well was 200,000 dollars and it was done by the state water company. Lola said that they have almost completed this project; they just need one more type of electrical wire, which costs 20,000 dollars. Currently they receive water once every
eight days from Ticuantepe. With more water, they could grow rice. Now they have to buy oil, rice, sugar, salt and matches, but everything else they can produce themselves.

After Lola finished, Eloisa, the president of the cooperative who was 53 years old and had started off unable to read or write, told her story. Growing up, Eloisa was forced to migrating through the municipalities and was unable to go to school. She often told her children about this experience because she wanted them to remember how difficult the times were back then. In 1980s, when the Sandinistas won the elections, their lives changed.

Eloisa set the goal for herself that her children should not suffer the way she did and she thought that she is meeting the goal with faith in God and the support of the other women. Eloisa emphasized her gratitude toward God, Lola, and the ATC. “Because even before the Sandinista Front came into power, the ATC was working with us,” said Eloisa. “José Adán (Rivera) and Edgardo (Garcia) were out there fighting even though they were wearing homemade sandals, winning over our people. That is where we were born. That is who we are. That’s how we are going to die.”

Because the women were organizing and empowering themselves, Eloisa started not feeling afraid anymore. Before she was afraid to speak and shy; when she began to feel empowered and motivated, she agreed to become the deputy coordinator of the community and then eventually the president of the cooperative.

Eloisa’s message was that women should not let themselves be mistreated. She has seen major changes since the women took the reigns of the community, which she tied to the support of the FSLN: “That’s what this government has brought to us, rights for women, and rights for children.” The community would not have what it has today without the energy and dedication of the women. Now they feel heard, brave, and proud.

Eloisa concluded by stating that she is proud to be a campesina, because campesinas are the reason people can eat in the city. “I am proud to say I am from the campo and born in the campo, that I smell of smoke from our kitchen,” she told us. “I am very proud to be in the campo. Even if they gave me a house in the city, I would not take it because I am from the campo and will die here.”

We finished this session with the testimony of Lea, an educator and who was the only young woman in the cooperative when it was founded in 2008. She was 18 years old at the time and was the secretariat of the cooperative. The cooperative told her to finish high school to help and teach the members how to read and write. For example, she taught Eloisa. Many say they learned how to read and write thanks to her, but Lea tells them that they achieved this themselves. The women’s motivation got them to learn and now there is about 80% literacy. Today Lea gives classes to other people in the community and her dream is that her mother who helped her and her siblings to get educated will learn to read and write. She hopes to get her college degree as a full-fledged teacher to help the community.

Lea explained that the knowledge the women gained through struggle, effort and suffering has been transferred to the young women who are grateful to the community. She told us that she has been to Cuba and Honduras to represent the cooperative and the ATC and will be going to Venezuela in February. She said “that the ATC has never abandoned us and we are the daughters of the ATC.”

**Day 2 of Testimonies at the Gloria Quintanilla Cooperative**

On the second day, Claudia, at 22 years old the youngest member of the Gloria Quintanilla Cooperative, discussed her transformation from someone who “didn’t even know how to pull up one bean plant” to an important part of her organization. Before joining the cooperative, she would pass by meetings and think that the women “had nothing to do.” And when she was invited for the first time, Claudia didn’t want to be asked about her opinion on anything. She continued attending meetings and began enjoying the conversations about
gender. Eventually the cooperative invited her on a trip to Managua and she started to become really active. Now she gives tours whenever there are groups visiting Santa Julia and participates in the ATC’s workshops.

When Claudia was 15, she became pregnant and was unable to finish high school — a common experience for Nicaraguan women. The workshops with the ATC and the cooperative on gender, along with men being supportive of women in Santa Julia, empowered her to continue her studies. “I would travel with my huge belly to El Crucero to study,” said Claudia. “I would have to put a huge backpack on to balance the weight of my belly. I finished my third year of high school. The next year I wanted to finish. I wanted to finish two years in one year, but they don’t offer that here. I had to go to Managua where there is a government program that allowed me to finish in one year.”

Asked about what she wished students in the United States understood about her experience, Claudia said “everything,” but more specifically a few transformations: 1) From living in the city to living in the countryside; 2) From being an adolescent to becoming a mother; 3) “From being unorganized and then to becoming organized.”

Irma, a 74-year-old who “feels brands new,” then spoke about her experiences from the time of the Somoza dictatorship until today. Irma has given birth to 18 children and has 50 grandchildren, 40 great grandchildren, and no “complaints with the current government.” She told the delegation, “We used to go to bed at 9 PM and get up at midnight. We almost didn’t sleep. I would make 2 kilograms of tortillas every day for 300 coffee harvesters. When a brigade would come, we made them for 600 people.” When Irma was young, she cut cotton on the plantation in Santa Julia and also migrated to Chinandega and other places to find work. She didn’t earn enough to even buy a pair of sandals and thus had to work barefoot. “When Daniel entered as president, that is when we all woke up,” said Irma. “Why? Because the ATC helped us and now we have been able to change our lives.”

To conclude the testimonies, Nora provided an in-depth history lesson on the victory over Somoza, the Sandinista Revolution, the era of neoliberalism, the return of the FSLN to power, and the formation of the Gloria Quintanilla Cooperative.

“The Sandinista Front changed our lives,” Nora said. “Under Somoza everything that we consumed was rationed, even water. With the Sandinista Front, women were valued more, so our salary was larger. What has helped us along the way is to be organized, and the key to that organization is the ATC.” After the victory of Violeta Chamorro and the defeat of the Sandinista Revolution, their collective farm fell apart due to mismanagement and exploitation by those with more learning. The women had to struggle with the ATC to reclaim the land, as Nora explained:

“Thanks to the help of the ATC we carried out demonstrations and demanded that the land be redistributed amongst us. We carried out long demonstrations for several weeks around the UCA, under the sun, under the rain. I had a small child who I carried in my arms so that I could be a part of the demonstration. Thanks to that long struggle and the initiative of the elders who said we had to hold on through the year, we were able to resist the effort to sell the cooperative and we had it parcelized so we could all have part of the land. While it isn’t divided perfectly, we can now say that we each have 4 manzanas of land for coffee cultivation. This is a source of pride for us.”

When asked upon the impact of Daniel Ortega’s election in 2007, Nora described a series of improvements: wage increases and pay equality for men and women, a breakfast program at the elementary school, and a program to provide school children new shoes and backpacks. She asked, “How can we say it is a bad government when it is a government that has been giving us the things we have been struggling for all along?”
Conclusion

During our time in Nicaragua, we learned from the ATC, popular organizations, and the Nicaraguan people that we are in a world in crisis. The U.S. government has engineered regime change in Honduras, Brazil, Paraguay, and other countries in Latin America where people had begun realizing true social and economic progress. Across the globe, agribusiness advances in our communities and tries to take away our culture and agriculture.

But, we also saw that despite the difficult international context, nations, peoples, and organizations continue to fight. The experiences of the ATC in organizing rural workers and small farmers, of LVC in creating an international movement for food sovereignty based in agroecology, and the defense of the Sandinista Revolution in Nicaragua are just three examples of popular struggles that give us hope that another world is possible. In fact, each was necessary for Nicaragua to triumph over the attempted coup of 2018.

While the tranques shut down cities and major transport routes, farmers in the countryside continued to work the land and produce food. Nicaragua, after all, is very much an agrarian country with a large peasantry that grows food for the nation. Since the return of the FSLN, there has been promotion of achieving self-sufficiency in food. Now, Nicaragua is practically self-sufficient in all of the main crops: corn, beans, meat, dairy, and vegetables, and it is almost there with rice. 92% of what is eaten by Nicaraguans is produced in the country (a figure that smashes what many of us are used to in industrialized nations). Most of that food is bought in the local community, from nearby municipal or farmers markets. Very few Nicaraguans buy their food from the supermarket. That is, while many of the products that get distributed in the large box stores were stopped during the failed coup, there was never large shortages of food, because Nicaraguans could still get the important food products from local corner stores run by neighbors, from the farm down the road, or from their own patio. Food in Nicaragua, rather than being a weapon of war, is a weapon of anti-imperialism.

So, now that we are armed with this experience and information, what is our task as members of the solidarity community? We can go back home and organize – to help get progressive folks out of their silos, to change our corrupt system, to end U.S. imperialism and an economy for the 1% that destroys the planet.

One tangible way to organize is by joining the Friends of the ATC solidarity network. We are a network of people from all walks of life who organize in our own local communities and at the international level to build solidarity with the ATC. One of our central values is internationalism because we believe in the importance of supporting ongoing struggles for justice around the world. To join our next meeting, please write info@friendsatc.org. All are welcome.

Our delegation was extremely inspired by the eight IALA students that accompanied us on our travels. We have returned with a commitment to help more peasant youth attend IALA in order to support the strengthening of peasant movements throughout the region. We hope to sponsor the participation of 50 youth and women members from La Via Campesina organizations of Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean in a 15-day introduction to the curriculum and popular education practice at IALA. This training will serve as an outline of the topics that are studied more formally and in-depth during the two-year agroecology program, with the hopes that many participants will become future students at IALA. Our goal is to raise $5,000 by April 1, 2019. Please join us in reaching our goal: afgi.salsalabs.org/AgroecologyTrainingEncounteratIALAFundraiser/

We also invite internationalists to join future delegations. Updates can be found at the Friends of ATC (friendsatc.org) or Alliance for Global Justice (afgi.org) websites.

And finally, we hope you will share this report in your communities and organizations.

Globalize struggle, globalize hope!