THE LAND IS OUR MOTHER

A Friends of the ATC Publication
OCTOBER 2020
This publication is a part of a testimonies project produced by the Friends of the ATC, a solidarity network with the Asociación de Trabajadores del Campo (ATC, or Rural Workers’ Association). Founded in the context of the Sandinista Revolution, the ATC is an organization of struggle that defends the rural workers and peoples of Nicaragua. We organize at local and international levels to spread awareness, form solidarity, and facilitate support for the struggles and initiatives of the ATC and the international movement La Vía Campesina. In the spirit of internationalism, we believe in the necessity of supporting ongoing struggles for justice in our own communities and around the world.

Our main activities are the following:

- Sharing information and news about the ATC, the CLOC, and La Vía Campesina
- Organization of events (exchanges, delegations, and speaking tours)
- Logistical support for relationships between the ATC and other organizations and individuals around the world
- Securing resources for initiatives of the ATC, CLOC, and La Vía Campesina

From July 11–21, 2019, the Friends of the ATC and the ATC hosted their “Solidarity with Nicaragua” delegation. A central purpose of this trip was the collection of testimonies in order to clarify for international audiences and solidarity activists the current state of revolutionary struggle in Nicaragua. Over the course of our time in Nicaragua, delegates conducted more than 20 interviews with ATC organizers, students, and members, whom described today’s political situation in Nicaragua as well as efforts to build agroecology, food sovereignty, socialism, and anti-imperialism in the region. These testimonies have been transcribed, translated, and condensed by Friends of the ATC and will be released in a series of packets like this one.

If you have any questions or want to become involved in the work of the Friends of the ATC, please write us: info@friendsatc.org (English, Español). You can also visit our Facebook page (https://www.facebook.com/friendsatc) or our website (https://friendsatc.org/).

We thank WhyHunger for their collaboration on the design of this document.
Introduction

Born in 1978 within the context of the Sandinista Popular Revolution, the Asociación de Trabajadores del Campo (ATC) is an organization of struggle that represents more than 50,000 Nicaraguan workers in unions and cooperatives. Active in 13 of the country’s 15 departments (Nicaragua’s equivalent of states), the ATC organizes with peasant cooperatives for the right to land and water, women’s rights, food sovereignty, and agroecological production — all banners of struggle promoted by the global peasant movement La Via Campesina.

The Gloria Quintanilla Women’s Coffee Cooperative, founded in 2008 through the ATC, is located just outside of the capital city Managua in Santa Julia, a rural community tucked down in the valleys of El Crucero. The following testimonies shed light on several eras of Nicaraguan history: the Somoza dictatorship from 1936-1979, the Sandinista Revolution in 1979-1990, the era of neoliberalism from 1990-2006, and the current second stage of the Revolution, marked by the FSLN’s return to state power in 2007. In the first part of the 20th century, Santa Julia was a German-owned coffee farm, which later fell into the hands of Somoza around World War II. During the Somoza period, workers in Santa Julia suffered inhumane living conditions: around 500 people worked 12 hours a day, lived in shacks owned by the farm, and went hungry. There was no school or hospitals.

With the triumph of the Sandinista Popular Revolution in 1979, the land was put into the hands of the community, part of the national agrarian reform that redistributed 4 million acres of land for peasant families. Previously illiterate people learned to read, and the community learned how to organize and defend itself.

With the fall out of power of the FSLN in the 1990, the neoliberal president Violeta Chamorro threatened to take away the community’s right to the land, and the women of Santa Julia alongside the ATC organized to defend the land they had obtained in the 1980s, carrying out demonstrations for 6 years in Managua.

When the women of these testimonies founded the Gloria Quintanilla Cooperative in 2008, one of their basic rules was that men were not allowed to hurt women. With much struggle, they have rid the community of machismo and established a high value on women’s work. In collaboration with the ATC and the current Sandinista government, the women have also fought for and won land titles in their names, their own homes, access to education, improved roads, and most recently, a community water well.

With training and workshops from the ATC, the women have transformed the land, which was previously misused and polluted with agrochemicals, into diversified plots for community consumption and for sale at local markets. They also receive tools, seeds and livestock through government programs to promote peasant food production. The label on for their coffee, one of their biggest products, reads, “coffee with the smell of organized women from the countryside.”

In their testimonies, the women explain that they consume what is native to the land so their children and grandchildren can be healthy. They use agroecology to ensure that the land, their second mother, stays strong. They prioritize education and involvement of youth in their organization so that the next generation carries out the Gloria Quintanilla Cooperative’s vision for advancement in Santa Julia and Nicaragua.

The Gloria Quintanilla Cooperative is dear to the hearts of many Friends of the ATC as over the past few years the community has hosted delegations, interns, and other international visitors. By visiting cooperatives like Gloria Quintanilla, Friends of the ATC have been able to experience rural Nicaraguan life and see the tangible benefits in the countryside of the Sandinista Popular Revolution and the ATC. We hope this publication captures the perspectives that so many of us have been lucky to gain first-hand thanks to our friends and comrades who are a part of the Gloria Quintanilla Cooperative.
I am from Nicaragua and represent the women of the countryside.

At the very young age of 11 years (during the Somoza dictatorship), I worked in the fields, the campesino life. I didn’t have land; I was an agricultural worker. It was hard because there was no education, no protection for children. There were no rights for women. There was no healthcare. My mother and I were nomads, moving through various departments looking for work, harvesting cane sugar. We didn’t have a home. I became a woman: I learned to walk with a machete, cut coffee and cotton and cane, sell fruit, and clean rooms in Corinto, Chinandega.

In 1979, at the age of 14, I met the Rural Workers’ Association (ATC) and I woke up. I never thought I would learn to defend my rights, to defend the rights of others. The main thing was to be in solidarity, to see ourselves not for our color but for the heart we have to serve.

Ten years later, I learned to write my first letters, to train myself, I learned what a forum is, what it was like to speak in public (a process that made me sweat and tremble). Then it allowed me to do concrete things like form a union and go to the Ministry of Labor with a worker. This also allowed me to stand up at the mayor’s office, to fight for the right to water, the right to have roads. The ATC guided me on what my rights are and how to apply them by organizing.

In 1983, we came up with the idea of forming a union under the name of Imelda Gonzales, a woman heroine of the same calibre as myself who has since died. We had the idea of forming a cooperative in 2008.

All these years, from 1979 to 2019, have been a very rich accumulation of experience that has allowed me to defend my rights with all my might. If I see a woman being abused, I get involved and defend her. If I see the government
We defend women’s rights. Peasant feminism fights every day for health, education, food and for all women’s work to be compensated.

All this has allowed me to learn more. In spite of being 54 years old, I continue to learn with this attempted coup. It brought my bones and my heart closer to the community. Every person I visit I preach to in this way: that we must unite so that we will never have a liberal government. We tried Arnold, we tried Violeta, we tried everything, and everyone ended up filling their own wallets.

With this government, there are many favorable laws like 693 on Food and Nutritional security and sovereignty. They help us in the municipalities and on the land. As we produce more, the municipalities finance and give us seeds. They give us support, they give us crop diversification.

If we go to the MEFCCA (Ministry of Family, Community, Cooperative and Associative Economy) they help us to add value to our products. They give us the bags, containers, they give us a label, everything ready to go to sell the product. What previous government did this for us?

Youth are preparing themselves by learning English, getting their studies in marketing or tourism. This government trains all the departments, and we all benefit by having more nurses, tourist guides. Now they are rehabilitating the natural water holes. What government before would care? Only this one. The presidential couple and their team are providing health and education to the countryside.

I used to walk barefoot and I couldn’t imagine having a piece of land. These are small things that carry a lot of weight.

WE HAVE ALREADY TRIED NEOLIBERAL GOVERNMENTS

According to the testimony of my community, we were slaves up until 1980, but in 1980 we had 10 years of joy with the Revolution. We women and men woke up. We conquered land, received land titles, and got the right to children, decent housing, roads and everything.

When Doña Violeta became president, we went backwards. What can I say from this? I can say that we have already tried these governments. With Doña Violeta, instead of producing more food, she sent more than 1 million people into unemployment because she took away land, sold the railroads, privatized electricity. Arnoldo did many things that made him the most corrupt man there was in Nicaragua.

We defend women’s rights. Peasant feminism fights every day for health, education, food and for all women’s work to be compensated. It is our struggle to make our husbands understand that housework is the responsibility of both of us. We have seen changes in our communities: men who were very machista are now great men who understand that we are talking about equal rights.
Here in Nicaragua a line of feminism developed that joined with the pro-coup puchitos—feminists who wanted to get funds from the United States. Regarding abortion, we had a meeting and our perspective was to support it, because if there were any complications we didn’t want the woman or the baby to die. But seeing that everything was headed in a different direction, we separated in 1998-99 and the pro-coup feminists united with the Catholic Church. Now, as we saw during the 2018 coup attempt, the Catholic Church and the feminists worked together in search of power and attacked us. They have not returned to the issue of abortion.

It is part of the culture, but we have been working on the distribution of contraceptive methods with the Health Ministry. From our community, Eloísa and Lea are the contact people for the Health Ministry. We have reached 90 families and we have stopped teen pregnancies. There are men who don’t beat or yell, but they don’t like to use condoms and don’t want women to use birth control, so we organize without their consent. Even though it’s a lie and a sin, we must do it as a strategy to develop ourselves as a community.

The government has also adopted this strategy; it provides free contraceptive injections and they distribute condoms. We use the law 779: if the man is of age, they are educated and taught respect. We give sex education talks. The ATC uses activities to train men in masculinity, to compare work roles between men and women. After two years of talks, it has allowed them to understand. Some of the older women in the community have had 23, 18, and I had 11 children. Now young people have one or two children because they have become conscious.
I am Lea Moncada...

I live in the community of Santa Julia. I am 30 years old and I have two five and nine year-old sons.

We are a family of six siblings. My mother is an important pillar for us. She has always raised us alone. That has not been an obstacle for her because all of her children learned to read and write. She gave us an education. She can’t read, but we can.

At sixteen I became part of the cooperative. We were born as a group in 2008. From that moment on we learned to manage, to defend ourselves. We learned that women are not valuable because men say that they are; we are valuable because of what we are and what we do every day.

I have been the secretary of the cooperative since our founding. When I started I was the only young woman and I was nervous because I didn’t know what to do. They used to tell me to go here and there and to fill different roles. Many times I was frustrated because I had so many responsibilities, but today I feel very grateful to the women because they have given me the space to grow.

I have learned a lot because I was all of their’s teacher. The women were always reminding me what the subject was, or that I forgot to give them homework. They always insisted that I leave them homework, so they could advance.

Eloisa, when she proposed to be president of the cooperative, said that she would not be able to represent us because she could not read or write. But she represented us and has represented us well. Sometimes we look at a woman who is all shy and when we assign her a specific role we see what that woman is capable of. For this reason we switch up the roles in the cooperative: to get to know ourselves better and what talents we have. For me the cooperative has been a school.

I feel proud when they tell me, “I learned to read thanks to you.” At that time I was just getting out of high school, so the little knowledge that I had I shared with them. Today the women know how to read and write because they put in all their effort and because they wanted to see the community improve.
May women fight for their rights, may children fight for their education and may men and young people support our proposals to take it to the national level.

WE WANT TO SEE OUR COMMUNITY AS AN EXAMPLE

My children were born when I was already organized. I had my first child at 21. I remember that the women and my mom were sad because suddenly I got pregnant. Although it was a fine age to have a child in Nicaragua, for me it was a challenge because I was not yet ready to be a mother. I still felt very young.

Today we want to see our community better. I am the one who manages the family planning methods in the community, because we don’t want to see girls having children at a very young age. We had 13 and 14 year-old girls having children. As Doña Irma said, we don’t want to see our girls “loaded up like hacienda shotguns.”

We want to see an educated community because education is important to us. We want to empower youth so that Nicaragua continues to grow. We don’t want to see our community as rural—although we feel proud to be farmers, to be producers, to be what we are—but we want to see ourselves as a community that is an example to other communities and neighborhoods.

May women fight for their rights, may children fight for their education and may men and young people support our proposals to take it to the national level.

IN INVOLVING YOUNG PEOPLE

We work for the inclusion of young people in health and sexual/reproductive issues, and into the agroecology sector. We have young people who cultivate the land. We assign them responsibilities so that they take the work of on agroecology, about how to cultivate the land, as we are proud to be farmers and producers.

I have gone to represent the cooperative, the community and the country in other countries: four times to Honduras and twice to Cuba. These are wonderful experiences because you see the different cultures. It is very important to share experiences with other people, about how the country is, how the people are.

We are a one hundred percent Sandinista and revolutionary community. Most of the young people are Sandinista and want to see their country prosper. Last year in the marches, they were the ones who went to defend the party. At night they sent us as support to guard the mayor’s office. They take the country seriously—it is important for them.

OUR CHALLENGE IS TO MAKE THE COMMUNITY CONSUME WHAT IT PRODUCES ITSELF

I remember that the first project we accomplished as a group was a pig farm where we took turns cleaning and feeding the pigs. Most of us have taken technical courses in the coffee industry, so no one messes with us on this issue. I feel very proud to be a farmer because we women contribute more than 40% of the country’s food.

I go to the countryside to work. We currently have four manzanas of coffee. If we have coffee to plant, I plant it. The week before I left for Cuba, I planted four hundred coffee plants. It feels very nice when the plant grows. I have banana plants that I planted two years ago and they are already blooming. You feel proud that you planted that plant, because the peasants are the ones that feed people.
in the city.

We sell our products at the market once or twice a month. If we don’t go to the market, we sell in our community. For example, today a lady in the community made tortillas, and we bought from her.

Coffee is more difficult for us to sell, because people are accustomed to buying packaged coffee. We want to sell coffee in small bags so that people have access to it and can consume our 100% healthy coffee. We do not put rice or corn in it; it is pure. Our challenge is to make the community consume what it produces itself to improve the well-being of all.

One feels grateful for life and grateful for God and our governments. For example, we feel grateful for our Sandinista Government that has given us the land. Before it was a challenge for women to have land; before only men had rights to the land.

Today women can also inherit the land. It has been proven that women are good administrators and what better benefit is there than to inherit the land and make it produce? My mother and I share the land. She says that when she dies it becomes part of me.

**NOW WE ARE PREPARED FOR ANYTHING**

We were sad (during the 2018 coup attempt) because it was our country. We had never seen looting in the country before, killings, or Nicaraguans fighting with Nicaraguans. We were not prepared for a social media war. It should be noted that what happened did not happen just like that. It was something that had been planned for a long time.

At that time, we, the militant Sandinistas, the CLS (Sandinista Leadership Council), were ready to bring the families piglets. I am currently part of the CLS in the community and we are always looking after people’s needs.

In the cooperative, we produce bananas and squash among other things, but we don’t produce soap, rice, or oil. Everything we don’t produce we have to find at the market, and it was dangerous to go as a woman because of the roadblocks and the criminals there who could kill you, rape you, do whatever they wanted. So that’s where
we were affected the most.

But from this there were positive things because people began to sow in large quantities and produce at a larger scale. One month we had one item, in the other month we had another item: we had onion seeds, pepper seeds.

We suffered on all sides but we, as militant Sandinistas, want to see our country progress. Our entire community attended the marches for our government because we wanted to see our country advance in the way it had been. We had a roadblock in the municipality for five days, but the people who wanted to continue seeing the country grow the way it had been growing for the last ten years removed the roadblock.

Now we are prepared for anything. The advice I could give is that we unite more, that we look out for the well-being of our country, of our nation, of our world. We are all human beings and we have to love each other because the big businessmen only look out for their stock market; they don’t look out for the proletarian class, the poor people, the working people, the peasant people.

I also want to thank you all for visiting our community, for taking this message that we are working to produce our own food and watching over our country’s progress so that our society changes, that all of Latin America unites for the well-being of our countries so that we grow.

Also to remember that adults always have something to teach us. The women I have been with have suffered a lot. Their rights have been violated since they were little, they are women who have had more than 15 children, women who have known how to move forward with their struggles, with their testimonies, with their children, who are single but who have known how to work, who reach the age of 70 and who still work. Their experience shows change for us young people— a change of attitude, a change in one’s life. I hope that their testimonies give you advice. The advice of adults is always useful.
I am Eloisa García...

I am president of the Gloria Quintanilla cooperative. The cooperative is eleven years old. We accompany one another. There is no difference between members, we are all women. Gender equality in the community is very valuable: no machismo. Here, women govern the community. We are also in charge of our homes!

I have a partner. We have been together for 43 years, and we have never had a problem. I am not his daughter, nor is he my son. I am not his slave. For that I thank my organization, and for the leadership that we women have in the cooperative.

I feel strengthened by the land, proud of being a peasant. There are many people that say, “Oh you are a peasant,” and look down on me for it. But it is thanks to the peasants that the city eats. If we don’t produce, the city doesn’t eat anything. For me, the land is my mother. After my biological mother is mother earth. If we didn’t have land, we wouldn’t eat.

As peasant women we trained with the ATC for five years to manage the land: to grow coffee, to make contour lines, to conserve the soil, to plant. Now we plant many things in small spaces. I am proud of this.

That’s why I take on the challenge of being part of the cooperative, because I like the countryside and the land. For me it is an honor to be a peasant. We peasants are honest, we are transparent, and what we harvest is our own.

GROWING UP UNDER THE SOMOZA DICTATORSHIP

I used to have nothing, nothing. I had nowhere to live. I was born in a camp. I had no home. We walked from farm to farm. My mother was a single mother. There was a lot of machismo with Somoza. Men beat and mistreated women often.
I gave everything to my mother. I had to be a mother and father to my siblings. We didn’t have clothes; I put on my first pair of shoes when I was fourteen. We did not even have a bowl to cook with. We went around asking and people would lend us a little bit of oil, a little bit of salt. I felt humiliated but I did it so that my siblings could eat.

There was no school. I never went, in order to help my mother at home. I don’t feel sorry for that, or resentful. Now I feel blessed. I feel that I did something in life, and now I have been blessed. I sowed love and love I have received.

This was in the 60s and 70s. I saw then what it was to suffer, and I said, “No!” I used to say, “When I have my family it’s not going to be like this.” I decided my children were going to study no matter what.

I have five sons and one daughter, and they were born with better conditions. In the 80s, after the triumph of the Sandinista Revolution, we were given a home, and schools were set up in each community. My children studied. I feel proud! I say to them to appreciate what they have.

I studied as an adult. I learned to read when I was forty. Lea is an adult education teacher, she taught me. I have been reading for thirteen years now. When you want to learn, you can become rebellious and very strong minded.

I will no longer get on a bus that goes to Pochomil when I want to go to Carazo. I can now write my own checks, and I can check if the amount is correct. Before, my ID was signed with just a line, now I sign Eloisa García Castro. It wasn’t fair that I didn’t know how to read before.

**AS LONG AS I HAVE BEEN ELOISA, I HAVE BEEN A SANDINISTA**

I am very grateful for my government because it is a poor peoples’ government. This government looks out for the poor. Earlier in my life I only knew of one hospital. Now there are many hospitals and of great quality. They are finishing the roads in the municipality, and they are going to build new ones. For me, this is a relief and a sense of pride.

Many women, including me, benefit from seeds. They gave me one hundred pounds of corn, one hundred pounds of beans. We benefit from tools. Some people were given chickens, pigs, sewing machines. They give us each a family garden.

Because the government gave me a cow, a pig, or because I have a job is not why I am Sandinista. I say thank you to my president who gives us the opportunity as women to have our rights. Women have their space in politics. No other president is going to give us that, I don’t think in any country. Here we send letters to the president, and he responds to us. That is why I am a Sandinista and a Danielista.
As long as I have been Eloisa, I have been a Sandinista. Everyone knows that Santa Julia is left. Here, we isolate a right-winger. We don’t open the doors for them. Everyone here is of the same political lineage. Do you know why? Because we are grateful. We are grateful for the land that was given to us in the 80s, from the agrarian reform.

When Alemán won, he did nothing. What he did was marginalize the poor. The right-wing does not want progress for us poor people. They don’t want us to talk, or to be in the media. They want us to be afraid. They don’t want us to have land. They don’t want to allow President Daniel to help the poor, they want him to hold hands with the private companies. The right wants us to live buried below them. ¡No pudieron, ni van a poder!” (They couldn’t defeat us, and they never will be able to!)

I as a peasant am proud. I feel that the Sandinistas have helped us. Of course they won’t come tell me, “Take this pound of rice, cook it!” No. They give us the tools to move forward; they give us the possibility to go and sell our products at markets. I am a Sandinista, and my whole
family is a Sandinista of heart and blood. Here we are all Sandinistas.

WE ARE THE ATC

I was born from the ATC, I owe who I am to the ATC and I thank God for having enlightened me to know the ATC. My mother was the first ATC leader. She is 79 years old. She had a brain stroke and is now in a wheelchair. For this reason I am here with two of my sisters, continuing that legacy. Leadership roles for women, women's rights, workers' rights, children’s rights, the right not to be exploited, to form a union… For all of that we thank the ATC.

We formed the cooperative through the ATC and go two or three times a month to meet with the ATC. We are the ATC, that’s where our ideas come from. We are in a union with other cooperatives. Gloria Quintanilla is a model cooperative. Despite the limitations—without resources, without money—we have done a lot for the community. All thanks to the ATC.

WE WANT WHAT IS NATIVE TO THIS LAND

For me, working my land, and working it organically, is a satisfaction. We do it out of necessity, like Cuba. And it has worked out for them because they harvest well, better than anywhere in Latin America. We do it because of necessity, dignity and health.

Food sovereignty is healthy production. Healthy plots for every family. Here in Santa Julia we have healthy plots. The ayote, pipián, tomato, pepper, onion, celery, coriander. Food sovereignty is having chickens to lay eggs. Now we have 500 chickens, and Dona Irma has 250. Have you seen the chicks?

It is an injected chicken meat. They say those chickens are born through machines. We don’t want that.

Food sovereignty is not consuming junk food, soda and all the transgenic things that come with them. The Maruchan, the Maggie soup brand. All of that is harmful. Anemia, kidney disease, appendicitis, gallbladder disease. Junk food hinders food sovereignty.

We also rescue native seeds. We don’t use GMO seeds because they come with chemicals. Agroecology overarches all of these issues. In agroecology you have to take care of the fauna, harvest healthy. We fight for this! Food sovereignty is to consume what is ours. Lemonade, mango. We harvest red beans, the ones from Nicaragua. The Gloria Quintanilla cooperative also grows citrus. We are working the land, diversifying: sour orange, mandarin orange, lemon mandarin, tahiti lemon, native lemon.

The ATC is how we started to understand what food sovereignty means for us. Food sovereignty is having beans, tortillas, a healthy dish at home. I don’t buy chicken with hormones at the market. We don’t like that chicken. We want what is native to this land, what is ours. So that our children and grandchildren are healthy.

We tell mothers: plant your eggplant, your avocado. This year there was a lot of avocado and banana. So we try to consume what’s here. That is why here we fight for food sovereignty.

THIS YEAR’S CROPS

We hope to God that there will be a good harvest of coffee. I recently planted 2,500 new coffee plants. I like to maintain a rhythm; I sell the coffee and my plantains gradually. In January I reap 700 pounds of beans, and then I am set for the whole year. I’ve been selling beans all year! We know to do that thanks to the entrepreneurship workshops the ATC has given us.

Although it is difficult for us to work hard under the sun and in the mountains, we sell at a fair price for the good of the consumer and the producer. Right now I have ninety ayote squash plants, thirty of pipián squash. The ayote is delayed but those ninety plants will produce one thousand ayote. A small ayote is worth twenty córdobas. Two or three pipianes for twenty córdobas, but we sell them for five. We offer favorable prices.

I feel happy to work my land. I feel happy to harvest my 700 pounds of beans. Always working with the earth, always. We have worked the land for 100 years. That’s our future and our grandchildren’s future: working the land.

Do you want to go see my plot? Let’s go!
I am Alfonso “El Zorro...”

Here the government is accused of being a terrorist.

But this government is building roads, roofs, houses, bridges, hospitals, entertainment sites. People can sit down at the tourist centers. They can enjoy going 100k/h in big vans on the roads that the government has built. Comandante Daniel has brought light to some of the most rural corners of Nicaragua where people have never known electric power. Where the government can’t place electricity, they put up solar panels so that people can have small refrigerators.

The 500,000 who marched in the repliegue (celebration of the strategic retreat from Managua to Masaya during the insurrection against the Somoza dictatorship) are the ones who want Daniel to stay, and we will see even more on July 19 (anniversary of the Sandinista Popular Revolution). In the repliegue you don’t see old people, we stay home. You see new young people. The greatest strength that Daniel has is the youth, because here he has all the youth in his favor. The Sandinista Youth has been activated. Daniel is not a dictator: it’s his people who want him there.

Simply put, the opposition has nothing else to offer.

They could say they will provide free health care, but this government is already providing it. They could say they will give us light, but this government is already providing it. They have nothing to promise so their only way to try to take power was to carry out a coup d’état.

IT IS DIFFICULT TO BRAINWASH THE SANDINISTAS

They should have studied first before trying to stage a coup. In what world can a coup take place in a country where the army and many of the police are revolutionary? The army general is the first to be able to carry out a coup, but here they have Sandino and Carlos Fonseca in their minds and they will never betray the people.

The opposition roadblocks were bases of operations to kill and commit crimes. From there they went out to steal the vehicles of the institutions and nobody could say they worked for the government because they’d cut off your head. Many women died because they could not pass through the roadblocks while they were in labor. This is not mentioned on social media.
They used gangs and delinquents, claiming that they were students. Many people went to jail because they allowed themselves to be deceived by the bourgeoisie, by the leaders of this attempted coup.

When they could not succeed, they were left mentally frustrated. My father used to say that “He who bets and loses is left with the covers.” In other words, they only have their mouths now. So they lie to social networks worldwide, mostly to the interested parties who are not in favor of Nicaragua—not the American people but those who govern that country—who don’t want to see that this country is marching on and developing.

If someone is captured by the police, Channel 10 (right-wing news channel) says they are political prisoners to discredit this government.

There was a baseball narrator, Edgar Tijerino, who was never in the war. He doesn’t even know how to handle a rifle, and he said that if 4 million people have to die, they can die as long as the Ortega-Murillo family leaves. I think it is stupid to say that since he is not at the front.

The NGOs supported the coup shamelessly, saying “I represent Nicaragua,” but they were receiving the money that financed the roadblocks. They wanted to brainwash us, but it is difficult to brainwash the Sandinistas.

THE PEOPLE WANT WORK AND PEACE

When you got off the plane, did you see repression? Did you see the police repressing? That’s what they are saying, that there’s still repression here.

In the Bible it says that the laws were made for the bad guys. The police stop delinquents who go around murdering. The police have to enforce order. But here, if you go around calmly and peacefully, the police don’t touch you. The police act accordingly.

I would like to invite Pompeo to sit in the park that we have in Lake Xolotlán to see if the police attack him. On the contrary, we would take care of him because we Nicaraguans are welcoming to foreigners. We would serve them pozol corn drink with milk. Even Trump himself can come here.

The opposition called for a United States military intervention. But who will they kill if they try to select who is opposition, right-wing or coup-plotter? They will just kill everyone.

Another thing they have done is promote unemployment: they fired people saying they would close companies because of the government. At the moment of the Repligue they called for all the markets to close and not to sell to anyone. Do they really think that someone who makes a living from their store will close off their means of income? Those babosos didn’t even believe it themselves. They only did what they were told by the United Nations—the democratic charter, the sanctions which they create against leaders but end up hurting the people.

Private enterprise has attacked the government the most, savage capitalism that wants to return to power to remove all the peasant programs so that the peasants stay stagnant, so that they do not learn to read and write. Not now. Peasants know their rights and no longer allow themselves to forget. Here, the peasants are with Daniel because Daniel is the one who is with the peasants.

The Comandante does not want war in Nicaragua. Since the 80s, the people want work and peace. The opposition only wants power. No pudieron y no podrán.

HERE WE ARE ALL OWNERS OF THIS LAND

I would like you to share the reality of Nicaragua, of how people work, how we are developing.
Nicaragua loves the people of the United States because it knows that the people have nothing to do with their government and that they have their own problem with the empire, which is only interested in power by repressing the poor.

A foreigner told me that the U.S. government and banks are taking away farmers’ property and the farmers are committing suicide, but Trump doesn’t point that out because he doesn’t want to start solving his own problems. America wants to force other countries to do what it wants. I agreed with the Revolution because at that time the land was in the hands of the bourgeoisie. There was unemployment and many horrible conditions. I looked at all this and said that we had to fight for something better.

This area was depopulated before, pure mountains. When the Sandinistas won, Daniel gave all this land to the peasants and they started to leave the plantations and start their own plots. Here we are all the owners of this land.

In the community we have peasants who are doctors. When were we going to see that before? The universities belonged to the bourgeoisie. Now the government gives full scholarships for the children of peasants to study.

The wealth of a country is the peasant. The peasant has both learned to study and work the fields.
Café Santa Julia

Café con Aroma de Mujer
I am Nora Isabel Velázquez...

I was born and raised here in the community. I am a 58-year-old mother of seven. My mother was from San Rafael del Sur and my father was from Leon, but I am now from this community.

I became a single mother because of machismo. I remember that when I got paid, my husband demanded that I give it to him. He would drink and hit me. Of seven children I have only four because the other three I lost as a result of the beatings.

Thank God that’s in the past and with the cooperative we are now independent. Thanks to God, my four children have done well through our efforts. I tell my sons who are married to treat their partners well, because I have been abused and I don’t want my daughters-in-law to experience it. I hope that my nine grandchildren will find a way to advance, that they will study. We encourage children to excel and continue the struggle.

As a single mother, we have fought for our cooperative to advance. We have been organized by the ATC. We are very motivated and this sentiment helps us to motivate young women. The organization is what has made us succeed.

NOW THE LAND IS OURS

It is of great importance for us to have the land and not to have it for the sake of having it. When we were given the land, it’s a saying, “We were given”... But no, we struggled for six months without a salary to achieve what we have today.

Now I own four manzanas of land where I plant. I have beans, corn, yucca, pipian, ayote. Now the land is ours, I don’t have to work for anyone.

When we single mothers finished building our houses we were very thin. We started at six in the morning and at nine I would breastfeed my son. At noon we would say, “We are going to have lunch”; and those who had anything went to get a sip of coffee, but those who didn’t came back with empty stomachs.
**A LARGER VISION**

Sometimes we tell Lola that she is the one who woke us up because she has been a great leader of the ATC. She was who started motivating us to form a cooperative. It was beautiful because we knew that we were organized. We started the cooperative with pigs, then chickens, and now it is a multi-sector cooperative. We sell what we grow and bring money into the community. Now we have a coffee machine, there are two de-pulpers. If I get more than ten hundred-pound sacks of coffee, I pulp them and use the pulp as fertilizer.

The cooperative meets every last Sunday of the month. My job as fiscal officer is to keep an eye on things. The Sunday we meet, they take out their notebooks and we review how we did that month, what went out and what came in. To be a fiscal is to be aware of everything we have in production. A market is coming up, so on the last Sunday of the month we will decide what we are going to sell and at what price so that the day we go to the market we know what we are going to take.

Today we have woken up. It has been very important to be in the cooperative and to have a larger vision. I feel that my life is different now. If we are not organized, we do nothing.

**THE SOMOZA DICTATORSHIP & THE SANDINISTA REVOLUTION**

The cooperative has been in existence for eleven years, but we have been organized since 1985. In Somoza’s time, I remember that if a boss or a farm manager liked you and you didn’t let yourself be raped, they could run you out of work. It happened to me. A manager had his eye on me, he would say things to me and I wouldn’t listen, until the time came when he wanted to rape me. That’s when I was fired.

My father worked all the time for Somoza and wasn’t given anything to protect himself from all the chemicals they were spraying which affected his throat and his lungs. They operated on him but it was just too much.

When the Sandinista government arrived in the 80s, all that changed; they recognized our work. Before, if the man earned five cordobas, we earned two-fifty. Now, men and women have equal rights. Here, most of the farms were Somoza’s, but now they were left to all the workers.
Unions were not valid in Somoza’s time, you couldn’t organize. Once the ATC was in place, we began to work. This government looks after the dispossessed: not just those who were in the war, but everyone. Today we have freedom.

We vote because this is the government that looks out for the poor. When I voted for the first time, it was for the Sandinistas and nobody is going to take that away from me. If it’s true that Daniel stole the elections, he stole them for the poor.

GOVERNMENT PROJECTS

Sometimes there are people who don’t like living in the countryside, but the countryside is where life is. In the countryside we don’t buy wood; we produce bananas, beans etc. We produce from our own land. Now I have corn, beans, pipian, ayote, quequisque, cucumber, pepper, tomato, lemons, dragon fruit, sour orange, sweet orange, banana, and nancite.

Here projects come when we least expect it. There was recently one that brought us basic grains, vegetables and tools to work the land. That is a great blessing because even a shovel has a cost.

Eloisa, who is the community coordinator, told us that we were going to have a meeting. In the meeting they told us, “We were sent by president Daniel Ortega and compañera Rosario Murillo, each of you can request materials.” As a producer of basic grains, I put in everything I needed: a rake, pumps, plastic, a shovel. Other women decided to raise laying hens.

I prefer to work the land, because if I only look after animals I’ll be crippled, but if I sow the earth I’ll drink my coffee and walk around.

After 15 days, they called us to another meeting and told us that we had been approved and gave us all that we had applied for along with basic grains and seeds for vegetables. For the compañeras who are raising chickens, their broiler chicks came.

When I was younger I used to make dresses for my daughter and she learned to sew to earn a bit of money. She applied for a sewing machine and it was approved. There are also materials for women who make tortillas in the community.

All of us who benefited from basic grains have planted them.
I am Irma Maria Abiles Rivera...

I am 74 years old and I came to Santa Julia at the age of 29. I’ve been here over forty years of my life; I’ve grown old. I raised my eighteen children here. Ten are alive and eight dead.

I worked during the time when Somoza’s guards were here, when we earned 2.50 cordobas a day. We went to work at 6am and left at 4pm. In the day, we labored in the coffee plantation. After farming, I would go to work in the kitchen. I prepared two hundred-pound sacks of corn, went to bed at nine at night, and got up at midnight to make tortillas. We earned a pittance.

From there I went to Chinandega to cut cotton, barefoot. When I left with my first husband, he gave me the life of a dog. He beat me. God forbid that a man spoke to me, God forbid that a woman spoke to me. He kept me locked up, like being in a tank with barely a peephole to see clarity.

I raised my kids by myself. My husband died and left me eight children and I came here to raise them. I tried to have my children study, but I didn’t have enough money so they started to work, earning money with honor from the sweat on their foreheads. They know how to read. I can almost sign my name, but my mind has worked really hard and suffered.

My children grew up working with machetes and working in the fields. They are campesinos and none of them have gone to the city, except for one that my sister took with her to Costa Rica. If my children don’t have land to sow and I do, they are the ones who sow the beans and corn. Right now I have yucca and things like that in order to survive. Thanking God.

When this land was a business, they used to throw
chemicals on it, but when we each got our own little piece, I don’t like to use that stuff. I have five sacks of fertilizer that we make. It is a natural fertilizer of ashes, coffee pulp, wood, sardines, rice, bean pods, all that. They gave us a sprayer that we use to apply organic pesticide when our beans have plague. I find someone to spray my four manzanas of coffee so that I know I’m going to sell and eat something good. I tell my children that when you plant, don’t burn the natural material, it is better to spread it over the plants. Don’t burn it. It takes away the strength of the land.

I have 5 manzanas and I plant coffee. Not too long ago ago I received 300 coffee plants, and I already planted them. The cooperative received coffee plants and I planted them too. I have mango trees, I have avocado trees, orange trees and tangerine. Everything I have been given I have sown. We have planted bananas. I also have cedar trees, and everything— just imagine how beautiful my plot is. We are advancing, thank God.

Right now a blessing came to us; they gave us chickens as part of a project. They gave me 250 chickens and eleven hundred-pound sacks of food, four water troughs and four feeders. I have them all back there. I hardly sleep because I’m making sure they don’t get caught by the foxes and snakes.

We don’t starve since we have beans and tortillas. We buy about 20 pounds of rice for the month, although sometimes I pass it to my daughter-in-law. Someone comes from another community to sell milk. When I have money, I buy, when I don’t, I don’t and we make oat drinks instead. I don’t spend money on Coke, but they give me some from time to time and I drink it. I can have a small tortilla with coffee for dinner without any problem.

Everything has been hard but here in the countryside we are better off than the people in the city. Here, as Lola says, “We are rich,” because if I don’t have anything to eat, I cook two plantains and I go to Lola and I don’t die of hunger. But in a city, where would I go to eat? We help each other here. I go to Eloisa and I tell her I haven’t eaten and they give me food. If someone doesn’t have food, I help them like they help me.
The first time you came I felt that you wanted to know about us and now that you came again it touched my heart and reminded me of ‘79 because the role you are playing is very important. You are like a watered seed. Internally we give each other solidarity and support but I am worried because I see in the news that they speak against us without being with us. Now your visit is going to allow what we say in these testimonies—which is real and the truth—to germinate in your countries. It is not the same for me to speak about our experience, than to have people come live with us and listen to us, like the Friends of the ATC do.

Imagine us, who are not in a physical war but a psychological one. You are contributing something good to us. You will also share the result with us, because this helps us to build our community history, and therefore we are grateful to you. May the place where you sleep here be pleasant and know that the food you eat is all made with love and gratitude.

I love Erika because she is always doing something: she wishes we could sell all the coffee we have, she wants our stories to be shared widely. I feel that all this rescue of information is going to be useful for some who are deceived. For those who don’t believe it, I know that you will add that seed and something will germinate from it.

There will be elections in 2021 and we are sure that we will win again. The goal is to reach the economy that we had in March of 2018 that was growing at 6.3%. In these communities I do not know if it is God who has chosen us, but what we do is talk, and motivate ourselves. We will fight to have this government win again.

Today we are united more than ever. With all that happened we are united and stronger. As evidence in this community, we are almost 90 families and no one is right-wing; we are all conscious and politically clear. We always say that we should sow, harvest water, and produce because when the people are educated and have food there is no enemy that can defeat us. We have learned to work the land we have, cooperate and be in solidarity.