

LGBTQ Politics in Nicaragua: Revolution, Dictatorship, and Social Movements. Karen Kampwirth. University of Arizona Press, 2022. xviii + 340 pp. \$50 Hardcover ISBN: 97880816542796.

Nicaragua has had a long history of emergent LGBTQ identities and politics, closely intertwined with its history of dictatorship, revolution, and social movements. The ambitious project under discussion here began as the fruitful collaboration of political scientist Karen Kampwirth with historian Victoria González-Rivera, but the work grew in scope to the point that each of the authors has undertaken to bring out a volume on a portion of the story. This, the first of these companion books to appear, takes up the more recent decades, from the revolutionary decade of the 1970s through 2017, spanning the rise and fall of Sandinista President Daniel Ortega (1979-1990), the nation's neoliberal turn, and then Ortega's rise once again (2007 to the present). Covering a full half-century is no mean feat, and Kampwirth makes the wise decision to conclude with only brief remarks about the sharply authoritarian turn since 2018 taken by Ortega and First Lady and Vice President, Rosario Murillo.

As the author of numerous articles and books on Nicaragua, Central America, and the wider Latin American region, Kampwirth is well positioned to take on as complex a subject as the vicissitudes of gender and sexual politics in a country known, on the one hand, for its radical, transformational history, and on the other hand, for its deeper repressive past and (sadly) present. If the hopes of many in Nicaragua and beyond soared with the Sandinista revolution, LGBTQ aspirations for activism and visibility were challenged even before the historic 1990 electoral loss; when gay men and lesbians, generally committed Sandinistas, began quietly organizing in the late 1980s, they were restrained by the Ministry of the Interior. With the Sandinista loss to a centrist opposition coalition, neoliberalism ushered in the most repressive anti-sodomy law in the hemisphere (Article 204), but also offered space for more autonomous social movements to thrive. The 1990s saw a rapid rise in feminist organizations and NGOs, as well as other groups confronting HIV-AIDS and calling for respect for sexual diversity. Lesbians and gay men began a collective process of coming out publicly, with marches, cultural events, and LGBTQ venues gaining space in Managua and other cities around the country.

A key moment in recent Nicaraguan political history came in 1998, when Daniel Ortega's adoptive stepdaughter Zoilamérica Ortega Murillo publicly charged the revolutionary hero with two decades of sexual abuse, from the time she was a child. Her mother, Rosario Murillo, stood by her husband, who in turn hid behind his parliamentary immunity and never faced charges. When Ortega accepted the support of the Catholic Church and made his electoral comeback in 2007, choosing Rosario Murillo as his Vice President, the governing Sandinista power couple cracked down on dissent; those affected included feminist organizations that had stood by Zoilamérica, and other opposition groups that challenged Ortega's increasingly autocratic rule. Notably, after retaliating against feminists by banning even therapeutic abortion (in the case of rape and to save women's lives), some LGBTQ initiatives were singled out for support, opening a space for what Kampwirth describes as a "boom" during the 2007-2017 decade. This support was

calculated to drive a wedge between feminist and LGBTQ allies and to lend an appearance of modernity to a government that was increasingly the focus of international criticism. Even so, it should be mentioned that Zoilamérica herself became an influential transgender ally who is credited in some significant part for the advances of the trans community during that period.

As Kampwirth thoroughly documents, in Nicaragua feminist and LGBTQ activism springs from broadly overlapping constituent groups, as lesbians in particular have been instrumental in confronting HIV-AIDS and a climate of intolerance concerning sexual diversity. Thus when Ortega and Murillo embraced the even more marginalized sector of trans individuals, this seemed designed to weaken alliances between feminists and LGBTQ activists that had grown since the 1980s. Transgender Nicaraguans found over time, however, that while they might be offered token financial support and opportunities to showcase such cultural spectacles as the Miss Gay Nicaragua pageant, they were not winning more urgent demands for sexual rights. Although the infamous anti-sodomy law was abolished, trans Nicaraguans were not granted the right to officially change their birth names, or to be recognized in the newly established Family Code.

LGBTQ Politics in Nicaragua concludes with a chapter on Nicaragua in comparative perspective, providing us with a broad view of its and other nations' efforts to achieve greater legitimacy, nationally and globally, by extending rights to LGBTQ citizens. Kampwirth shows that the past generation has made significant gains in LGBTQ political rights. Yet in Nicaragua, as elsewhere, there have also been setbacks, as in the backlash signaled by the draconian 1992 anti-sodomy Article 204. As Kampwirth contends, neoliberal globalization can be a force for expanding or limiting rights, at different times and places. Comparing cases from the United States, Indonesia, and Russia, Nicaragua is found to be neither unique nor an outlier when it comes to government efforts to coopt and incorporate LGBTQ individuals and groups in clientelistic networks, "rather than ceding to their demands for full civil rights, or outright repressing them" (259). In the Nicaraguan case, the Ortega-Murillo family regime has shown itself in recent years to be consistently focused on consolidating its own power, in the face of increasing opposition and in open defiance of the constitutional prohibition on presidential reelection. "Pinkwashing," or the extension of rights to LGBTQ citizens in order to deflect attention from violations of human rights in other social domains, can be understood as one important aspect of the regime's rampant opportunism. In the end, these citizens' gains were of their own making—Kampwirth makes the crucial point that even if LGBTQ Nicaraguans honor gay pride around the New York (and now global) anniversary of the Stonewall uprising June 28, they do this in celebration of their own history and their own future-in-the-making.

Since April 2018, the Nicaraguan government has violently confronted organized protest and dissent, leading to hundreds of deaths and a climate of fear, sending many prominent Nicaraguans into exile in Costa Rica, the United States, and elsewhere. As I write, the regime has gone so far as to strip the citizen rights of hundreds of opposition figures, cultural icons, and public intellectuals, as they have been expelled from the country. This goes beyond the scope of Kampwirth's already expansive volume. Her brief epilogue, however, points to the way feminists have been targeted and at least one well-known lesbian feminist and pro-democracy activist was

among those who have been brutally beaten. Other LGBTQ activists have been targeted by government agents, with transwomen being sent to men's prisons, for example, and subjected to physical abuse. The Ortega-Murillo regime, as Kampwirth relates, has unquestionably crossed the line to become the sort of brutal dictatorship that the Sandinistas defeated in 1979. We may feel optimistic that the political winds will change once again, but for now the future of LGBTQ and all Nicaraguans is under very serious threat. As someone who was conducting research during the 1990s and who attended many gay pride events in Managua, I am deeply grateful that we have this rich and insightful account of the past half century of LGBTQ mobilization. Let us remain cautiously hopeful at this time of crisis, as Nicaraguans continue their struggle for democratic rights for all.

Kampwirth is to be commended for the masterful and painstaking job she has done in assembling a vast amount of material, much of it only now being made available to readers. Moreover, unlike many histories of gay activism in Latin America, she gives ample attention to women as well as men, and to nonbinary folk as well. Readers are treated to extensive discussion of lesbian organizing and leadership, and the pivotal role of women in the growth of social movements, both feminist and queer-identified. At times the book can be a somewhat encyclopedic cataloguing of events and organizations, piecing together an ornate narrative, but the text is enlivened when the author presents a deeper look into particular moments in Nicaragua's LGBTQ history. Kampwirth positions herself as a longtime observer of the nation's political scene, and when she relates her own connection to her subject, we are left wishing for more of such personal disclosures. While she could not have been present for all or most of the events discussed in her book, she has had first-hand interviews and conversations with many Nicaraguans and was surely present for a number of the key events she discusses in the text. Some of the most affecting parts of the text are those delving into the lives and stories of individual activists and cultural figures. Overall, this book is a treasure trove of new material to be appreciated for the more complete picture it offers of LGBTQ history in this small yet consequential Central American nation.

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